‘Christ Alone for Salvation’:

The Role of Christ and His Work in John Wesley’s Theology

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Isaac Hopper

The School of Arts, Languages, and Cultures

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Thesis Word Count: 70,848
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(BE)</td>
<td>The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Jackson)</td>
<td>Thomas Jackson, ed. <em>The Works of the Rev. John Wesley</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collection</td>
<td>John Wesley, <em>A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists</em> (1780), vol. 7 in (BE)</td>
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<td>ENNT</td>
<td>John Wesley, <em>Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament</em></td>
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<td>Intro</td>
<td>Albert Outler, ‘An Introductory Comment’ in (BE)</td>
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<td>SOSO</td>
<td>John Wesley, <em>Sermons on Several Occasions</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday Service</td>
<td>John Wesley, <em>The Sunday Service of the Methodists, with Other Occasional Services</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>WC</td>
<td>John Deschner, <em>Wesley’s Christology: An Interpretation</em></td>
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Abstract

The University of Manchester
Isaac Hopper
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
‘Christ Alone for Salvation’: The Role of Christ and His Work in John Wesley’s Theology
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This thesis is a study of the relationship between John Wesley’s Christology and his broader theology. No specific effort has yet been made to assess whether or not a meaningful change to Wesley’s Christology ever occurred, or to what extent Wesley’s Christology shaped his broader theology. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap by first demonstrating that a change to Wesley’s Christology did occur and describing the implications of this shift for his broader theology and, second, by evaluating to what degree Wesley’s broader theology arose out of, or was shaped by, his Christology.

Chapter one describes Wesley’s inherited theology, which he received from his family and faith tradition, in order to provide a foundation from which to examine changes to his Christology. Chapter two then demonstrates that a change to Wesley’s Christology did occur around his 1738 ‘evangelical conversion’, and describes the implications of this shift for Wesley’s evangelical theology.

John Wesley identified the core doctrines of the early Methodists as repentance, faith, and holiness. Following Wesley’s lead, this study examines three correlating areas of focus as representative of these core Methodist doctrines, in order to describe the relationship between these doctrines and Wesley’s Christology. Chapter three, ‘Christ and Humanity’ examines Wesley’s doctrine of humanity, including his understanding of the image of God, original sin, and the nature of salvation as restoration of the divine image. This chapter lays out Wesley’s understanding of the need for human repentance. Chapter four, ‘Christ Working for Us’ examines those doctrines most closely tied to justification as an orienting concern. This includes Wesley’s understanding of grace, the stages of faith, repentance itself, works meet for repentance, Christ’s imputed righteousness, and adoption. Finally, chapter five, ‘Christ Working in Us’ examines those doctrines most closely linked to sanctification as an orienting concern. This includes the doctrine of the new birth, freedom from sin, assurance, and Christian perfection.

By identifying the changes that occurred to Wesley’s Christology and evaluating the relationship between his Christology and other core doctrines, this thesis will contribute to the growing body of research into the theological foundations of Methodism and the life and thought of the Rev. John Wesley.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Acknowledgements

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I began this research under the suggestion and initial supervision of Dr. Allan Coppedge, who not only nudged me in the direction of studying Wesley’s theology, but who modelled for me what it looks like to be a Christian first and a scholar second.

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Finally, and most importantly, to my wife Sarah and our children, Janna and Simon, thank you for your unconditional love and support and for believing in me, even when I did not believe in myself. This research is dedicated to you in the hopes that God will use it to make me a better husband and father, as I draw closer to Christ through the renewing of my mind and the example of faithful men like the Rev. John Wesley.
Introduction

Philip S. Watson, while reflecting on the theological heritage of John and Charles Wesley, once wrote:

[T]he Wesleys are more nearly akin to Luther than to any other great exponent of the Christian faith and life. There is an extraordinary similarity between the spiritual evolution of the sixteenth-century monk into the reformer and that of the eighteenth-century Oxford Anglicans into leaders of the Evangelical Revival; and the revival itself is aptly named, for it was fundamentally a renewal and extension of the work of Luther’s Reformation.¹

Watson’s observation revolves chiefly around John Wesley’s rediscovery of the Reformation doctrine of salvation by faith alone, which became the central message of the people called Methodists. Wesley’s preaching of this doctrine became a distinguishing mark of the Methodist movement. Like Luther, Wesley underwent an experiential transformation, which was closely tied to a theological shift from an anthropocentric to a theocentric view of God’s grace, and by which he came to recognize the sufficiency of Christ and his works for the full salvation of the individual, both in this life and the next, as the cornerstone of faith. Some scholarly studies have described and evaluated various aspects of Wesley’s theology and his views of scripture, while others have endeavoured to describe Wesley’s place historically within the broader Christian tradition. Still, questions remain as to the effect that Wesley’s rediscovery of this Reformation doctrine had on his theology. Colin Williams stated that ‘the central focus of Wesley’s theology is on the saving

¹ Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God!: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 3.
work of Christ and the human appropriation of that work.\textsuperscript{2} But can one substantiate this claim?

In a journal entry chronicling the days immediately preceding his heart-warming experience of 24 May 1738 John Wesley reflected upon his state of being as ‘continual sorrow and heaviness in my heart’.\textsuperscript{3} A series of connected events, including his decision to pursue ordination in the Church of England in 1725, an early parish ministry with his father, Samuel, in Epworth and Wroot, experiments with his brother Charles and the Holy Club at Oxford, and his missionary journey to the Georgia colony in America had brought Wesley providentially to this point. These experiences, combined with his appropriation of the writings of Thomas à Kempis, Jonathan Taylor, and William Law, and key encounters with James Oglethorpe, Peter Böhler, and the German Moravians had left Wesley with an expanded view of God’s holiness and a conviction of his own sinfulness and lack of faith, which he conveyed in a letter to a friend.

I see that the whole law of God is holy and just and good. I know every thought, every temper of my soul ought to bear God's image and superscription. But how I am fallen from the Glory of God. I feel that ‘I am sold under sin’. I know that I too deserve nothing but wrath, being full of abominations; and having no good thing in me to atone for them, or to remove the wrath of God.\textsuperscript{4}

Had he known then what the day would have in store, Wesley’s outlook might not have been so bleak. Yet, it was not until that evening, as Wesley sat ‘very unwillingly’ in attendance at a society meeting in Aldersgate Street, listening to a reading of Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, that he experienced what has

\textsuperscript{3} Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I (BE)}, 18:241.
become known as a significant turning point in his life and ministry. The details are worth recalling here, though we will investigate them further at a later point in this study.

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.\(^5\)

This statement displays a reversal in understanding from earlier in the day, when Wesley had declared that, while he could hear the voice of God calling to him to ‘Believe, and thou shalt be saved’, yet he could not claim that faith for himself.\(^6\) It was this reversal, made manifest in Wesley’s life through a newly awakened understanding of faith in the merits of Christ’s work alone as sufficient for salvation that served as the catalyst for his evangelistic foray into an itinerant field-preaching ministry to the common people of Britain and Ireland and the establishment of societies for the spiritual care and encouragement of those who heard his call to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone as God’s gift of grace. Yet, despite the apparent change in Wesley’s focus and motivation the questions remain: In what way did Wesley’s new trust in ‘Christ alone’ lead to a new understanding of the Person and Work of Christ and new focus on Christ in his theology as a whole?

**Christology in Wesley Studies**

Various interpretations of Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ have arisen in recent years. Most have applied a systematic approach in efforts to both

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describe Wesley’s doctrine and place it within the theological contexts of eighteenth-century Church of England and historic Christian orthodoxy. As Richard M. Riss noted, much of the discussion has circled around the question of whether or not Wesley’s view of Christ fits within the Chalcedonian definition, with as many opinions arising as there are scholars to pen them.\(^7\) However, no study has yet sought, as the primary focus, to illuminate the relationship between Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ and his broader theology. No specific effort has yet been made to assess to what extent Wesley’s new focus on salvation by ‘Christ alone’ changed the shape and content of his theology as a whole. The goal of this research is to fill this gap in Wesley Studies by examining the relationship between Wesley’s understanding of the person and work of Christ and his broader soteriology. This would be an impossible task, though, without the work of prior scholarship, which has proven invaluable both as a foundation upon which to build and as a source for excellent dialogue partners. Four scholars in particular have offered contributions to the study of Wesley’s Christology, which have helped to direct this course of study.

This study is deeply indebted to the work of John Deschner, who produced the clearest and most extensive systematic analysis of Wesley’s Christology.\(^8\) Deschner sought to explain ‘the standard Wesley’, which he defined as ‘the Christological teaching of the Methodist standards of doctrine.’\(^9\) He was not primarily interested in Wesley’s historical significance or his thought development, but rather in what came to be the accepted doctrinal standards of Methodism, which were derived in one way

\(^9\) Deschner, *WC*, x.
or another from Wesley’s work as author and editor.\textsuperscript{10} To this end, Deschner employed the three primary doctrinal sources of the \textit{Articles of Religion}, the \textit{Standard Sermons}, and the \textit{Notes on the New Testament} in an effort to construct a robust, systematic account of Wesley’s thought. The result of his work is an expansive reconstruction of Wesley’s mature understanding of the person and work of Christ. However, his limiting of primary sources led him to question whether or not Wesley’s theology gave appropriate weight to the full humanity of Christ. His work has proved invaluable for this study and has become a standard source for contemporary research into Wesley’s theology.

Randy L. Maddox argued that Wesley’s theology has a discernible ‘orienting concern’ of \textit{responsible grace} throughout, and sought to demonstrate both the presence and function of this concern in Wesley’s works.\textsuperscript{11} Maddox’s research underscored the cooperative nature of grace in Wesley’s theology and contributed to the study of Wesley’s Christology with his evaluation of the person and work of Christ as the \textit{initiative} of responsible grace. However, Maddox did not explicitly tie his discussion of each area of Wesley’s theology back to his Christology, choosing instead to focus on the cooperative nature of God’s interactions with humanity.

In \textit{The Theology of John Wesley}, Kenneth J. Collins endeavoured to show that Wesley’s theology centres around a two-part ‘axial theme’ of holiness and grace.\textsuperscript{12} He viewed the work of Christ as that which God does \textit{for} us through the atonement and justification and that which God does \textit{in} us through sanctification. Collins argued that Wesley placed an emphasis on the \textit{free grace} of God at work in the world and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Deschner} Deschner, \textit{WC}, x.
\end{thebibliography}
especially in the lives of believers. While Collins did not explicitly tie his analysis of Wesley’s theology back to Wesley’s Christology, his suggestion of a two-fold framework for understanding the work of God in Wesley’s thought has proved helpful for this study.

Thomas A. Noble recently proposed that Wesley’s doctrine of Christian Perfection is better understood as deeply rooted in the doctrine of the Trinity, and specifically the doctrines of Christ and atonement. He argued that Christian theology necessarily holds a Trinitarian and Christocentric shape, and that Wesley’s doctrine must be viewed as consistent with the central Christian tradition of sanctification. While Wesley did not himself think like a systematic theologian, nor set out to make dogmatic connections between Christology and sanctification, his thought does reveal the influence of his new saving faith in Christ on his doctrine. This research has contributed to an understanding of Wesley’s Christology as an implicit influence on his broader theology and offers a pattern for discerning how the various doctrines found in Wesley’s works were shaped by his Christology in meaningful ways.

The Purpose and Scope of this Study

The purpose of this study is, first, to demonstrate that a change to the role given to Christ in Wesley’s theology occurred around his 1738 ‘evangelical conversion’, and to describe the implications of this shift for Wesley’s inherited theology. This description and analysis is presented in chapters one and two, which

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describe Wesley’s inherited theology, which he received from his family and faith tradition, and his evangelical theology, which entails his interpretation of that inherited theology through the lens of his evangelical conversion, respectively.\textsuperscript{15} This thesis will pay particular attention to Wesley’s doctrine of the person and work of Christ, but will also examine his views on the doctrine of God and the nature and function of faith, especially as faith relates to epistemology.

Secondly, this study will evaluate to what degree John Wesley’s broader theology arose out of, or was shaped by, his focus on Christ, particularly from 1738. In his ‘Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained’, written in 1746, Wesley identified what he believed to be the core doctrines of the early Methodists, which encompass all other doctrines, as 1) repentance, 2) faith, and 3) holiness.\textsuperscript{16} He went on to say, ‘The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third is religion itself.’\textsuperscript{17} Following Wesley’s lead, we have chosen three correlating areas of focus for this study as representative of these core Methodist doctrines. Chapter three, ‘Christ and Humanity’ will examine Wesley’s doctrine of humanity, including his understanding of the image of God, original sin, and the nature of salvation as restoration of the divine image. This chapter lays out Wesley’s

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{15} Albert Brown-Lawson defined an evangelical in the eighteenth century as one who 1) emphasized the necessity of personal religion, 2) insisted on the total depravity of human nature, 3) believed the only way of salvation was faith in the atoning work of Christ alone, 4) believed that this salvation is by God’s grace, 5) believed that faith leads to justification and the forgiveness of sins, 6) believed that the Holy Spirit is active in salvation, without whom no person can turn to God, and by whom the believer is sanctified and granted assurance of faith, and 7) believed in the inspiration of Scripture. The term evangelical has been used by scholars to describe Wesley and seems particularly fitting to describe the emphasis of his theology after 24 May 1738. See Albert Brown-Lawson, \textit{John Wesley and the Anglican Evangelicals of the Eighteenth Century} (Durham: The Pentland Press, Ltd., 1994), 3-4. See also, Herbert Boyd McGonigle, \textit{Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism} (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001).

\textsuperscript{16} Wesley, ‘Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained’ (BE), 9:226-7.

\textsuperscript{17} Wesley, ‘Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained’ (BE), 9:227.
understanding of the need for human repentance. Chapter four, ‘Christ Working for Us’ will examine those doctrines most closely tied to justification as an orienting concern. This includes Wesley’s understanding of grace, the stages of faith, repentance itself, works meet for repentance, Christ’s imputed righteousness, and adoption. Finally, chapter five, ‘Christ Working in Us’ will examine those doctrines most closely linked to sanctification as an orienting concern. This includes the doctrine of the new birth, freedom from sin, assurance, and Christian perfection.

The study concludes with a final summary of findings and will offer a response to the thesis questions asked here in the introduction. What is the role of Christ and his work in John Wesley’s theology, and did that materially change following his 1738 ‘evangelical conversion’? Further, to what extent did Wesley’s doctrine of the person and work of Christ shape his broader theology?

The Limits of this Study

This study is concerned primarily with the relationship between Wesley’s broader theology and his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ. As such, it will not attempt to describe Wesley’s theology exhaustively, nor will it seek to articulate a systematic analysis of Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ considered in isolation, but will focus instead upon core theological concepts in an effort to demonstrate to what degree each of these arose out of, or was shaped by, Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ. This study will pay particular attention to any changes in Wesley’s thought or expression of his theology following his 1738 ‘evangelical conversion’, so far as those are apparent. It will not seek to place Wesley in a particular historical or theological setting, except where this is relevant to the goals laid out above and, likewise, this study will not seek to provide a detailed
historical narrative of Wesley’s life, except where such details most clearly shaped Wesley’s understanding of the doctrines in question.

Sources and Methodology

Research into Wesley’s theology often focuses on the content of Wesley’s sermons, journals and diaries, and letters. These contain some of the richest theological material and provide insight into the development of Wesley’s thought over time. Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament offers additional clarity concerning his thoughts on specific passages of scripture in commentary form, and are, therefore, useful for understanding his position on key theological topics.

As already noted, one of the key questions raised in previous studies of Wesley’s Christology is whether or not his doctrine of Christ fits within the Chalcedonian definition. This question partially stems from the perception that Wesley’s view of Christ tends toward an emphasis on his divinity, while neglecting his humanity. John Deschner, a key proponent of this view, argued for the use of the ‘standard Wesley’ as sufficient for understanding Wesley’s Christology, by which he means the forty-four sermons, the Notes on the New Testament, and the Twenty-four Articles of Religion, which Wesley abridged from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England and sent to the American colonies.18 While he agreed that the more fragmented material from Wesley’s journals and letters is helpful, Deschner saw them as only secondary sources. Following on the heels of J. Ernest Rattenbury, Deschner commented on another vital source for Wesley’s theology, the Methodist hymns:

Rattenbury reports that the English hymnbook committee of 1932 could find only two of Charles Wesley’s more than six thousand hymns to illustrate the

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18 Deschner, WC, 7. Note, Wesley’s original abridgement was Twenty-four articles.
earthly life of Christ, and one of these was an allegory on the healing of the sick. This fact may serve as a signal for one of the problems of Wesleyan Christology: the lack of emphasis on the human nature of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{19}

Having founded an opinion upon this presupposition Deschner dismissed the hymns as a viable source for Wesley’s Christology. However, this evaluation of the hymns did not account for the frequent appearance of language concerning the person and work of Christ scattered throughout the hymns, and so missed out on some rich material that contributes to a clearer picture of Wesley’s doctrine of Christ.

In order to thoroughly investigate questions concerning the relationship of Wesley’s broader theology to his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ, this study will reclaim those additional sources for Wesley’s thought and seek to assimilate them into our understanding of Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ. In addition to the sermons, journals, and letters, this study, like Deschner’s, will utilize the Articles and the Notes on the New Testament, and will add to these the 1780 A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists, which were authored by Charles Wesley, and which John Wesley ‘stands behind’ by presenting the Collection as ‘a little body of experimental and practical divinity’.\textsuperscript{20}

It is important to note that John did not view all of Charles’s hymns with the same degree of enthusiasm as the 1780 Collection. He was known to distance himself from Charles’s hymns, when he felt the theology presented therein fell short of his own views. In one instance, John answered a critic, who had made the statement, ‘These hymns contain the joint sentiments of Mr. John and Mr. Charles Wesley’ with a clear rebuttal, ‘Not always. So that if some of them contradict others, it does not

\textsuperscript{19} Deschner, WC, 24.
\textsuperscript{20} See Outler, ‘Introduction’ (BE), 7:2 for comments on J. Wesley’s support of the Collection. See also Wesley, Collection (BE), 7:74.
prove that I contradict myself. For this reason, not all of Charles’ hymns should be weighted equally when considering their relationship to John’s theology. In contrast to other collections of hymns, the 1780 Collection underwent a high degree of scrutiny and editing from John’s pen, before being recommended to the Methodist societies. Therefore, consideration of John’s limited appropriation of Charles’s thought from this source may shed some additional light on John’s understanding of the person and work of Christ. 

22 See Appendix A for a defence of the 1780 Collection as a primary source for John Wesley’s theology.
Chapter 1 - John Wesley’s Theological Beginnings

1.1 Introduction

John Wesley inherited a rich theological tradition, which was passed down to him through the Church of England and his own family’s High Church Arminianism. This inherited theology formed Wesley’s early understanding about the nature and attributes of God and the person of Christ. While many aspects of Wesley’s theology underwent significant revision after 1738, this inherited theology remained a steady influence on his thought, but did not feature prominently in his preaching and teaching.

This chapter will, first, examine the means by which Wesley inherited his inherited theology, the affect it had on his preaching prior to 1738, and the results it produced along his spiritual journey. Secondly, this chapter will describe the content of Wesley’s inherited doctrine of God and Christology. This examination will provide a foundation from which to evaluate the changes that occurred to Wesley’s theology (especially his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ) after 1738, and how his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ helped to influence or shape his wider theology.

1.2 Wesley’s Upbringing

Reflecting upon his youth, John Wesley once remarked, ‘I believe, till I was about ten years old I had not sinned away that “washing of the Holy Ghost” which was given me in baptism, having been strictly and carefully taught that I could only be saved by universal obedience, by keeping all the commandments of God, in the
meaning of which I was diligently instructed.'23 This recollection faithfully summarizes the overarching goal of religious education at the Epworth rectory: to produce sincere obedience to the laws of God.

The task of educating the Wesley children fell to their mother, Susanna, whose own piety and devotion to the Church of England has been a subject of interest to John Wesley’s biographers.24 Susanna’s approach to religious education was one of discipline and method, and her principle task with her children was to ‘conquer their will’. For Susanna, this was fundamental to any hope of for their future success, both in education and life:

As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children ensures their after-wretchedness and irreligion; and whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety. This is still more evident if we consider that religion is nothing else but the doing the will of God, and not our own; and that self-will being the grand impediment to our temporal and eternal happiness, no indulgence of it can be trivial, no denial of it unprofitable.25

Only after the will has been subjected can one ‘inform their understanding’, which ‘must proceed by slow degrees’ according to the age and readiness of the child.26 Susanna began this process of breaking the will by putting her children ‘into a regular method of living, in such things as they were capable of, from their birth,’ which included learning a regular pattern of sleep, being ‘taught to fear the rod, and to cry softly; by which means they escaped abundance of correction they might otherwise have had,’ and becoming disciplined in what they ate and drank.27 Speaking against

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27 Wesley, *Journals and Diaries II* (BE), August 1742; Letter from Susanna dated July 24, 1732.
anticipated criticism of this method of discipline, Susanna described indulgent parenting as the very work of the devil.

For, by neglecting timely correction, they will contract a stubbornness and obstinacy which is hardly ever after conquered; and never without using such severity as would be as painful to me as to the child. In the esteem of the world they pass for kind and indulgent whom I call cruel parents, who permit their children to get habits which they know must afterwards be broken . . . the parent who studies to subdue [self-will] in his child works together with God in renewing and saving a soul. The Parent who indulges it does the devil’s work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable; and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body, forever. 28

As the will of the child was broken to produce obedience, they were taught to live according to a rule of life intended to build up and to instruct. As soon as they could speak, each child was taught the Lord’s Prayer, which was to be recited twice daily upon waking and going to bed. To this were later added additional prayers, a short catechism, and Scripture memorization ‘as their memories could bear’. The children were taught to revere the Sabbath, ask for blessings after prayer, and speak to both servants and family with care and respect. 29 This behaviour was reinforced by a set of household by-laws intended to regulate behaviour and teach obedience and courtesy. Once a child reached the age of five, 30 Susanna began the process of a classroom education. She worked with the children six hours each day until they could first recite the alphabet, then spell, and finally read at length from Scripture and English writers. By this method all of the children learned the alphabet in a day or less, except Molly and Nancy for whom it took a day and a half, and learned to read at a quick pace. The importance of education was reinforced by the rule that ‘no girl be

28 Wesley, Journals and Diaries II (BCE), August 1742; ‘From Mrs. Susanna Wesley’ July 24, 1732.
29 Wesley, Journals and Diaries II (BE), August 1742; ‘From Mrs. Susanna Wesley’ July 24, 1732.
30 With the exception of Kezzy, ‘in whose case I was overruled; and she was more years learning than any of the rest had been months.’ John Wesley, Journal (BCE), August 1742; ‘From Mrs. Susanna Wesley’ July 24, 1732.
taught to work till she can read very well . . . for the putting children to learn sewing before they can read perfectly is the very reason why so few women can read fit to be heard, and never to be well understood.\(^{31}\) The end result of Susanna’s enforced discipline and method was children who were pious and obedient to their parents, despite the interruptions of life that led to momentary lapses in both.\(^{32}\)

Biographies of Wesley’s life suggest that he learned the lessons of the Epworth Rectory well and grew into an obedient young man who heeded the advice of his parents and approached religion with seriousness and devotion.\(^{33}\) The first real challenge to Wesley’s upbringing came at the age of eleven, when he began his formal education at the Charterhouse school in London. The few stories that remain from his time at Charterhouse paint a picture of Wesley as the dutiful son who outwardly observed the lessons he had learned from his parents. He cared for his physical well-being by running around the school three times each morning as his father recommended, endured harassment from the older boys with quiet patience, and continued in his pattern of reading the Scriptures and praying daily.\(^{34}\) Despite having an outward appearance of religion and adherence to his parents’ instruction, Wesley viewed himself during this period as one inwardly mired in sin and a stranger to the gospel.

And those instructions, so far as they respected outward duties and sins, I gladly received and often thought of. But all that was said to me of inward obedience or holiness I neither understood nor remembered. So that I was

\(^{31}\) Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries II} (BE), August 1742; ‘From Mrs. Susanna Wesley’ July 24, 1732.

\(^{32}\) Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries II} (BE), August 1742; ‘From Mrs. Susanna Wesley’ July 24, 1732. Susanna describes the temporary loss of propriety that arose in the children from ‘that fatal dispersion’ when the children were temporarily housed with other families following the famous fire of 1709, which consumed the rectory and nearly took young John Wesley’s life.


indeed as ignorant of the true meaning of the law as I was of the gospel of Christ.\textsuperscript{35}

In his reflections upon these early years Wesley remained critical both of his understanding of the gospel and his adherence to the laws of God. He viewed the period from Charterhouse to his undergraduate education at Oxford as a steady decay of his moral grounding and saw himself as becoming habituated to sinful behaviour. At the university, he continued to observe some of the religious practices to which he had become accustomed, such as the reading of the Scriptures, saying prayers, and attending Church. But Wesley confessed that he was negligent in what he saw as his ‘outward duties’ and succumbed regularly to sinful behaviour, for which he felt continual guilt and a growing sense of hopelessness at his chances of being ‘saved’. Wesley summarized the perceived futility of his situation well: ‘I cannot well tell what I hoped to be saved by now, when I was continually sinning against the little light I had, unless by those transient fits of what many divines taught me to call “repentance”.’\textsuperscript{36} But this was not to be the end of Wesley’s pursuit of holiness and the year 1725 brought with it a renewed vigour and hope as he dedicated himself to the task of preparing for ordination, under the instruction of his mother and father, and embarked on a journey to discover the meaning of ‘true religion’.\textsuperscript{37}

The eighteenth-century academy has maintained a negative reputation among historians, due in no small part to scathing, though often humorous, accounts from diaries and memoires of the time.\textsuperscript{38} Oxford University, in particular, has been portrayed as a politically charged environment, filled with apathetic instructors who sought only to maintain the status quo and students who were prone to societal

\textsuperscript{35} Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries 1} (BE), 18:243.
\textsuperscript{36} Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries 1} (BE), 18:243.
\textsuperscript{37} Wesley, ‘The Way to the Kingdom’ (BE), 1:218-32.
\textsuperscript{38} Rack, \textit{Reasonable Enthusiast}, 61.
excess. However, as Henry D. Rack has noted, ‘More recent scholarship has been
cconcerned not only to soften these harsh judgments and to lighten the gloomy picture
by examples of diligence and devotion, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to
explain the peculiar circumstances in which the university operated and to clarify the
contemporary understanding of its role in society.’ Rack argued that the role of the
academy was not primarily to be innovative, but rather ‘The university was to pass on
received wisdom and maintain the established order in church and state. Above all it
was the trustee of orthodoxy in the church: it trained the clergy and defended the
church intellectually against the subversive religious and political opinions of Roman
Catholics and Dissenters.’ The freedom Wesley found in this environment may have
contributed to his spiritual laxity during his years as an undergraduate. Yet this same
setting with its social opportunities and pietistic leanings, when approached from a
desire to seek holiness of heart and life, became an integral part of Wesley’s ongoing
transformation and the seat of his experiments with ‘inward religion’. As Rack
observed:

A university characterized politically by a firm Toryism, with Jacobite
overtones; its religion firmly rooted in the ideals of seventeenth-century High
Church divines; its scholarship, traditional rather than innovative, was in many
ways an appropriate and indeed congenial setting for the sons of Epworth
rectory. The combination of a framework of formal discipline and piety which
he could exploit and embroider if he wished, together with larger opportunities
for intellectual and social life than were available at home, provided Wesley
with an almost ideal setting for his holy experiments as well as a degree of
freedom which he could develop if he wished.

The year 1725 saw significant changes for Wesley, both professionally and
personally. Following the successful completion of a BA, he stayed on at Christ
Church to start working towards the MA and soon began hoping for a Fellowship, for

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39 Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 62.
40 Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 62.
41 Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 68.
which his father, Samuel, worked to garner support. Wesley also began to think seriously, for the first time, about a career in service to the Church, which he communicated to Samuel and Susanna through his letters. The news certainly seemed to catch his parents by surprise, and we get some indication that their hopes for him, in this regard at least, had not been great. However, after receiving the blessing and encouragement of his parents Wesley began preparations for ordination. It was around this time that Wesley first read Thomas à Kempis’s *Christian Pattern* at the suggestion of a friend, an event he would later recall as providential. He credited Kempis with introducing him to an understanding of religion as ‘seated in the heart’, and it became a catalyst for his newfound desire to seek after a ‘new life’ of inward and outward holiness.

Coincident with these other developments, Wesley’s view of the nature of faith itself began to undergo a transition. Later in life, in his 1788 sermon *On Faith*, Wesley reflected on the definition of faith as he believed it had been predominantly understood throughout the eighteenth century saying, ‘Faith has been considered chiefly as an evidence and conviction of such or such truths. And this is the sense . . . at this day in every part of the Christian world.’ The younger Wesley had once appealed to this very definition of faith as the grounds of belief, which has led some

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42 See Wesley, ‘From Samuel Wesley’ 26 January 1725 and ‘From Susanna Wesley’ 23 February 1725, *Letters* (BE), 25:157-160. Both Samuel and Suzanna express genuine surprise and pleasure at hearing of John’s interest in taking holy orders, though each also comments that this is a sudden change in his disposition. Susanna, in particular, was surprised and also concerned that Wesley’s sudden desire to take holy orders should stem from an equal desire to turn away from worldly pursuits toward those of a spiritual nature. See also A. Skevington Wood. *The Burning Heart, John Wesley: Evangelist* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2007), 45.
43 Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:243-44.
44 Wesley, ‘On Faith’ (BE), 3:496. See Chapter 2 for a further discussion of Wesley’s ‘common’ definition of faith, and its inconsistency with Church of England doctrine.
scholars to suggest that his view was underdeveloped. In a letter to Susanna Wesley, dated 29 July 1725 he defended this definition saying, ‘As I understand faith to be an assent to any truth upon rational grounds, I don't think it possible without perjury to swear I believe anything, unless I have rational grounds for my persuasion.’ Indeed, Wesley’s reliance upon reason as a guiding principle was deeply ingrained, even from an early age, to the extent that it occasionally incensed his family. His father, Samuel, remarked once that ‘As for Jack, he will have a reason for everything he has to do. I suppose he would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature unless he had a reason for it.’ As time passed Wesley grew uncomfortable with a definition of faith resting solely on the foundation of reason, and he began to view faith as a living and active agent in the lives of Christians, which could not be reduced to mere rational assent. At the same time he continued to see faith as something based upon rational grounds. Though Wesley had not yet arrived at his mature understanding of faith in 1725, the seeds of dissatisfaction with what he believed to be the commonly held position of his day had been sown, and he was searching for a more robust definition.

Wesley’s view of faith and his budding search for inward and outward holiness were not the only things to occupy his thoughts during 1725. As Heitzenrater

45 Collins, John Wesley: A Theological Journey, 36.
47 Rack, Reasonable Enthusiast, 58.
48 Rex Dale Matthews, “Religion and Reason Joined”: A Study in the Theology of John Wesley,’ ThD Thesis, (The Divinity School, Harvard University, 1986), 240-6, identifies three types of faith language in Wesley’s writings: faith as assent, faith as trust, and faith as ‘spiritual experience’. Evidence suggests that Wesley developed this varying language in accordance with his personal experiences of faith. As he moved from an intellectual knowledge of God to a more filial knowledge, and began wrestling with the implications of Christians receiving an assurance of God’s favour, his understanding of faith’s inner workings also changed and his language followed suit. While Wesley continued to appeal to all three types of language, as Matthews has noted (241 ff.), thereby recognizing the dynamic qualities of faith, his focus tended toward language consistent with his recent experience.
noted, Wesley was also wrestling with his understanding of assurance of salvation, the means of grace, and antinomianism.

He [Wesley] was convinced as early as 1725 that one should certainly be able to sense God’s forgiveness; this became the basis for his concern for a perceptible assurance of salvation. He was just as convinced that such certainty of pardon was not a guarantee that sin could not rise up again; this is the basis for his constant concern for backsliding (and for part of his antipathy toward predestination). He also felt that the means of grace should be used constantly; this provided a basis for his lifelong battle against antinomianism.49

Along with Kempis, Wesley read Bishop Taylor’s *Holy Living*, and while he appreciated Taylor’s teaching about humility and repentance, Wesley’s own views on assurance at least partly stemmed from his disagreement with Taylor’s position.50

When he was elected as a fellow of Lincoln College soon after on 17 March 1726, Wesley took his new assignment as an opportunity to redouble his efforts and apply himself fully to study and holy living. He began to separate himself from what he considered to be any ‘trifling acquaintance’, to carefully evaluate his use of time, and to guard against actual sins. After reading William Law’s *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* in 1726 and later his *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, he became even more convinced of the divine mandate for inward and outward holiness.

But meeting now with Mr. Law’s *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call* (although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet) 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 resolved not to prolong the time of obeying him as I had never done before. And by my continued endeavor to keep his whole law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was

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persuaded that I should be accepted of him, and that I was even then in a state of salvation.\textsuperscript{51}

This pursuit of holiness became a central theme for Wesley, which he taught throughout his life. But while his emphasis eventually became that of holiness as the gracious gift of God bestowed upon humanity through faith, something we shall endeavour to show later, the focus of Wesley’s early teaching was upon the role of human effort in bringing about holiness of heart and life, in response to God’s law. This was manifest most clearly in Wesley’s earliest sermons.

1.3 Wesley’s Early Sermons

At this time, there are nineteen of John Wesley’s sermons dated between 1724 and 1738 for which we have surviving manuscripts. Wesley did not publish his early sermons as part of the \textit{Sermons on Several Occasions}, with the notable exception of his 1733 sermon, ‘The Circumcision of the Heart’. The only known copies of the remaining manuscripts were either recovered from his personal files after his death or preserved as transcriptions by his brother Charles. Of these, a few were later published in the \textit{Arminian Magazine}, while others were reproduced with significant revisions by Charles Wesley’s widow in a posthumous collection of Charles’ sermons.\textsuperscript{52} It is significant that Wesley did not publish the majority of these sermons himself, though his reasons for preserving the unpublished manuscripts for six decades remains a mystery. With the difficulties that arise from the scarcity of other early theological sources, these nineteen manuscript sermons remain our clearest

\textsuperscript{51} Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:244-5. Wesley’s emphasis.
\textsuperscript{52} See Outler, ‘An editorial comment’ (BE), 4:201ff.
choice for an initial comparison of Wesley’s theology before 1738 with that following his evangelical conversion.\(^{53}\)

In theological matters not covered by the sermon corpus we must presume Wesley to be typically Anglican. This is substantiated by his regular appeals to the *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Homilies*, and the *Articles of Religion*. These foundational documents of the Church of England provide us with basic assumptions about Wesley’s doctrine, at least in so far as he does not explicitly deny or modify them, as he did with his later revision of the *Articles* in 1784.\(^{54}\)

Evidence suggests that, early on, Wesley enjoyed some success as a lecturer and preacher at Oxford.\(^{55}\) His sermons appear to have been generally well received, despite their unremarkable content, the occasional harshness of their tone, and a tendency toward what Albert C. Outler dubbed the ‘gospel of moral rectitude’.\(^{56}\) But he was in no way limited to the confines of the academy during these early years of ministry. Heitzenrater’s research has shown Wesley’s preaching influence from 1725 to 1737 to be quite broad, including roughly sixty-five numbered (and 30 unnumbered) sermons, many of which he preached on multiple dates and in a variety of locations.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{53}\) Outler wrote that the ‘importance [of the manuscript sermons] in any serious study of his [Wesley] theological beginnings and subsequent development is crucial,’ as ‘they show, more clearly than anything else, how typically Anglican his early views of Christian faith and the Christian life were’. Outler ‘An editorial comment’ (BE), 4:201.

\(^{54}\) Near the end of his life, Wesley sent his ‘Sunday Service’ to Methodists in the American Colonies. This included his twenty-four articles of religion, a revision of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Church of England. Perhaps more significant than the revisions is the omission of several articles altogether (e.g. article XVII, on predestination).

\(^{55}\) See Outler’s note on Wesley’s success as a preacher in *Intro* (BE), 1:109.


Wesley’s first sermon, ‘Death and Deliverance’, inaugurated his preaching ministry in a Stoic, but not unconventional, fashion.\textsuperscript{58} Beginning with the text of Job 3:17, where the \textit{Authorized Version} reads, ‘There the wicked cease from troubling; there the weary are at rest,’ Wesley carefully presented evidence for the misery of the present world, based on reason and experience. The ‘chief cause’ of this misery, he said, is the actions of evil men, who ‘deny God’ and perpetrate this evil whether or not there is a hint of ‘temporal profit’ in it.\textsuperscript{59} And yet, despite the evidence of the misery and evil of the present world, people are reluctant to leave it.

Yet although we all agree in calling life a burden, it is a burden which very few are willing to lay down. We all know the ill[ness] and yet shun the cure; and though we are assured of being some way wretched as long as we continue here, we have an earnest desire for such a continuance. The thought of present death sets all of our faculties in alarm. Nay, although when we daily contemplate it at a distance we may some of us think with the Apostle, that ‘to die is gain’, yet even many good men are terrified at its approaches.\textsuperscript{60}

For Wesley, the alternative to this miserable life was obvious, and beyond dispute. Heaven, ‘that blessed rest’\textsuperscript{61} as Wesley referred to it, is something to be longed for, not put off, ‘since we learn from Holy Writ that death is not only a haven, but an entrance into a far more desirable country—a land not flowing with milk and honey like the earthly Canaan, but with joys knowing neither cessation nor end.’\textsuperscript{62}

If Wesley had stopped here, one could be left wondering whether it would be better to not have lived at all. But here it was that Wesley arrived at the main goal of the sermon. ‘What a satisfaction must [it] be to a good man to perceive the good works he had begun in this life continued and perfected in himself, to find every one

\textsuperscript{58} Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:206-14.
\textsuperscript{59} Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:208-11.
\textsuperscript{60} Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:207.
\textsuperscript{61} Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:211.
\textsuperscript{62} Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:208.
of those Christian virtues with which he had endeavoured to adorn his soul improved and drawn out to its utmost extent." Wesley’s intent was clear, to persuade those who seek to enter ‘that blessed rest’, that the journey begins now in the miserable world he had just described. He went on to say that ‘pious men, even in manifold temptations, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory when they contemplate the inheritance of which they will one day be made partakers.’ Though full happiness could not be found this side of eternity, this promise of joy as ‘the reward of the just even before the day of final retribution’ was sufficient enough for Wesley to encourage obedience in this life as a precursor to the next where ‘the state of just men [will be] made perfect’. And so Wesley urged the listener: ‘What diligence, even according to human prudence, should we use to make our calling and election sure!’

Here, then, is the first occurrence of a dual theme that appeared throughout Wesley’s early sermons: the *ars moriendi*, or ‘art of dying’, joined with a theology of ‘moral rectitude’ as a means to achieving that glorious end. Wesley continued with this theme in his second sermon on Matthew 6:33, ‘Seek First the Kingdom’, where he again urged the hearer on to a life of holiness in order to obtain deliverance from this world by death. One could wonder if Wesley was simply moralizing in these first two sermons, demanding a Christian response to death and evil that is unreasonably austere, had not the subject suddenly come much closer to home. Wesley’s seventh sermon, ‘On Mourning for the Dead’, was seemingly written in haste for the funeral of Robin Griffiths, whom some believe to have been Wesley’s first convert. His message to the family and other loved ones was perhaps even more Stoic than his

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63 Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:212.
64 Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:212.
65 Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:213.
66 Wesley, ‘Death and Deliverance’ (BE), 4:213.
68 Wesley, ‘On Mourning for the Dead’ (BE), 4:236.
previous sermons on death, even referring to the act of ‘profusely sorrowing’ as unprofitable, sinful, and absurd. Wesley considered such grief to be incompatible with virtue because it does not recognize God’s providence and care for our ultimate good. His conclusion on the matter:

If we are at any time in danger of being overcome by dwelling on the gloomy side of this prospect [of death], to the giving us pain, the making us unfit for the duties and offices of life . . . let us immediately recur to the bright side of it, and reflect with cheerfulness and gratitude that our own time passeth away like a shadow.

This statement seems almost comical in its candour, but one should not think that Wesley was being in any way disingenuous. He was simply presenting what he considered a rational argument, based on the indisputable misery of this life and the promise of eternal happiness for the just after death, that sorrow cannot bring anyone up from misery to joy, and so should be purged from the Christian life like anything else not contributing toward making one’s election sure.

One should not be left with the impression that the ‘art of death’ is the only topic about which Wesley preached in more than a decade leading up to Aldersgate. Nothing could be further from the truth. Wesley’s diary lists a multitude of texts and subjects on which he preached, and even with the limited number of manuscript sermons available one can see Wesley delving into a variety of topics related to Christian faith and practice.

On at least two occasions that we know of Wesley turned the focus of his sermons toward local concerns. In his 1727 sermon, ‘On Corrupting the Word of God’, Wesley seemed to be defending his father, Samuel Wesley, and his preaching

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69 Wesley, ‘On Mourning for the Dead’ (BE), 4:238-9. Wesley argued for the absurdity of grief, because it is derived from past events, which cannot be changed.
70 Wesley, ‘On Mourning for the Dead’ (BE), 4:240.
72 Wesley, ‘On Corrupting the Word of God’ (BE), 4:244-51.
methods against those who he sees as misusing the pulpit and corrupting scripture. While addressing these concerns of a more regional nature, Wesley also used the opportunity to talk about the proper interpretation of scripture, even touching on some practices that would become rules of his hermeneutics later on in his ministry, such as letting scripture interpret scripture and taking the plain sense of scripture, and the ‘analogy of faith’. The other instance of Wesley’s writing and preaching a sermon directed toward local events was his 1732 sermon, ‘Public Diversions Denounced’, where he denounced the people of Epworth for engaging in public spectacles immediately following a fire that he saw as God’s wrath against them.

Wesley was also known to write the occasional sermon seeking to answer questions of a more philosophical or theological nature. In 1726 he wrote a sermon, ‘On Guardian Angels’ that included some speculation on the nature and work of angels as God’s messengers and ministers to humanity. Wesley also engaged epistemology with ‘The Promise of Understanding’, written in 1730, where he discussed the nature of human knowledge about God and reasons why that knowledge is limited. This sermon provides an interesting contrast to Wesley’s later work that described the role of faith in providing Christians with ‘spiritual senses’ that enable one to discern ‘the invisible things of God’, a subject which will be explored in Chapter 2. One of the more erudite examples of Wesley’s early sermons was ‘The Image of God’, written on November 1, 1730. In this sermon Wesley detailed the ways in which humanity is made in the image of God, along with some of the effects

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73 Outler, *Intro* (BE), 4:244.
74 Wesley, ‘On Corrupting the Word of God’ (BE), 4:247.
75 Wesley, ‘On Corrupting the Word of God’ (BE), 4:250.
of the fall upon this image and the remedy for the present state of humanity. Here Wesley made one of the few direct statements about Jesus Christ that can be found in these early manuscripts, when he said, ‘Who indeed shall recover us from the body of this death? Who shall restore our native immortality? We answer with the Apostle, “I thank God, Jesus Christ our Lord!”’.\(^{79}\)

Despite the varied topics of Wesley’s preaching, as one reads the manuscript sermons, one cannot help but see this theme of seeking virtue as a means of securing eternal joy running as an undercurrent throughout. Even in the example above concerning ‘The Image of God’, Wesley ultimately turns the focus away from the work of Christ and toward obedience to his commands for the goal of conquering ‘the first death’.\(^{80}\) This theme pops up time and time again in the manuscript sermons, sometimes operating in the background, and sometimes as receiving Wesley’s full attention. In a very real sense, this was the axial theme of the young Wesley, and we see this reflected not only in his preaching, but also in introspective comments in his *Journal*, as he wrestled with a lack of assurance that he had secured the happiness he was seeking, and whether his efforts to do so were in any way effectual toward that end. This was particularly true of his reflections following the mission to Georgia.

From the evidence of his manuscript sermons and early journals, one might rightly ask if Wesley was preaching, or at least practising, works-righteousness prior to 1738. In fact, Wesley said as much about himself, upon returning from Georgia.\(^{81}\) Even if it is true that Wesley personally strove after works-righteousness, this does not necessarily mean that his theology followed his practice.

\(^{79}\) Wesley, ‘The Image of God’ (BE), 4:299.

\(^{80}\) Wesley, ‘The Image of God’ (BE), 4:299.

\(^{81}\) See Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:246.
One must remember first that Wesley was ordained in the Church of England and subscribed fully to the doctrines of the church as contained in the Articles of Religion and other foundational documents. Even a cursory read of the Articles will leave one convinced of the supremacy of Christ in the theology of the Church of England, and one can assume that Wesley both understood and acknowledged the same. In addition to this, Wesley repeatedly points to God as the only one who can make a person obedient or righteous. Nowhere in the early sermons did he state this more explicitly than his 1730 sermon, ‘On the Sabbath’, when he listed as one purpose of the Sabbath,

That man should be constantly and deeply sensible that he can no more sanctify than he could create himself must ever be of the last importance. It must ever be of the highest concern to men to remember that they are unable to help themselves; to keep the impression of this great truth ever strong upon their minds, that he who is born of a woman must be born again of God, or it is impossible that he should please him.\(^{82}\)

God’s grace and providence were at the forefront of Wesley’s challenge to those who heard the word preached. His calls to a life of virtue and piety were grounded on the understanding that it is God who enables obedience in those who seek to please him. It is only by God’s unmerited gift that people receive a ‘better life of holiness’, and it is for this reason, as well as the promise of eternal joy, that Wesley urged people on to greater obedience in this life, ‘That this last, noblest gift may not be in vain, we must now especially work together with him; we must labour to conform ourselves to his likeness, to be holy as he is holy.’\(^{83}\) Thus, while Wesley’s practice may have tended at times toward works-righteousness, the theology he taught was still grounded, to a significant degree, upon God’s grace enabling human response.

\(^{82}\) Wesley, ‘On the Sabbath’ (BE), 4:274.
\(^{83}\) Wesley, ‘On the Sabbath’ (BE), 4:275.
With this in mind, we can safely say that the young Wesley’s theology was at least *theocentric*. But what about the role of Christ in his theology? While his Anglican roots provided a Christological confession with which he agreed intellectually, Wesley’s expressed theology was almost devoid of direct teaching about Christ and his work, or their impact on the lives of ordinary Christians, outside of indirect references to Christ’s work in justification. Since the orienting concern of Wesley’s early preaching had little to do with the justification of believers, and more to do with setting straight the lives of presumed Christians, mention of Jesus Christ was minimal. He tended, instead, to speak of the providence, grace, goodness, and majesty of God in more general terms, and how one’s life should reflect those traits. It is not clear to what degree Wesley believed his theology to be grounded on the work of Christ at this point, but it is significant that his communication of any such views in the early sermons was mostly nonexistent.

1.4 ‘Beating the Air’

Following the completion of his M.A. on 14 February 1727 Wesley left Oxford to assist his father, Samuel, as curate in Epworth and Wroot. He took well to the life of a country minister, and with the exception of a short visit for his ordination as presbyter in 1728, did not return to Oxford until the summer of 1729. During that time Charles Wesley, who was then at Christ Church, had experienced a change of heart similar to what John had experienced in 1725, which included a desire to re-orient his life after John’s pattern of serious reflection and study, something with which his brother was obliged to assist. When, in May 1729, John received a letter from Charles announcing that he had convinced a friend to join him regularly in these
new pursuits, John visited his brother at Oxford to meet with and encourage them. Soon after, John Wesley was called back to the University to assume his duties as Fellow of Lincoln College, and in the winter of 1729 he resumed his residence at Lincoln College.

With Wesley’s arrival back in Oxford, the group which was later to become known as the ‘Holy Club’ and the pattern for the Methodist class and band meetings began meeting in earnest and adding to their number.\(^\text{84}\) This period in Wesley’s development has been well documented by historians and theologians alike. For our purposes, it is important to note two closely related consequences of this period for Wesley’s spiritual development, though they did not lead to a change in his theology. First, the inclusion of others into the practices Wesley had adopted encouraged him both in his outward and inward pursuit of holiness. The members of the Holy Club met to study together, observed the sacrament, ministered to the poor and sick, and visited the prison. Wesley took to all of these endeavours with a renewed enthusiasm, remarking that he was doing these and ‘what other good I could by my presence or my little fortune to the bodies and souls of men.’\(^\text{85}\) Along with good works, Wesley also began a more regular pattern of self-denial, beginning with his observation of the weekly fasts, but continuing into other areas. So committed was Wesley to his pursuit of inward holiness that he was able to declare, ‘I omitted no sort of self-denial which I thought lawful . . . I omitted no occasion of doing good.’\(^\text{86}\)

The second consequence of Wesley’s time in Oxford between 1729 and 1735 apparently came as a surprise to him. Despite all of his efforts to please God through his pursuit of holiness, Wesley gained no assurance that he had accomplished his task.

\(^{84}\) Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 87.
\(^{85}\) Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:245.
\(^{86}\) Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:245.
To the contrary, Wesley began to sense that all of his effort was wasted and concluded that he ‘had been all this time building on the sand’.\textsuperscript{87} Wesley sought counsel from others about his predicament, but found what amounted to antinomianism in the mystic writers accompanied by contemplative practices that Wesley later came to discern as a ‘refined way of trusting to my own works and my own righteousness’ and which gave no greater comfort to him that he was in God’s favour.\textsuperscript{88}

In 1733 Samuel Wesley, Sr. began urging John to consider succeeding him in his duties at Epworth. Despite his earlier affinity to the task, Wesley resisted his father’s promptings, stating that he felt he could do the most good for his own soul in Oxford, even going to far as to write a detailed letter highlighting all of the ways this was true. When Samuel pressed John more forcefully to accept on his deathbed in 1735, he agreed to look into the possibility by asking Sir John Philips to assist him. Though Wesley had the support of James Oglethorpe, Philips declined to help Wesley gain the living, and so he returned to Oxford after burying his father. Shortly thereafter Wesley was approached by John Burton, who asked him if he would be willing to and minister to the new Georgia colony, something in which Samuel had been keenly interested. As Heitzenrater observed, ‘Here then was an alternative to the Epworth living that would still provide a chance for Wesley to fulfill his father’s dreams.’\textsuperscript{89} Such an opportunity would also bring with it a change of scenery for Wesley and another opportunity to seek holiness through ministry and mission.

The voyage to the colonies on board the Simmonds in 1735/36 was one full of danger, and on several occasions Wesley was confronted with the fragility of life.

\textsuperscript{87} Wesley, \textit{Journals & Diaries I} (BE), 18:245.
\textsuperscript{88} Wesley, \textit{Journals & Diaries I} (BE), 18:246.
\textsuperscript{89} Heitzenrater, \textit{People Called Methodists}, 56.
Most memorably, he wrote in his *Journal* of a series of strong storms occurring from the 17th to 30th of January, which instilled in Wesley both a sense of his own fear and shame at his ‘unwillingness to die’. In contrast to his own fear and that of many others aboard ship, Wesley witnessed in the group of Moravians with which he travelled, courage and peace in the face of imminent death. He famously wrote in a journal entry dated Sunday, 25 January:

> In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterward, “Were you not afraid?” He answered, “I thank God, no.” I asked, “But were not your women and children afraid?” He replied, mildly, “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.”

Wesley’s own experience was so vastly different from what he witnessed with the Moravians that upon his arrival in Georgia he sought out advice from one of the German ministers, Mr. Spangenberg, about his conduct during the voyage. The ensuing conversation led Wesley deeper into self-doubt.

> He said, “My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?” I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it and asked, “Do you know Jesus Christ?” I paused and said, “I know He is the Saviour of the world.” “True,” replied he; “but do you know He has saved you?” I answered, “I hope He has died to save me.” He only added, “Do you know yourself?” I said, “I do.” But I fear they were vain words.

Though Wesley’s original intent to evangelize the native peoples of Georgia was never fully realized, Wesley did have quite a bit of success in his parish ministry in Savannah and Federica. Geordan Hammond has carefully demonstrated that, under Wesley’s leadership and care, the church in Georgia grew, both in numbers and

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90 Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:142.
91 Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:146.
Wesley had his detractors, some of them very public, but he also had many supporters within his parish. However, despite the considerably positive tone of his ministry in Georgia, Wesley’s reflections of his own spiritual progress during this period in his life were bleak.

All the time I was at Savannah I was thus ‘beating the air’. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which by a living faith in him bringeth salvation ‘to everyone that believeth’, I sought to establish my righteousness, and so laboured in the fire all my days.93

When the scandal concerning Sophia Hopkey broke, and Wesley was forced to leave the colony under threat of legal action, it no doubt contributed to his sense of spiritual deprivation. His unrealized hopes in Georgia only encouraged the fear he had experienced previously, and a sense of immanent death followed him after he returned home in January of 1738, when according to Wesley, ‘I was strongly convinced that the cause of that uneasiness was unbelief.’94 Even so, Wesley did not break under the weight of his concerns, still convinced that his good works gave evidence of his Christianity. In that same month, on 24 January, 1738 Wesley wrote,

I think, verily, if the gospel be true, I am safe: for I not only have given, and do give, all my goods to feed the poor; I not only give my body to be burned, drowned, or whatever God shall appoint for me; but I follow after charity (though not as I ought, yet as I can), if haply I may attain it. I now believe the gospel is true. ‘I show my faith by my works’ by staking my all upon it. Whoever sees me, sees I would be a Christian.95

Shortly thereafter, Wesley was introduced to the Moravian, Peter Böhler, who accompanied him on several short journeys around England, and whose good counsel

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93 Wesley, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:246.
94 Wesley, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:247.
95 Wesley, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:211.
Wesley began to seek. Wesley recalled in his journal a number of examples of God’s working in the lives of people to whom Wesley ministered in those next few weeks, but his self-doubt persisted despite all of this evidence of God’s handiwork, until at last, following his brother Charles’ sudden illness and subsequent recovery, Wesley declared himself to be ‘clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved.’

Wesley’s crisis of faith stemmed from the inherited theology that he gained from his tradition and upbringing, but that he had not yet applied experientially to his life and ministry. In other words, he had inherited theological presuppositions about God, but had not yet come to fully understand the work of God, especially the work of God in Christ, for himself. The remainder of this chapter will explore the details of this inherited theology.

1.5 Wesley’s Inherited Doctrine of God

Wesley’s doctrine of God is one aspect of his theology that did not change materially following his 1738 evangelical conversion; rather his teaching remained remarkably consistent throughout his life.

Wesley believed speculative theological language could interfere with a clear understanding of God. In the preface to his Sermons on Several Occasions, first published in 1746, Wesley commented on the content and structure of his sermons, saying,

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96 Wesley, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:228.
97 Wesley, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:235. It should be noted that Wesley later questioned his early evaluation of his own faith prior to Aldersgate. In 1775 Wesley added notes to his journal entries leading up to 24 May 1738, which recounted his journey of faith, and said that he believed he ‘certainly then had the faith of a servant, though not the faith of a son.’
I design plain truth for plain people. Therefore of set purpose I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations, from all perplexed and intricate reasonings, and as far as possible from even the show of learning, unless in sometimes citing the original Scriptures.⁹⁸

Despite an occasional inclination toward speculation about matters of science and the nature of new creation, John Wesley remained wary of abstract or speculative theology, particularly concerning the nature of God.⁹⁹ In his 1775 sermon, ‘On the Trinity’ Wesley expressed his desire for plain speech about God.

I dare not insist upon any one's using the word Trinity, or Person. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better: But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them I cannot: Much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist, green wood, for saying, Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; yet I scruple using the words Trinity and Persons, because I do not find those terms in the Bible.” These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words, unexplained, just as they lie in the text: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one.”¹⁰⁰

What was important to Wesley was that a person possessed a true faith in the triune God, known to be true through the inner witness of God to the believer whereby ‘God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him [the believer] through the merits of God the Son—and having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit “even as he honours the Father”’.¹⁰¹ The ability or inclination to express the theological concept of the Trinity was less important than experientially knowing Father, Son, and Spirit, and the plainest understanding of such

⁹⁸ Wesley, ‘Preface,’ (BE), 1:104.
⁹⁹ See Wesley, ‘The General Deliverance’ (BE), 2:436ff. for one particularly speculative sermon about new creation.
¹⁰⁰ Wesley, ‘On The Trinity’ (BE), 2:377-38. Wesley was aware that the authenticity of the Trinitarian text quoted here was disputed, and offered three arguments from Bengelius that he believed sufficient enough to accept the text as genuine.
¹⁰¹ Wesley, ‘On The Trinity’ (BE), 2:385.
things was to be preferred.\textsuperscript{102} Yet this in no way implies that Wesley was himself unconcerned with theological language and concepts. He had an adept mind and often sought to clarify matters of doctrine for his people.

With regard to the doctrine of God, Wesley was largely successful in keeping speculative language out of the sermons. It is precisely this peculiarity that creates difficulty for examining his doctrine of God. Wesley left no systematic account of his views on God’s attributes, and his lack of emphasis on this topic in his sermons makes the task of tracking changes to his thought difficult. Wesley’s inherited doctrine of God did not show any significant revision during his lifetime, and his lack of focus upon the subject in his early sermons indicates that, while this doctrine was operating in the background, it had not become evangelical for him in any meaningful sense prior to 1738. The next chapter will explore Wesley’s evangelical doctrine of God and indicate those areas where Wesley’s thought did undergo revision after 1738.

\textbf{1.5.1 The Unity of the Trinity}

According to Wesley, God is first and foremost Triune. Throughout his life, he emphasized the unified work of God in restoring sinful humanity to a relationship with himself. Nowhere is the Triune nature of God more clearly seen than in his love for humanity, which generates a loving response.

It is in consequence of our knowing God loves us that we love him, and love our neighbour as ourselves. Gratitude toward our Creator cannot but produce benevolence to our fellow creatures. The love of Christ constrains us . . . to be patterns of all true genuine morality, of justice, mercy, and truth. This begins when we begin to know God, by the teaching of his own Spirit.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{102} Wesley also sought to apply a \textit{plainness} of approach to his hermeneutics of Scripture, seeking to uncover the plainest sense of a text as its primary meaning. See Scott J. Jones, \textit{Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture} (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995) and Donald A. Bullen, \textit{A Man of One Book? John Wesley’s Interpretation and Use of the Bible} (London: Paternoster, 2007).

\textsuperscript{103} Wesley, ‘The Unity of the Divine Being,’ (BE), 4:67.
When God acts, he does so with a unified purpose in which all three persons of the Trinity participate. Wesley often invokes this Triune view of God’s work as the source of true happiness: ‘As soon as the Father of spirits reveals his Son in our hearts [by the teaching of his own Spirit], and the Son reveals his Father, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts; then, and not till then, we are happy.’

1.5.2 The Attributes of God

Late in his life, Wesley penned a number of sermons aimed directly at teaching about the attributes and nature of God; the first of these was his sermon ‘On the Trinity,’ which was written in 1775. Given his earlier decision to avoid speculative language in his sermons and his many explicit affirmations that he held to the doctrines of the Church of England, it is not surprising that sermons of this sort did not show up sooner. That he wrote them at all, and many of them in relatively quick succession, indicates that something must have changed, either in his opinions concerning God’s attributes, or in his felt need to explicitly state his long-held beliefs.

Outler has suggested the motivation behind some of these sermons, beginning with ‘The Unity of the Divine Being’ (1789), was ‘Wesley’s explicit identification of the threat to true religion coming from the wave of Enlightenment humanism,’ and his assertion that only right belief or ‘true religion will motivate and sustain authentic morality.’ In an effort to provide a corrective to Deist philosophy, Wesley turned to the more speculative aspects of the doctrine of God.

In these sermons, Wesley remains orthodox in his theology. We find little to suggest a change in his understanding of God away from that which he believed in his

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105 Outler, Intro (BE), 4:60.
youth. What we find instead are Wesley’s attempts to link a right belief in God with right action.

   a) Eternity. Following in the footsteps of John Locke and Samuel Clarke, Wesley defined eternity as a ‘boundless duration,’ which can be divided into two parts: ‘that eternity which is past, and that eternity which is to come.’  

   106 For Wesley, this concept of eternity was only understandable in relation to God’s being. Only God is able to inhabit eternity in both these senses. ‘The great Creator alone (not any of his creatures) is “from everlasting to everlasting”: his duration alone, as it had no beginning, so it cannot have any end.’ 107 God is constant, unchanging in that ‘As he ever was, so he ever will be; as there was no beginning of his existence, so there will be no end.’ 108

   As Kenneth J. Collins has noted, the eternal nature of God ‘is intimately associated with the divine name.’ 109 The name of God itself carries the meaning of the term. As Wesley stated it, ‘This is universally allowed to be contained in his very name, “Jehova”; which the Apostle John accordingly renders, “He that was, and that is, and that is to come”. Perhaps it would be as proper to say, “He is from everlasting to everlasting.”’ 110 In other words, not only does the name of God imply that he alone inhabits eternity in both senses, but it suggests that eternity is an expression of God’s fully independent nature. Collins further clarifies this idea, ‘That is, God is the One whose very essence is to exist and is, therefore, not dependent on any other being or substance for this qualitatively distinct kind of being.’ 111

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109 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 22.
111 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 22.
Though God alone inhabits eternity in the fullest sense, Wesley was careful to show that the concept of eternity has implications for God’s creation, and human choices have eternal consequences:

This is not an incommunicable attribute of the great Creator; but he has been graciously pleased to make innumerable multitudes of his creatures partakers of it. He has imparted this not only to angels, and archangels, and all the companies of heaven, who are not intended to die, but to glorify him and live in his presence for ever, but also to the inhabitants of the earth who dwell in houses of clay. Their bodies indeed are ‘crushed before the moth,’ but their souls will never die.  

This reality that God has extended eternity to human souls carries with it the implied question of how one’s soul will experience that eternal existence.

*b) Omnipresence.* According to Wesley, the omnipresence of God is closely related to his eternity. ‘As he exists through infinite duration, so he cannot but exist through infinite space,’ which is to say that ‘God is in this, and every place.’ For Wesley, this was a comforting idea, and one upon which careful reflection should be made. Since God *is* everywhere at once, he also *acts* everywhere at once.

God acts in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, throughout the whole compass of his creation; by sustaining all things, without which everything would in an instant sink into its primitive nothing; by governing all, every moment superintending everything that he has made; strongly and sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures.

To the worldly objection that one is unable to perceive the omnipresence of God with physical senses, Wesley simply replied, ‘But by which of your senses do you perceive your soul? Surely you do not deny the existence or presence of this! And yet it is not

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115 Wesley, ‘On the Omnipresence of God,’ (BE), 4:43. Wesley referred to this doctrine as a ‘comfortable truth’ recounting the delight of the Psalmist that there is nowhere one can go where God is not present.
the object of your sight, or of any of your other senses." He considered it a sufficient argument to point out that God is Spirit, and is no more discernable by the physical senses than our own souls.

Collins identified another significant theological issue related to Wesley’s teaching of this doctrine, ‘Though Wesley clearly taught that God is *immanent* in the creation and therefore everywhere, he nevertheless avoided the teaching of pantheism by contending that the Holy One yet *transcends* the universe in some important ways." The danger here is in confusing the idea that God is ‘in all places’ with the notion that God is ‘in all things’. But in sidestepping the danger of pantheism, Wesley also had to avoid the trap of Deism and a transcendent God who has no relationship with his creation. Or, to put it another way, ‘to stress immanence to the neglect of transcendence would result in pantheism; to stress transcendence to the neglect of immanence would result in separation in which God would be and would remain unknown.’

*c) Omnipotence.* Wesley saw the omnipresence of God as a great comfort in part because it demonstrates that God is also omnipotent. In fact, Wesley suggested that the omnipotence of God only makes sense in the light of his omnipresence.

Nay, and we cannot believe the omnipotence of God unless we believe his omnipresence. For seeing . . . nothing can act where it is not, if there were any space where God was not present he would not be able to do anything there. Therefore to deny the omnipresence of God implies likewise the denial of his omniscience.

For Wesley, the omnipotence of God is primarily displayed in his providence. While Wesley saw God’s power as boundless, and ‘He doth whatsoever pleaseth him,

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120 Wesley, ‘On the Omnipresence of God,’ (BE), 4:44.
in the heaven, the earth, the sea, and in all deep places, he saw God’s power primarily put to action first in creating, and subsequently in sustaining his creation. ‘The eternal, almighty, all-wise, all-gracious God, is the Creator of heaven and earth. . . And as this all-wise, all-gracious Being created all things, so he sustains all things.’

Collins explains this further: ‘For Wesley at last, the omnipotence of the Creator is conceived in such a manner that the creation is dependent on God’s power not only at the beginning, but also continually so.’

\[d)\text{ Omniscience.}\] Wesley viewed the omniscience of God in much the same way as he did God’s omnipotence; that is, as a ‘clear and necessary consequence of his omnipresence,’ for, ‘If he is present in every part of the universe, he cannot but know whatever is, or is done there.’ Wesley also related God’s omniscience to his eternity. ‘All time, rather all eternity . . . being present to him at once, he does not know one thing before another, but sees all things in one point of view, from everlasting to everlasting.’ Since God is outside of time, and perceives all events through a singular point of view, ‘he sees at once whatever was, is, or will be to the end of time.’

Wesley was not content, however, to leave this doctrine with such a simplistic explanation. His dual concerns of human dependency upon God and human freedom and responsibility compelled him to further explain that God’s knowledge, though complete, is not causal: ‘But observe: we must not think they are because he knows them. No; he knows them because they are.’ In this way, Wesley was able to avoid

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123 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 27.
the charge that God is the author of sin: ‘In like manner God knows that man sins; for he knows all things. Yet we do not sin because he knows it: but he knows it because we sin.’

Wesley was likewise able to preserve freedom of belief in the light of God’s knowledge concerning human choice, saying, ‘Men are as free in believing, or not believing, as if he [God] did not know it at all.’

It is here that we first encounter a difference between Wesley’s thought and what was considered typical of a clergyman in the Church of England. Article seventeen of the Thirty-nine Articles states the position of the church on the topic of predestination, saying that God ‘hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.’ In 1784, near the end of his life, Wesley sent his Sunday Service to Methodists in the American Colonies. Included in this was a document containing twenty-four articles of religion. Many of the Twenty-four Articles were taken verbatim from the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, though some were revised slightly. Perhaps more significant are the articles that he chose to remove altogether. Article seventeen, on predestination, was one such absent article.

Though this omission is telling, it is not at all surprising. Wesley spent a significant amount of time and energy refuting the tenets of Calvinism. He believed the doctrine, as it was commonly preached, ran contrary to the love and mercy of God. But was this view a later development that occurred following his heart-warming experience of 1738? As it turns out, Wesley began expressing his concerns

with the doctrine as early as June 29, 1725. Wesley wrote the following in a letter to his mother Susanna:

> What then shall I say of predestination? An everlasting purpose of God to deliver some from damnation does, I suppose, exclude all from that deliverance who are not chosen. And if it was inevitably decreed from eternity that such a determinate part of mankind should be saved, and none beside them, a vast majority of the world were only born to eternal death, without so much as a possibility of avoiding it. How is this consistent with either the divine justice or mercy?  

Wesley was ordained a mere two months later, and presumably gave public witness to his agreement with the *Articles*. He continued to appeal to the *Articles* as containing the faith, which he preached throughout his life. Considering his reservations concerning predestination, his outward arguments against it later on, and his omission of article seventeen from the list sent to America, one has to wonder if Wesley was either subscribing to a nuanced view of predestination and election, or speaking disingenuously, when lending his support to the *Articles*. In either case, one thing can be sure: his views against predestination were already formed, at least in part, before 1738 and were not a product of his experience at Aldersgate Street.

e) *God is Spirit.* For Wesley, the eternal God, who is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, is also a spirit ‘not having such a body, such parts, or passions, as men have.’

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130 Herbert McGonigle argued that Wesley inherited an Evangelical Arminianism from his parents. See Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism*, 78. His expression of this heritage in 1725 is an indication that Wesley was making this inherited theology his own.


transcendent, in that he created all things and is above all that he created, and that God is also immanent, in that he sustains all things through his ‘infinite wisdom’.

Wesley uses this doctrine to provide grounding for his doctrine of humanity as created in the image of God:

He created man in particular, after his own image, to be ‘a picture of his own eternity’. When he had raised man from the dust of the earth, he breathed into him an immortal spirit. Hence he is peculiarly called ‘the Father of our spirits’; yea, ‘the Father of the spirits of all flesh’.

It is not a physical resemblance with which he is here concerned, but a spiritual one, an eternal image ‘endued with understanding, with will, or affections, and liberty—without which neither his understanding nor his affections could have been of any use, neither would he have been capable either of vice or virtue.’

This was important for Wesley, because it illustrates that humanity is uniquely created to dwell with God eternally after death, is uniquely capable of choosing good or evil in this life, and is morally responsible for those choices. Humanity has been granted the privilege of being given a soul, though ‘[God] alone is a pure spirit, totally separate from all matter.’

1.6 Wesley’s Inherited Christology

Wesley also inherited a Christology from his tradition and upbringing. This inherited theology of the person of Christ did not materially change, so this section will seek to outline Wesley’s mature theology. The following chapter will demonstrate that what did change for Wesley was that Christ and his saving work became central to his theology in a way that it was not prior to 1738. The goal here is

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to concisely summarize the basic tenets of Wesley’s thought, identifying any distinctive elements that will be helpful later on in the study, and describing Wesley’s relationship to the theological tradition of the Church of England.

Wesley’s Christology has been under some scrutiny, particularly concerning the doctrine of the two natures. John Deschner argued that Wesley placed greater emphasis on Christ’s divine nature to the neglect of his human nature. This assertion has led many to question whether or not Wesley’s Christology was indeed orthodox according to the Chalcedonian formula. As Deschner explained, however, Wesley’s Christology was not unique within traditional Protestant theology. So, while some elements of Wesley’s thought may, at times, take on a nuanced emphasis or vary slightly from the expected norm, he was operating within an established orthodox paradigm.

Deschner’s methodology was to highlight what he saw as the emphases and tensions characteristic of Wesley and compare them to commonly accepted Protestant doctrine. The method of this study is less concerned with comparison, and will seek instead to summarize Wesley’s inherited theology of the person of Christ in this chapter as a starting point for understanding his evangelical theology of the work of Christ in Chapter 2, and evaluating the relationship between Wesley’s Christology and his broader theology in the remainder of the study.

1.7 The Person of Christ

Wesley’s inherited Christology is, perhaps, best summarized in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. He later edited the Articles to accompany his 1788

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137 Deschner, WC, 6.
Sunday Service for the American Methodists. In doing so he reduced the number to twenty-four and slightly altered some of the language.\textsuperscript{138} It is significant that the articles materially changed or removed by Wesley mostly pertained either to issues of politics or Christology, particularly those having to do with the implications of Christ’s work for humanity. Even his changes and omissions tell us something about his Christology, as we shall see later. However, Wesley’s views of the person of Christ remained consistent with those expressed in the Thirty-nine Articles and creeds, and remained rooted in the Chalcedonian framework.\textsuperscript{139}

1.7.1 The Two Natures of Christ

Wesley retained nearly all of the precise language of Article II of the Thirty-nine Articles concerning the doctrine of the two natures of Christ when he penned his Twenty-four Articles: ‘The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man.’ For Wesley there can be no separation of Christ’s natures; he is in all ways ‘real God, as real man,’\textsuperscript{140} ‘the Son of God and the Son of Man…one taken from his divine, and the other from his human, nature.’\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{138} The number was later altered to twenty-five by the American Methodists.
\textsuperscript{139} Deschner, WC, 15 and Thomas C. Oden, John Wesley’s Teachings: Christ and Salvation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 39-40 agree that Wesley’s Christology utilized the language and structure of Chalcedon, though Deschner argues that Wesley maintained an imbalanced emphasis on the divinity of Christ.
\textsuperscript{140} Wesley, ENNT, Phil. 2:6.
\textsuperscript{141} Wesley, ENNT, Luke 22:70.
However, Wesley’s decision to remove the clause ‘of her [Mary’s] substance’ from Article II raises an interesting question. Was it his commitment to Christ’s perfection along with his strong view of original sin that led him to this alteration, or something else? Deschner noted that a lack of emphasis on Christ’s humanity was one of the problems with Wesley’s Christology.\textsuperscript{142} He argued this particular omission suggests Wesley’s hesitancy to ascribe human weakness to Christ, something that Wesley also hinted at with his references to Christ’s emotions.\textsuperscript{143}

While Wesley at least tacitly affirmed the language about Christ’s humanity in Charles’ hymns, and explicitly affirmed the language of the Articles, the Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer, it is unclear why he did not use this language more often himself. Wesley did comment on the full humanity of Christ on occasion, such as his note on John 1:14, but he did not do so regularly or with the same emphasis as when he wrote about Christ’s divinity.\textsuperscript{144} This choice leaves the door open for continued questions about Wesley’s view of the humanity of Christ, but does not give enough clear evidence to suggest that Wesley’s doctrine was outside orthodox boundaries. As Deschner concluded, ‘these questions deal with tendencies rather than with doctrines.’\textsuperscript{145}

Indeed, Wesley’s views stood in line with his inherited theological tradition. This is evidenced, in particular, by his publication of extracts from the Homilies and his appeals to their authority. Maddox stressed the importance of the Homilies for

\textsuperscript{142} Deschner, \textit{WC}, 24-8. Descher concluded that it would be inaccurate to call Wesley’s Christology docetic, because it includes a clear teaching about the human nature, even though the emphasis for Wesley lays elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{143} Deschner, \textit{WC}, 25.

\textsuperscript{144} Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, John 1:14. Wesley commented on the Word becoming flesh, saying, ‘Flesh sometimes signifies corrupt nature; sometimes the body; sometimes, as here, the whole man.’

\textsuperscript{145} Deschner, \textit{WC}, 32.
Wesley’s defense of the revival, noting Wesley took particular interest in Cranmer’s homily, ‘The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works,’ which he reprinted twenty times during his lifetime.\(^{146}\)

Wesley stressed the usefulness of the *Homilies* as second only to scripture for forming doctrinal understanding, saying, ‘And no minister of the Church can with any decency oppose these, seeing at his ordination he subscribed to them in subscribing to the Thirty-sixth Article of the Church.’\(^{147}\) These same *Homilies*, which Wesley recommended so unequivocally, clearly teach an orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology, which does not shy away from the exposition of Christ’s human nature.

We are evidently taught in the Scripture, that our Lord and Saviour Christ consisteth of two several natures; of his manhood, being thereby perfect man, and of his Godhead, being thereby perfect God . . . In that he did hunger and thirst, eat and drink, sleep and wake; in that he preached his gospel to the people; in that he wept and sorrowed for Jerusalem; in that he paid tribute for himself and Peter; in that he died and suffered death; what other thing did he else declare, but only this, that he was perfect man as we are?\(^{148}\)

It is evident from Wesley’s affirmations of the *Articles*, *Homilies*, and *Book of Common Prayer* that he aligned himself with orthodox Christology. However, it is equally apparent that he did not emphasize the humanity of Christ in the same way as he emphasized Christ’s divinity. Since Wesley did not provide a full and systematic account of his theology, it may appear difficult to ascertain for certain where he stood on this issue, but, when considering Wesley’s work, one must remember that the

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\(^{146}\) Maddox, ‘An Introductory Comment’ in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I* (BE), 12:29. Maddox commented, ‘The value Wesley placed on this pamphlet extract from the *Homilies* can hardly be overemphasized.’ And furthermore, ‘It can rightly be considered—along with the sermon *Salvation by Faith*—as the theological manifesto of Wesley’s evangelical reframing of his holy living Anglican heritage.’

\(^{147}\) Wesley, ‘On God’s Vineyard’ (BE), 3:505.

\(^{148}\) Thomas Cranmer, ‘A Sermon of the Nativity’ in *Certain Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed to Be Read in Churches, In the Time of the Late Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory* (London: The Prayer Book and Homily Society, 1852), 376-7.
majority of Wesley’s writing was in the form of response to particular questions.\textsuperscript{149} In his particular context, belief in Christ’s humanity was not under threat, but his divinity was. Both questions of divinity and humanity were highlighted in the same homily noted above,

Where are now those Marcionites, that deny Christ to have been born of the flesh, or to have been perfect man? Where are now those Arians, which deny Christ to have been perfect God, of equal substance with the Father? If there be any such we may easily reprove them with these testimonies of God’s word, and such other.\textsuperscript{150}

This homily, written over a century before Wesley’s day, addresses both sides of the Chalcedonian issue. For Wesley, the primary focus of the Christological questions he received was about divinity. As Deschner wrote, ‘It is artificial to judge the importance of a Christology by the amount of explicit attention it receives.’\textsuperscript{151}

Therefore, acknowledging Wesley’s inherited Christology, and noting his particular context, one finds it difficult to argue that Wesley stands outside the boundaries of orthodoxy on the issue of Christ’s humanity. This is, perhaps, why Wesley scholars have tended to affirm that Wesley remained orthodox in his Christology.

For Wesley, ‘the very substance of God...dwells in Christ in the most full sense,’\textsuperscript{152} and as such was untainted by original sin. Always at the forefront of Wesley’s Christology was Christ the Redeemer, and his interpretation of the doctrine of the two natures was formed in the light of this.

Equal with God most high;
He laid his glory by:
He the’eternal God was born,
Man with men he deigned t’appear,

\textsuperscript{149} Maddox, ‘Introduction to Wesley’s Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises’ (BE), 12:16-17.
\textsuperscript{150} Cranmer, ‘A Sermon of the Nativity’, 376-7.
\textsuperscript{151} Deschner, \textit{WC}, 37.
\textsuperscript{152} Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Col. 2:9.
Object of his creature’s scorn,
Pleased a servant’s form to wear.\textsuperscript{153}

1.7.2 Christ’s Divine Nature

Though he used many other names and titles, Wesley often referred to Jesus simply as ‘God’.\textsuperscript{154} Christ shares a unity of essence with the Father, being altogether ‘supreme, eternal, independent’ and yet he is ‘distinct from God the Father,’ ‘the Word whom the Father begot or spoke from eternity.’\textsuperscript{155}

\begin{verse}
Thou art the co-eternal Son,
In substance with thy Father one,
In person differing we proclaim,
In power and majesty the same;
\end{verse}

When Christ speaks, it is with divine authority as the Logos through whom all things were made. ‘He is “the true God”, the only Cause, the sole Creator of all things.’\textsuperscript{157} Yet he wields his authority with grace and love as ‘the light of men, the fountain of wisdom, holiness, and happiness to man.’\textsuperscript{158}

As Oden has noted, Wesley took for granted the historic faith of the church in ascribing to Christ all of the divine attributes of the Father.\textsuperscript{159} Wesley confidently presupposed the language of Article I of the Thirty-nine Articles in ascribing to Christ ‘all the attributes and all the works of God. So that we need not scruple to pronounce

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{153}{Wesley, \textit{Collection} (BE), 7:315}
\footnotetext{154}{Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, John 12:41; 1 Cor. 1:2; Col. 1:17; 1 Thess. 3:11, 5:27; Rev. 1:4, 20:6.}
\footnotetext{155}{Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, John 1:1.}
\footnotetext{156}{Wesley, \textit{Collection} (BE), 7:387}
\footnotetext{157}{Wesley, \textit{Spiritual Worship} (BE), 3:91.}
\footnotetext{158}{Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Matt. 5:2; John 1:3-4.}
\footnotetext{159}{Oden, \textit{Christ and Salvation}, 40.}
\end{footnotes}
him God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God; in glory equal with the
Father, in majesty coeternal.”160

1.7.3 Christ’s Human Nature

While Christ is in every way ‘true God’ for Wesley, he is also a ‘real man, like
other men’.161 Wesley’s intended commitment to Chalcedonian Christology was clear.
He followed in the tradition of the Church of England, with regard to his
understanding of the incarnation, for the most part favouring the language of the
Thirty-nine Articles, and placing himself in the line of the Reformers. He took a very
serious view of the virgin birth as the historic event wherein the divine and human
were joined, and underscored the full union of Christ’s two natures in the ‘God-man’
Jesus Christ.

a) Virgin Birth

In A Letter to a Roman Catholic, Wesley expressed his view of the virgin birth
in the straightforward language that he favoured, saying, ‘I believe that he [Jesus] was
made man, joining the human nature with the divine in one person; being conceived
by the singular operation of the Holy Ghost, and born of the blessed Virgin Mary’.162
This statement echoes the more traditional language found in Wesley’s Sunday
Service: ‘The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one
substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin.’163
He is clear that the incarnation was not simply an historical event ending with Christ’s

160 Wesley, ‘Spiritual Worship’ (BE), 3:91.
161 Wesley, ENNT, Mark 6:6.
162 Wesley, ‘A Letter to a Roman Catholic’ (Jackson), 10:81.
163 Wesley, Sunday Service, 313.
death on the cross and leading to a disembodied, risen Lord free from the shackles of human existence, nor was it a metaphorical birth; rather it was the real and ceaseless joining of the divine and human, whereby the two natures of Jesus Christ ‘were joined together in one person, never to be divided’. 164

Somewhat surprising, since it is not affirmed in the Thirty-nine Articles, was Wesley’s belief in the Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, the mother of Jesus. 165 However, despite his peculiar insistence upon the perpetual virginity of Mary he did not allow this belief to develop into veneration, which he saw as a mistaken practice. Instead, he equated any favour which God bestowed on Mary to that given to Noah, Moses, David, and many others in Scripture, and surely ‘gives no room for any pretence of paying adoration to the virgin’. 166 Mary, though finding favour with God, was still in need of a Saviour; her hope was the same as our hope.

And she rejoiced in the hope of salvation through faith in him, which is a blessing common to all true believers, more than in being his mother after the flesh, which was an honour peculiar to her. And certainly she had the same reason to rejoice in God her Saviour as we have. Because he had regarded the low state of his handmaid—In like manner he has regarded our low estate; and vouchsafed to come and save her and us, when we were reduced to the lowest estate of sin and misery. 167

b) Personal Union

The incarnation of the Word of God is the full union of divine and human natures. ‘Christ, the Second Person, had a being, before he was born of a virgin.’ 168

Now, in Jesus Christ, ‘dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead; the most full

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164 Wesley, Sunday Service 313.
165 Wesley, ENNT, Matt. 1:25; Wesley, ‘A Letter to a Roman Catholic’ (Jackson), 10:81.
168 Wesley, Compend of Natural Philosophy, v, 215.
Godhead; not only divine powers, but divine nature…The very substance of God, if one might so speak, dwells in Christ in the most full sense.”169 There is no hint of Nestorian dualism in Wesley—all the attributes of the divine nature belong to the human nature and vice versa. Wesley affirmed this *communicatio idiomatum* explicitly in his comments on John 3:13: ‘This is a plain instance of what is usually termed the communication of properties between the divine and human nature: whereby what is proper to the divine nature is spoken concerning the human; and what is proper to the human is, as here, spoken of the divine.’170 As Thomas Oden noted, this view of the communication of properties ‘is what places Wesley so close to ancient Christian orthodoxy.’171

1.8 Conclusion

John Wesley’s upbringing and early education instilled in him a sincere desire to please God and make his election to eternal life sure. Though his attention to such pursuits may have waned after leaving home, his decision to pursue ordination in 1725 launched him on to a trajectory that would make this search for holiness his lifelong pursuit. Evidence that Wesley believed he could accomplish this under his own power is evident from his early sermons, which taught that individuals should pursue God out of duty and to ensure one’s standing before God. Wesley’s early ministry in Oxford and Georgia, while successful in many ways, left him with a sense of is own insufficiency to achieve such a goal and a growing fear of death.

During these early years Wesley’s theology lacked any clear focus upon Christ and God’s saving work in Christ. His theology of the nature and attributes of God and

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171 Oden, *Christ and Salvation*, 42.
his theology of the person of Christ were inherited from his tradition and remained mostly unchanged throughout his life. And though he was beginning to think deeply about some aspects of his inherited theology, such as the nature of faith and how one comes to knowledge of God (epistemology), he had not yet connected these to his Christology.

Wesley’s understanding of the person of Christ leaves some questions unanswered, particularly concerning his views on the two natures. Many scholars have commented on one question in particular, whether Wesley’s view of the person of Christ falls within the Chalcedonian framework, or not, since it shows a greater emphasis on Christ’s divinity. Collins suggested Wesley’s ‘apparent reluctance to stress the human nature of Christ too strongly’ stemmed from his concern for using language for God that was too familiar. Instead, Collins argued, Wesley tended to emphasize the divinity of Christ out of respect and honour. Maddox drew similar conclusions to Collins and affirmed that ‘Wesley had no intention of denying Christ’s humanity.’ However, Maddox then went on to further critique Wesley’s Christology, stating that his views ‘came right to the border of monophysitism,’ as a direct result of his ‘consuming emphasis on the deity of Christ,’ which he saw as ‘an expression of his conviction that God is the one who takes initiative in our salvation.’ Hambrick and Lodahl, giving evidence from Wesley’s treatment of the Epistle to the Hebrews and his amending of the Articles, suggested that Wesley came extremely close to a docetic Christology, if, in fact, he escaped it at all. In their critique of Maddox’s position, Hambrick and Lodahl concluded ‘Wesley should have

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interpreted Jesus Christ not only as the embodiment of God’s pardoning and empowering initiative toward us, but also as the embodiment of humanity’s ideal reception of and response to that divine initiative. Thus, we find Wesley to be notably inadequate on the crucial point of Christology.\textsuperscript{176} The position of Hambrick and Lodahl is not typical, but is indicative of the serious concerns raised by modern scholars about Wesley’s Christology. Most scholars have landed on the side, which argues Wesley’s Christology remained orthodox, even while exposing weaknesses inherent in his treatment of the doctrine of the two natures. Even Deschner, who first raised the question of balance in Wesley’s views about the person of Christ ultimately arrived at the conclusion that Wesley maintained a Chalcedonian Christology, though his accent lay elsewhere than the humanity of Christ.\textsuperscript{177} That scholars continue to revisit and critically evaluate this aspect of Wesley’s Christology indicates the unsatisfying, even unsettling, way Wesley’s treatment of the person of Christ speaks to modern theologians.

It is clear that Wesley believed himself to be in line with the orthodox Christian creeds and his Protestant heritage. He affirmed the language of the \textit{Articles}, the \textit{Homilies}, and the \textit{Book of Common Prayer}, as well as the language of Charles Wesley’s 1780 \textit{Collection} of hymns. However, Wesley’s own use of this language about Christ’s humanity was infrequent, at best, and included some curious omissions.

Wesley subscribed to the doctrine of Christ contained in the Anglican \textit{Articles}, maintaining the language and structure in his \textit{Sunday Service}, and frequently referencing the language in his \textit{Explanatory Notes on the New Testament}. Somewhat surprisingly, considering his tendency toward distain for ‘Popery’, in general, Wesley

\textsuperscript{176} Hambrick and Lodahl, ‘Responsible Grace in Christology?’, 100.

\textsuperscript{177} Deschner, \textit{Wesley’s Christology}, 28.
took a typically Catholic view of the perpetual virginity of Mary, but balanced this with caution against veneration.

One factor contributing to confusion, when discussing Wesley’s theology, is use of the term ‘Christology’. Modern theologians have sometimes used the term exclusively to mean the doctrine of the incarnation or the person of Christ, referring to the work of Christ under the broader heading of soteriology. One does not find such a distinction in Wesley’s works. For the purposes of this study, then, the term Christology will be used to indicate the doctrines of both the person and work of Christ. However, Wesley’s treatment of these two aspects of Christology is distinct, so this study will utilize the terms inherited and evangelical to differentiate between the aspects of Wesley’s Christology, which he assumed as part of his tradition and did not develop (inherited), and those which he developed and connected more directly to his soteriology after Aldersgate (evangelical).

Wesley embraced the solus Christus of the Reformation, but this appeared in his thought as a focus upon Christ’s work, specifically his atoning work on the cross—both his active and passive righteousness. His inherited Christology, which encompasses the doctrines of the person and work of Christ, ensured for Wesley the necessity of full divinity and full humanity. For example, in the Church of England’s homily ‘A Sermon of the Nativity’, Wesley would have read the following:

We are evidently taught in Scripture, that our Lord and Saviour Christ consisteth of two several natures, of his manhood, being thereby perfect man, and of his Godhead, being thereby perfect God...For the necessity of our salvation did require such a Mediator and Saviour, as under one person should be a partaker of both natures: It was requisite he should be man, it was also requisite he should be God. For as the transgression came by man so it was meet the satisfaction should be made by man.178

It is clear in this homily the Chalcedonian emphasis on both humanity and divinity was present in Wesley’s inherited Christology. Although Wesley has been accused of overemphasising the divinity of Christ in his writings, official homilies of his own Church must be considered evidence against accusations of him holding Deistic, or other heterodox views.

A related question that may be asked of Wesley’s Christology is whether or not he divorces the person and work of Christ. The answer is no, he didn’t divorce the two: he just never connected them in the way Athanasius and Cyril did, which was picked up by Barth and Torrance and others in the twentieth century.

Wesley’s understanding of the person of Christ did contain some irregularities. However, there is insufficient evidence to accuse Wesley of outright heterodoxy, even with his unequal emphasis upon Christ’s divine and human natures, which leads to the conclusion that Wesley’s Christology remained within the boundaries of the Chalcedonian definition, even while leaving the door open for further inquiry into his views.

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Chapter 2 - From Inherited to Evangelical

2.1 Introduction

We showed in the previous chapter that Wesley inherited a theological tradition, which provided the framework for his theology throughout his life. However, as his own experience with God underwent significant change he began to reinterpret and reshape some of this inherited theology and apply it to his life and ministry in new ways. This chapter will examine the development in Wesley’s thought, particularly with regards to his understanding of faith, the character and work of God, and more specifically the work of Christ, in order to provide a clearer foundation upon which to build an assessment of the relationship between his focus on Christ and his atoning work and his broader theology in the chapters to come.

The catalyst for the development in Wesley’s theology was a personal crisis of faith that led to a formative spiritual experience in 1738. This chapter will begin with a description of that experience, will then highlight the immediate affects that experience had for his understanding of faith and epistemology, and also the affect it had on his sermons. This chapter will then describe the content of Wesley’s evangelical doctrine of God, which includes his understanding of God’s character and work, and more specifically his evangelical Christology, which concerns his understanding and appropriation of Christ’s work. Wesley’s evangelical theology represents the areas of his thought that became foundational to his preaching and teaching after 1738. This chapter will describe Wesley’s mature theology, while noting changes that occurred to it after 1738.
2.2 Christ Alone?

Following his return to England from Georgia, Wesley wrestled with his own fitness to preach to others what he did not believe he had attained for himself, that is, salvation by faith alone. When he sought out Böhler’s counsel concerning this, he was encouraged to preach faith until he had it. This Wesley did with characteristic zeal for many weeks until, on 24 May 1738, Wesley made his way,

... very unwillingly to a society 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 has taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Research into this now famous event has tended to focus on that memorable phrase, ‘I felt my heart strangely warmed’, and a number of interpretive traditions have emerged. The primary goal of these traditions has been to determine what exactly Wesley experienced at that moment; was this John Wesley’s moment of conversion, was it what was later called a second blessing of entire sanctification, or was it perhaps at this moment that Wesley finally received his long desired assurance of God’s favour and his right standing? Several of these ideas may be inferred from, and supported by, the next line in his Journal. However, Wesley, himself, appears unsure of the answer to this question at various points in his life. J. Ernest Rattenbury has offered some language borrowed from J. H. Rigg that may be helpful.

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180 Wesley, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:228.
181 Wesley, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:249-50.
183 See Wesley’s note on 26 April 1738, Journals and Diaries I (BE), 18:235.
toward capturing the breadth of Wesley’s experience and avoiding the pitfalls that come with hindsight, that is, the language of ‘evangelical conversion’.  

Whatever the specific nature of Wesley’s experience that night at Aldersgate Street, and it is clear that something significant did occur, its effects were profound and enduring, fostering self-reflection throughout Wesley’s life and immediately impacting the message he preached. Consequently, this event invites further questions beyond ‘what did Wesley experience on 24 May 1738’? A more pressing question might be, ‘what happened next, as a result of Wesley’s heart-warming experience that night’? The questions which lie at the heart of this thesis are to what extent did Wesley’s Christology shape his broader theology and did this change following his ‘evangelical conversion’? More specifically, did Wesley’s theology acquire a new focus upon salvation in Christ at Aldersgate, or did he simply find a new voice for what was already present?

As is often the case with Wesley, the answer is somewhat perplexing. As an Anglican, he fully affirmed the supremacy of Christ and his work as the basis of salvation and saw that as the gift of a loving God. So, on the one hand, Wesley always held an orthodox Christology, in theory. However, his theology of Christ, not fully appropriated as an experiential reality, led him to pursue a works-based gospel of moral rectitude prior to 1738. While he may have acknowledged a high Christology intellectually, this did not significantly impact his broader theology.

As mentioned previously, all of this changed suddenly in 1738, when Wesley met Peter Böhler and began to explore further the nature of salvation by faith alone. It would be easy to make the inference that it was Böhler who first introduced Wesley to the concept, but the evidence does not clearly support this, nor is it fair to Wesley or

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the tradition of the Church of England to suggest that this significant theological point had somehow escaped them. It is true that Wesley recorded his first instance of preaching what he called ‘this new doctrine’ after Böhler’s encouragement that he do so.\textsuperscript{185} However, as we have already seen, it seems clear that Wesley already knew and affirmed that God alone saves people, by his grace, on the merits of Jesus Christ. This was affirmed in the doctrine of the Church of England, and in Wesley’s own comments to Spangenberg nearly two years prior. So, in what sense was this new doctrine for Wesley?

To this point, Wesley had focused his preaching largely on admonishing people to avoid sin and seek virtue. While he taught that righteousness was a gift from God, it was clear that the weight of his emphasis rested on the shoulders of the individual, who was expected to strive after holiness in order to make one’s election sure. Following more than a decade of rigorous self-denial and personal striving for the happiness and assurance he expected to result from such endeavours, yet failing to attain his goal, Wesley began to marvel at Peter Böhler’s accounts of those who had attained these things, not by their own efforts, but through a lively faith.

I met Peter Böhler again, who now amazed me more and more by the account he gave of the fruits of living faith—the holiness and happiness which he affirmed to attend it. The next morning I began the Greek Testament again, resolving to abide by “the law and the testimony”; I was confident that God would hereby show me whether this doctrine was of God.\textsuperscript{186}

The issue for Wesley was not that he lacked knowledge of the doctrine of salvation by faith, rather his personal experience of such faith was lacking. Therefore, the ‘new gospel’,\textsuperscript{187} that Wesley gained from Böhler and subsequently preached was one focused on the merits of Christ, rather than the merits of man. The weight of

\textsuperscript{185} Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:228.
\textsuperscript{186} Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:248.
\textsuperscript{187} Outler, \textit{Intro} (BE), 1:110.
responsibility was shifted, with eternal consequences. That Wesley saw this new doctrine as consistent with Church of England teachings is evident from a journal entry later in the year, when he wrote,

In the following week I began more narrowly to inquire what the doctrine of the Church of England is concerning the much controverted point of justification by faith. And the sum of what I found in the Homilies I extracted and printed for the use of others.\textsuperscript{188}

Following his evangelical conversion on 24 May, Wesley’s knowledge of the doctrine moved from intellectual to experiential, and the theology of his sermons moved with it. His orienting concern had shifted to soteriology, and his first volume of *Sermons on Several Occasions* would set the stage for his new focus upon salvation in Christ.

### 2.3 Wesley’s Changing Understanding of Faith

As noted in the previous chapter, in 1725 Wesley began wrestling with what he believed to be the commonly held understanding of faith: ‘chiefly as an evidence and conviction’ of particular truths.\textsuperscript{189} It should be noted that Wesley must have arrived at this ‘common’ definition of faith through some means other than his inherited theology. According to the traditions of the Church of England as conveyed through the *Articles* and *Homilies*, faith was properly to be understood as reliance upon the merits of Christ alone for salvation.\textsuperscript{190} Though it is unclear how he arrived at this ‘common’ definition, Wesley appears to have laid the blame for it at the feet of

\textsuperscript{188} Wesley, *Journals and Diaries II* (BE), 19:21.
\textsuperscript{189} Wesley, ‘On Faith’ (BE), 3:496. Even as late as 1788, Wesley believed this was the common understanding of faith in the Christian world.
\textsuperscript{190} See *Articles XI, XII, and XIII* for the Church of England position on faith and works. It is interesting that Wesley removed Article XIII from the *Sunday Service*. This is consistent with his teaching on ‘works meet for repentance’ or good works prior to justification, which he did not see as equal to good works flowing out of justification, but as nevertheless pleasing to God and a faith response to God’s prevenient grace. See Chapter 4 for further discussion on this point.
teachers such as William Law. In a pair of letters written just prior to his Aldersgate experience, Wesley accused Law of directing him toward a theology of work-righteousness, and of failing to warn Wesley of the need to pray for the faith in Christ, which alone can save.\footnote{Wesley, 14 May 1738, \textit{Letters} (BE), 25:540-2. See also Wesley, 20 May 1738, \textit{Letters} (BE), 25:546-8.} Law made it clear in his responses that he believed Wesley had missed the true nature of faith, not because persons like himself had misled him, but because Wesley had misled himself.\footnote{Wesley, 19 May 1738, \textit{Letters} (BE), 25:543-6. See also Wesley, 22 May 1738, \textit{Letters} (BE), 25:548-50.} However Wesley arrived at his early understanding of faith, it is clear that he believed the majority of his contemporaries shared the rationalistic definition of faith that he had himself held prior to 1725.

By 1730 Wesley had already begun to redefine faith as ‘distinguished from other species of assent, from knowledge particularly, by the difference of the evidence it is built on.’\footnote{Wesley, 28 Feb. 1730, \textit{Letters} (BE), 25:244.} However, it was not until 1738, when Wesley began preaching ‘salvation by faith alone’, that he first affirmed a definition of faith to which he would adhere for the remainder of his life.\footnote{Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:228. Wesley began preaching ‘salvation by faith alone’ under the direction of Peter Böhler even before he had experienced this faith for himself.} On April 22 Wesley noted in his \textit{Journal} that he met again with his mentor Peter Böhler, and ‘had now no objection to what he [Böhler] said of the nature of faith, viz., that it is (to use the words of our Church), “A sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ \textit{his} sins are forgiven, and \textit{he} reconciled to the favour of God.”’\footnote{Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:234. The editor notes that Wesley is remembering here a definition of ‘true faith’ from the \textit{Homilies}, ‘Of Salvation’, Part III. Wesley’s emphasis.} Yet, while Wesley had come to affirm this understanding of faith as intellectually satisfying and feasible just prior to his Aldersgate experience, it was not until 24 May that Wesley
experienced firsthand this ‘sure trust and confidence’. As his heart was ‘strangely warmed’ his intellectual acceptance of Böhler’s definition became experientially grounded.\textsuperscript{196} ‘I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation,’ he later wrote, ‘and an assurance was given me that he had taken away \textit{my} sins, even \textit{mine}, and saved \textit{me} from the law of sin and death.’\textsuperscript{197}

Once Wesley had gained an experiential knowledge of faith to complement his intellectual knowledge, his approach to questions of epistemology began to take on a nuanced tone, with faith at the centre. It has been said ‘holy-love’ was the axial theme of Wesley’s theology.\textsuperscript{198} It can just as easily be said following Aldersgate that faith, the experiential, the filial faith of a child of God, became the axial theme of Wesley’s epistemology.\textsuperscript{199}

\textbf{2.4 Faith in Wesley’s Epistemology}

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the role of Christ and his work in Wesley’s theology and how that changed after 1738. This section contributes to this goal indirectly by explaining the role that Wesley’s changing understanding of faith, specifically his faith in Christ alone, played in his epistemology. Prior to 1738, Wesley’s experience with God was tied intellectually to his inherited theology. After

\begin{footnotes}
\item[196] Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:250. Wesley’s journal entry from May 24 shows a palpable transition from an intellectual knowledge of faith to an experiential one; a transition which forever altered the course of Wesley’s life and ministry.
\item[197] Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:250. Wesley’s emphasis.
\item[198] Collins, \textit{The Theology of John Wesley}, 7.
\item[199] See Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:235. Wesley added a comment to his journal in 1775 which said ‘I certainly then had the faith of a servant, though not the faith of a son.’ He was here commenting on his faith just prior to the events of 24 May 1738, when he believed he made the transition from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son.
\end{footnotes}
1738 his experience with God became personal and evangelical through his faith in Christ, which enabled and enlivened his knowledge of God. In this way, Wesley’s epistemology shifted and became centred on faith in Christ as the means by which human beings can truly know God, as he is revealed in scripture, which is then informed by reason, experience, and tradition.

It has become customary for students of Wesley’s hermeneutics to follow the distinctive theological method first identified by Albert Outler as the ‘Wesleyan Quadrilateral’. Though Outler later regretted coining the term and the extremes to which it had been taken, the quadrilateral ‘was intended as a metaphor for a four-element syndrome, including the fourfold guidelines of authority in Wesley’s theological method.’ For Wesley, scripture was only source of doctrine, which is more fully understood through the lenses of reason, experience, and tradition. Though there is a dynamic interplay held between these authorities, as Outler has duly noted, ‘Holy Scripture is clearly unique.’

2.4.1 Faith and Scripture

For Wesley nothing was more important for understanding the things of God than scripture itself, which he saw as an umbrella under which these interpretive aids

functioned and by which they are measured.\textsuperscript{203} This rule of scriptural oversight also included a recursive element for Wesley, who held that any given passage of scripture was best interpreted and understood in light of the whole canon, ‘seeing scripture interprets scripture; one part fixing the sense of another’.\textsuperscript{204} As Scott J. Jones has stated, this rule ‘is a direct result of the Protestant theological principle of \textit{sola scriptura}…[if] there is no outside authority to render a definitive interpretation, then the Scripture must be self-interpreting.’\textsuperscript{205} For Wesley, all other earthly authorities fall under the corrective and validating authority of Scripture, even though they may at times be called upon as authoritative in their own right. In this sense he truly was a man of one book.

While Wesley was convinced that scripture is the only source for doctrine, it would be inaccurate to say that Wesley viewed scripture as sufficient for discerning ‘all the things of God’ without any qualification.\textsuperscript{206} When he held forth the Protestant banner of \textit{sola scriptura}, Wesley was not only explicitly proclaiming that written scripture is the full witness of God to humanity, he was also quietly affirming the expectation that this witness is only rightly understood and appropriated in the light of faith. Without faith, one cannot rightly perceive the truths revealed in scripture, which are of a spiritual nature. Wesley’s concern is not primarily that people assent to the \textit{facts} of the Bible, but that they become transformed through the revelation of its transcendent \textit{truths}. Without faith, these truths remain hidden in scripture. ‘[I]ndeed

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\textsuperscript{203} See Jones, \textit{John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture} for an extensive analysis of Wesley’s hermeneutics in which he describes Wesley’s appeal to scripture, reason, experience, and two branches of tradition: primitive Christianity and the Church of England.

\textsuperscript{204} Wesley, \textit{An Address to the Clergy} (Jackson), 10:482.

\textsuperscript{205} Jones, \textit{Conception and Use of Scripture}, 121-2.

\textsuperscript{206} Wesley, \textit{An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion}, I (BE), 11:45ff. See also his sermons ‘On Faith’ (BE), 3:491 and ‘On The Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:28.
they reveal nothing, they are a mere “dead letter”, if they are “not mixed with faith in those that hear them’. While Wesley would not likely dissuade a non-believer from reading the scriptures and appealing to their truths, remembering that Peter Böhler once counselled him to ‘Preach faith until you have it, and then because you have it you will preach faith’, the implication of his argument is that those who have not received faith are not able to fully discern or appropriate the mysteries of God that scripture reveals.

2.4.2 Faith and Reason

Wesley’s view of reason matured over time as he began to rethink the definition of faith, but he never let go of the understanding that Christianity is a rational religion. In his 1781 sermon *The Case of Reason Impartially Considered*, Wesley was quick to sing the praises of reason: ‘No thinking man can doubt but reason is of considerable service in all things relating to the present world.’ More specifically, he argued that reason is necessary for understanding scripture saying, ‘How is it possible without it [reason] to understand the essential truths contained therein [the oracles of God]?’ And later, in his 1784 sermon *The Imperfection of Human Knowledge*, Wesley described how reason allowed one to discover the things of God from creation. ‘Hence then, from his works . . . we are to learn the knowledge of God.’

210 Wesley, ‘The Imperfection of Human Knowledge’ (BE), 2:571.
However much he praised the usefulness, and even necessity, of reason, Wesley was also quick to point out that reason alone is not sufficient. In his 1785 sermon The New Creation, Wesley conceded, ‘It must be allowed that after all the researches we can make, still our knowledge of the great truth which is delivered to us in these words [of scripture] is exceedingly short and imperfect . . . beyond the reach of our natural faculties.’\(^{211}\) He went further in The Case of Reason Impartially Considered, and spelled out clearly what reason cannot do.

First, reason cannot produce faith . . . although [faith] is always consistent with reason . . . Try whether your reason will give you a clear, satisfactory evidence of the invisible word. Alas, you cannot, with all your understanding.\(^{212}\)

Wesley then concluded that reason cannot produce hope, and without hope it cannot produce the love of God. Without the love of God, reason cannot produce a love of neighbour, and without a love of neighbour there can be no virtue. The result for Wesley, then is that reason alone, ‘As it cannot give either faith, hope, love, or virtue, so it cannot give happiness for any intelligent creature.’\(^{213}\) Something greater is needed. To reason, one must add faith.\(^{214}\)

Richard Brantley described this connection between faith and reason, saying that faith is the means by which the senses come alive to the extent that unseen things

\(^{212}\) Wesley, ‘The Case of Reason Impartially Considered’ (BE), 2:593-98.
\(^{213}\) Wesley, ‘The Case of Reason Impartially Considered’ (BE), 2:599.
\(^{214}\) Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, Discourse I’ (BE), 1:271. Wesley argued here that reason and understanding have been given by God and are not ‘extinguished’ by ‘religion’ (i.e. faith), rather they are perfected by it.
may now be perceived. For Wesley, this ‘spiritual sensation’ is requisite to discerning the things of God and cannot be appropriated through any human ability.

Can you give yourself this faith? Is it now in your power to see, or hear, or taste, or feel God? Have you already, or can you raise in yourself, any perception of God or of an invisible world? . . . It is the free gift of God . . .

Far from what ‘spiritual sensation’ might imply on the surface, Wesley viewed faith as something much more tangible than mere feeling. As Brantley has noted, ‘religious feeling [according to Wesley’s definition] is so far from complete mindlessness as . . . to constitute matter for the mind to work upon.’ Proceeding with Wesley’s language that faith ‘is the feeling of the soul, whereby a believer perceives…both the existence and the presence of [God]’ Brantley concludes that ‘Wesley’s definition is more than exclusively sensationalistic in its language . . . it also implies a “rational empiricism”.

Wesley first began to communicate the cooperative nature of faith and reason almost immediately following his Aldersgate experience. In his sermon \textit{Salvation by Faith}, which was preached less than three weeks after Aldersgate, Wesley defined faith as:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[216] Wesley, \textit{An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, I (BE)}, 11:46.
\item[217] Wesley, \textit{Appeal (BE)}, 11:48.
\item[219] Wesley, \textit{An Earnest Appeal, I (BE)}, 11:47. Emphasis mine.
\item[220] Brantley, \textit{Locke, Wesley, and the Method of English Romanticism}, 52. Rex Matthews, in his \textit{Religion and Reason Joined}, 308-12; picks up this thread and suggests that Wesley’s view of faith as ‘spiritual experience’ works together with reason to produce a ‘transcendental empiricism’, which provided a bridge between 18th century empiricism and spiritual experiences that cannot be confirmed from sensory data.
\end{footnotes}
[N]ot barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart . . . Christian faith is, then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ . . . It is a sure trust and confidence . . .”

However, it was not until many years after Aldersgate that he fully articulated the consequences of a life lived without the benefit of the spiritual senses granted by faith. In his 1782 sermon *The General Deliverance* Wesley describes the picture of humanity when reason is present, but faith is absent. ‘If this is what distinguishes man from beasts, that they are creatures capable of God . . . whoever does not know, or love, or enjoy God,’ all three of which Wesley explicitly stated reason cannot produce, ‘. . .[this person]does in effect disclaim the nature of man, and degrade himself into a beast. They may have a share of reason, but they have not the mark [faith] which totally separates man from brute creation.’ Wesley saw reason as a useful and necessary tool, but one that is flawed and insufficient until it has been sharpened by faith.

2.4.3 Faith and Experience

Experience is sometimes viewed as purely subjective. This is perhaps one reason, among several, that some of Wesley’s detractors rejected the experience of Methodists in his societies as mere ‘enthusiasm’, particularly those experiences

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221 Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:120-21.
223 A. Skevington Wood in his *Revelation and Reason: Wesleyan Responses to Eighteenth-Century Rationalism* (Nuneaton: Wesley Fellowship, 1992) noted that Wesley recognized that reason can take one in the direction of faith, which is rational in its nature, but that he could not ‘see reason as establishing the principles of a natural theology which could be dovetailed into the truths of revelation.’ The gap between the two (natural theology and true revelation) is not one that reason can bridge alone.
related to the assurance of pardon and God’s favour. Yet John Wesley had a way of taking this perceived weakness and turning it into strength. That which some saw as contrary to reason, Wesley offered as the only rational basis for human perception of the invisible world. As Noble has shown, for Wesley experience is not limited to the subjective experience of the individual; rather it also entails the objective reality of God that is experienced. Experience is rational, because it has as its object a most rational God.

Consistent with his views on reason Wesley saw natural revelation as a gift given by God to all human persons. Creation reveals the handiwork of God, which is observed by sensory perception and understood with the aid of reason. According to Wesley, these observations provide the basis for what can be known of God without his direct inspiration. They are the starting point for the intellectual knowledge of God.

The little we do know of God (except what we receive by the inspiration of the Holy One) we do not gather from an inward impression, but gradually acquire from without. ‘The invisible things of God’, if they are known at all, ‘are known from the things that are made;’ not from what God hath written in our hearts, but from what he hath written in all his works. Hence then, from his works, particularly his works of creation, we are to learn the knowledge of God.

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224 John Wesley, *A Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists, etc.*, (BE) 11: 369-70. In this open letter Wesley responded to charges of ‘enthusiasm’ from Dr. George Lavington, Bishop of Exeter. One charge laid on Wesley was that Methodists claimed to have assurance of salvation immediately following conversion. Wesley objected to this charge, and repeated his objections to a sermon preached on Aug. 13, 1738 by the Revd. Arthur Bedford, chaplain to the Prince of Wales where a similar claim was made, stating that the assurance received by Methodists was an assurance of pardon, not eternal salvation. This charge likely stems from Bishop Lavington’s belief that such experiences are inconsistent with reason: ‘the true spirit and very essence of enthusiasm, . . . which sets men above carnal reasoning, and all conviction of plain scripture.’


226 Wesley, ‘The Imperfection of Human Knowledge’ (BE), 2:571.
Through examination of natural phenomena one is able to gain a limited knowledge of God. His works in creation point the way toward the Creator. They generate awe and wonder and force questions that are beyond the limits of human understanding, thus appealing to a higher power at work. Yet, while natural revelation is capable to produce a general knowledge of God, it fails to produce a personal or filial knowledge of God. Citing evidence from Wesley’s 1767 sermon *The Witness of the Spirit II* and his *Letter to Mr. Smith*, William J. Abraham has argued:

‘[A]t one level Wesley puts enormous store by the evidence of perception of the divine. For him the inner witness of the Holy Spirit was extremely important. Thus for Wesley, filial knowledge of God was not just one more piece of evidence among others; it had a privileged place in his epistemology.’

That this is an accurate characterization of Wesley can be seen from his revisiting the subject on multiple occasions. However, his discourse concerning the method by which one gains this filial knowledge was anything but singular. He used varying types of language and analogy to describe inward experience, though all such experience first requires the operation of faith. Inward experience occurs when God speaks directly to the inward heart through the witness of the Holy Spirit. This direct witness was called ‘Perceptible Inspiration’ by the anonymous ‘Mr. Smith’ in a series

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227 William J. Abraham, *Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 33, stated that ‘Wesley has personally next to no confidence in natural theology . . .’ for perception of the Divine. This may be true when taken to the fullest extent. Wesley did not trust in natural theology alone for gaining the knowledge of God, but he did consider the natural world to be a signpost pointing toward God, as indicated by the previous quote. His unwillingness to reject outright the role of reason or natural theology demonstrates his ‘both-and’ approach to epistemology; reason and natural theology may reveal things about God, but one also needs faith, which is consistent with both, in order to ‘know’ God in the fullest sense.

228 Abraham, *Aldersgate and Athens*, 33.

of letters that he wrote to Wesley from 1745 to 1748. Furthermore, this witness of the Spirit enlivens the ‘spiritual senses’ and enables the individual to perceive God in new ways.

Wesley penned two sermons on the witness of the Spirit more than twenty years apart. Each used Romans 8:16 as the text and sought to demonstrate the intimate nature of communication by the Spirit to believers. Wesley was here primarily referring to the witness of the Spirit, which confirms to a believer that he or she has been reconciled to God, that he has pardoned one’s sin. Wesley acknowledges that it is difficult to describe experiences of this sort, and finally settles on the following description.

[T]he testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly ‘witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God’; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.

This description is not a purely academic one for Wesley, but echoed his own experience of receiving the Spirit’s witness at Aldersgate. In describing that evening’s events, Wesley recalled that ‘an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me, from the law of sin and death.’

Wesley was conscious of the need for some form of rational evidence to corroborate a believer’s experience of the Spirit’s witness, lest such claims be merely

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232 ‘The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.’ Authorized Version.
234 Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:250. Emphasis is Wesley’s.
subjective in nature. His solution to the subjectivity of an inward impression was to point to evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in a person’s life, since only one who has been given the Spirit can exhibit the fruit. To guard from works-righteousness, he also emphasized that the Spirit’s witness must precede any such corroborating evidence.

‘[T]his “testimony of the Spirit of God” must needs in the very nature of things, be antecedent to the “testimony of our own spirit” . . . we must be holy of heart and holy in life before we can be conscious that we are so, before we can have “the testimony of our spirit” that we are inwardly and outwardly holy . . . Now we cannot love God till we know he loves us . . . And we cannot know his pardoning love to us till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit.’

Though, when positing the hypothetical question of how one is to know that he or she is really obeying and loving God, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, Wesley simply answered, ‘How does it appear to you that you are alive? And that you are now in ease and not in pain? Are you not immediately conscious of it? By the same immediate consciousness you will know that your soul is alive to God.’

An objection to this notion of a direct witness of the Spirit arose in a series of anonymous letters written to Wesley and signed with the name ‘Mr. Smith’. In these letters Mr. Smith argued that faith ‘should not be defined in terms of God’s perceptible influence upon the soul’, but rather ‘the imperceptible influence of God working with the faculty of reason in apprehending religious truths and in regulating moral life’. His basic argument supported the idea that faith grows out of a rational weighing of the evidence, which leads to moral behaviour, and finally to salvation.

Any supposed ‘perceptible’ influences of God are, therefore, contrary to reason and are must be the interpretation of Quakers and enthusiasts.\textsuperscript{239}

Wesley answered Mr. Smith’s charges in his typical integrative fashion. While he was in complete agreement that faith (in part) is an assent to rational truth, he also maintained that God works perceptibly to influence the hearts of believers, and that this is the privilege of every child of God.\textsuperscript{240} However, he by no means limited his understanding of the experiential knowledge of God to this direct witness. One of Wesley’s favourite analogies for describing the operations of faith drew upon a comparison with the physical senses. In his sermon \textit{On the Discoveries of Faith} he stated, ‘All the knowledge which we naturally have is originally derived from our senses.’\textsuperscript{241} He went on to describe the various physical senses, noting their differences, both in kind and in the extent to which they bring knowledge of one’s self and one’s surroundings.

It is here that his discourse took a sharp turn, “But still none of our senses – no, not the sight itself – can reach beyond the bounds of this visible world . . . They furnish us with no information at all concerning the \textit{invisible world}.’\textsuperscript{242} The empiricists of eighteenth-century England would see this as no great problem, since for them all essential knowledge was discernible from the evidence of creation, evaluated by pure reason. To Wesley, however, this posed a great problem which he stated using the rationalists own logic, ‘those who want any sense cannot have the least knowledge or idea of the objects of that sense.’\textsuperscript{243} Spiritual things, then, cannot be observed without a spiritual sense. Therefore, true knowledge of the things of God

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\item \textsuperscript{239} Shimizu, \textit{Epistemology}, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{240} Mitsuo Shimizu, ‘Epistemology’, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Wesley, ‘On the Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:29
\item \textsuperscript{242} Wesley, ‘On the Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:30.
\item \textsuperscript{243} Wesley, ‘On the Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:29.
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\end{footnotesize}
is incomplete if that knowledge is based on the ordinary senses. ‘But the wise and gracious Governor of the worlds, both visible and invisible’, Wesley goes on to say, ‘has prepared a remedy for this defect . . . He hath appointed faith to supply the defect of sense.’

According to Wesley, those who have not yet received this gift of spiritual sense live in a sort of sensory-deprived state. While many things are discernible through the ordinary senses, those senses are feeble by comparison with the spiritual senses supplied by faith.

What a relief it is to the defects of our senses, and consequently of our understanding, which can give us no information of anything but what is first presented by the senses. But hereby a new set of senses (so to speak) is opened in our souls, and by this means,

The things unknown to feeble sense,
Unseen by reason’s glimmering ray,
With strong, commanding evidence
Their heav’nly origin display.

Faith lends its realizing light:
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
Th’ Invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye.

2.4.4 Faith, Primitive Christianity, and the Church of England

A quick note is needed concerning the role of the Church and her traditions in Wesley’s epistemology. As Jones noted, “‘tradition’ had a mostly negative connotation for Wesley and could never be invested with authority in religious matters.” It is a term, which for Wesley and his contemporaries was loaded with

244 Wesley, ‘On the Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:30.
245 Wesley, ‘On Faith’ (BE), 4:200. The hymn quoted here by Wesley was taken from his brother Charles’ ‘The Life of Faith’ in Hymns and Sacred Poems.
246 Jones, John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture, 63.
claims to unbroken authority passed down through the generations by the Catholic Church. Wesley saw the greater part of Christian history since the first century, particularly after Constantine, as a gradual decay of Christianity, with only occasional periods of time when the church was particularly faithful to the teaching of the Apostles. When speaking positively about the brief glimmers of purity he sees only occasionally throughout the greater Christian tradition, he prefers instead to use the term ‘antiquity’.247 It would be inaccurate, then, to speak of tradition, in the general sense, as authoritative for Wesley. Rather, it was brief moments of antiquity, particularly in the first century of the Church, which held a position of authority for him, at least insofar as these moments in time agree with Scripture.

In addition to antiquity, Wesley viewed the Church of England as the best example of ‘primitive Christianity’ in existence during his lifetime. As a faithful witness, it held a special place as authoritative for Wesley’s doctrines and practice in the sense that he appealed to the teachings of the Church of England and the ‘primitive Christianity’ when making explicit arguments in support of what he considered scriptural doctrines, such as Christian Perfection. For Wesley, it was the witness of the faithful church that was authoritative and useful for discerning the things of God.

2.4.5 Faith as a Normative Influence

With the theme of faith running through Wesley’s epistemology, we find the bridge by which the interpretive aids to which he appealed fluidly co-mingle and cooperate as they work together to bring about knowledge of the things of God.

247 Jones, Conception and Use of Scripture, 63.
Scripture remained for Wesley the only source of doctrine and the primary means of God’s self-revelation to humanity. Scripture may be interpreted more faithfully through reason, now fully accessible through faith, experience which is no longer confined to the physical senses, but recognizes the direct witness of the Spirit and perceptions of the spiritual senses, and Christian tradition, particularly the tradition of the primitive church and the Church of England as faithful expressions of the Christian witness. Faith is the normative factor, which allows human beings to discern doctrine as it is revealed in scripture and interpret it through the lenses of reason, experience, and tradition.

With all of this emphasis on faith, one might be tempted to elevate its place to a position of primary authority in Wesley’s epistemology. However, we would be remiss to divorce faith from its interplay with these other means of God’s self-revelation. While Wesley’s definition of faith changed over time, his view of the origin and function of faith remained consistent. God gives faith as a free gift of grace. It does not replace scripture as the only authoritative source of doctrine, nor does it remove the need for the interpretive aids of reason, tradition, or experience for discerning the things of God. Rather, it co-operates with both scripture and these interpretive aids to enliven the spiritual senses that enhance one’s natural faculties. Faith in Christ alone is sufficient for salvation. And this faith working in conjunction with scripture and these interpretive aids is necessary for the full knowledge of God.

With this understanding of Wesley’s theological method, one can see how his newly acquired focus upon salvation in Christ alone impacted even his commitment to *sola scriptura*. 
2.5 Wesley’s Post-Aldersgate Sermons

Though still in its infancy and headed for further development, Wesley’s changing understanding of faith in Christ alone for salvation became evident almost immediately following Aldersgate. Noble has suggested that within the many and varied approaches to studying Wesley’s theology that have arisen over the years there is a method set forth by Wesley himself, and which holds truer to his thought. He recommends that the student of Wesley examine his theology ‘according to the way he ordered his sermons in the Sermons on Several Occasions.’ By approaching Wesley’s theology from this perspective one is immediately confronted with an ordering of material that is altogether different from the doctrinal statements of the Church of England or the customary order in works of Systematic Theology.

Volume one of SOSO was first published in 1746 and provides helpful insight into Wesley’s post-1738 perspective. If the Sermons on Several Occasions serve as the primary source for Wesley’s theology, it is sensible, then, to compare these with the sermons Wesley wrote prior to 1738, which we discussed in the previous chapter, as a means to determine what, if any, theological changes occurred after that time. That the sermons in SOSO are organized in theological, rather than chronological, order does not detract from this comparison, since many of the first sermons included in SOSO were also written in the years immediately following Aldersgate.

Utilizing Noble’s methodology we will now consider elements of the first four introductory sermons published in SOSO, as representative of Wesley’s theological message and orienting concern. The weight of these four sermons does not rest solely on their placement at the beginning of the volume, though Wesley made this choice after much deliberation with his close friends. The importance of these sermons can

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also be judged from the number of editions that were released during Wesley’s lifetime. While they cannot exhaustively demonstrate Wesley’s theology, these four sermons are sufficient for noting some of the changes already beginning to take place in Wesley’s thinking after 1738. One further disclaimer is warranted. Of the four introductory sermons in *SOSO*, only three were originally written by John Wesley. The fourth, ‘Awake, Thou That Sleepest’, originated from the pen of his brother Charles and was first preached by John in 1742. Its inclusion in *SOSO* and its position at the forefront of the volume testify to John’s approval of their content and the ideas they present.

Sermon one, ‘Salvation by Faith’, was a clear announcement of Wesley’s new orienting concern, or axial theme. This sermon, which underwent thirty-one editions in Wesley’s lifetime, announced the soteriological focus of Wesley’s theology. Relying on some of the elements from his early sermons, Wesley identified the problem of sin and the havoc it wreaks on the image of God in humanity. Wesley declared about man that, ‘Only corrupt fruit grows on a corrupt tree. And his heart is altogether corrupt and abominable . . . having nothing, neither righteousness nor works, to plead, his “mouth is utterly stopped before God”’. This message was old hat for Wesley, but where he would have previously announced the remedy to be a striving after virtue and the imitation of God, the new Wesley declared, ‘If then sinful man find favour with God, it is “grace upon grace” . . . “by grace”, then, “are ye saved through faith”’. With these Words Wesley announced the reversal of his gospel of moral rectitude, and ushered in the gospel of faith, where ‘Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation’.

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249 Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:118.
250 Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:118.
251 Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:118.
Upon these grounds, Wesley then proceeded to explain the nature of saving faith first, and foremost, as a living faith in Christ.

What faith is it then through which we are saved? It may be answered: first, in general, it is a faith in Christ—Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper object of it. Herein therefore it is sufficiently, absolutely, distinguished from the faith either of ancient or modern heathens. And from the faith of a devil it is fully distinguished by this—it is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart.\(^\text{252}\)

One can readily see Wesley taking aim at the establishment and its heightened sense of rationalism with this statement, particularly attacking the commonly accepted definition of faith, to which he earlier subscribed.

Wesley’s second point aimed at reversing his previous tendency to point toward the escape from this life into the next by declaring that salvation is wrought, not in the next life, but in this one. ‘It is something attainable, yea, actually attained on earth, by those who are partakers of this faith.’\(^\text{253}\) Here Wesley was reflecting what he had learned first from Peter Böhler about Christians experiencing happiness and freedom in this life. He recognized that final salvation was still to come after death, but that present salvation from sin and a life of holiness could, and indeed should, begin now.

Wesley’s final point of the sermon, then, was to answer the cries of antinomianism that he expected as a reaction to his declaration that salvation is by faith, not by works. Wesley turned the table on this anticipated charge by declaring it is not those who preach salvation by faith who make void the law of God, but rather those who do not preach it who do so.

We answer, first, all who preach not faith do manifestly make void the law, either directly and grossly, by limitations and comments that eat out all the

\(^{252}\) Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:120.
\(^{253}\) Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:121.
spirit of the text; or indirectly, by not pointing out the only means whereby it is possible to perform it. Whereas, secondly, “We establish the law”, both by showing its full extent and spiritual meaning, and by calling all to that living way whereby “the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in them.”

Wesley followed this up by re-emphasizing that it is only those who ‘trust in the blood of Christ alone’ who can do good works and ‘manifest all holy and heavenly tempers, even the same “mind that was in Jesus Christ”’.  

With sermon two, ‘The Almost Christian’, Wesley picked up where he left off in the previous sermon by differentiating between those who have the faith which leads to salvation and those who do not, but are yet close to it. He began by describing lesser forms of faith. First is the faith of a heathen, who recognizes the justice of God and treats others justly, and who has an expectation that others will do likewise. The heathen shows common decency, but that is all. Secondly is the faith of a servant, who truly desires to do the will of God and who has the ‘form of Godliness’, but not the power. Wesley went on to say that this person, who is ‘almost a Christian’ may even use the means of grace, attend regularly to worship, and strives to please God in all things. Surprisingly, Wesley took a moment here to confess that this was his own state for many years, and acknowledges that, at that time, he was only ‘almost a Christian’.

Contrasted with the ‘almost Christian’ was the ‘altogether Christian’. This is the one who possesses the love of God, and who ‘rejoiceth in God his Saviour’. The altogether Christian is marked by love for God, and also by love for one’s

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254 Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:125.
255 Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:125.
neighbour. This person exhibits the fruit of the Spirit, such as patience and long-suffering, is not easily provoked, and does not think evil thoughts or have evil desires.

And finally, the altogether Christian is the one who has as faith as the ground of all these things, and this is a particularized faith, not merely a general one. Such a person has to ‘not only . . . believe that Holy Scripture and the articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ’. Wesley’s conclusion then, was this: that an ‘altogether Christian’ is the one ‘whosoever has this faith, thus “working by love”’.263

The third sermon in SOSO, written by Charles Wesley, is ‘Awake Thou That Sleepest’. It was written as an attack against the academy, and those who, despite a multitude of warnings were perceived as remaining, figuratively, ‘dead asleep’. In this sermon, Charles charges the sleeper with having no spiritual senses, being ‘utterly ignorant of spiritual things’, and lacking the ‘witness of God’ that one is a child of God. The remainder of the sermon is a call to the sleeper to awaken from spiritual death and seek life. Charles first laid out a barrage of questions by which one can judge one’s own state of salvation.

Dost thou ‘know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent”? Hath he taught thee that ‘by grace we are saved through faith? And that not of ourselves: it is the free gift of God; not of works, lest any should boast”? Hast thou received the faithful saying as the whole foundation of thy hope, that ‘Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners”?

The list went on to build to a climax where he declared, ‘O that in all these questions ye may hear the voice that wakes the dead, and feel the hammer of the Word which

264 Wesley, ‘Awake Thou That Sleepest’ (BE), 1:146.
265 Wesley, ‘Awake Thou That Sleepest’ (BE), 1:152.
“breaketh the rock in pieces”’. 267 Charles ended the sermon with a final call to those who were asleep to awaken while there was yet time and seek salvation from the judgment of God.

The fourth and final sermon for consideration here is ‘Scriptural Christianity’. With this sermon, John Wesley concluded the four-fold summary of his ‘new doctrine’. He began in sermon one by defining salvation by faith, demonstrated that there are many who call themselves Christian who have not yet exhibited such a faith in sermon two, through Charles’ words he called to account those who are spiritually dead and encouraged them to awaken to faith in Christ in sermon three, and here, finally, in sermon four Wesley painted a picture of scriptural Christianity, as it has been witnessed and transmitted throughout the ages by those who were awakened to faith in Jesus Christ. In essence, this sermon stands as Wesley’s call to a Spirit-filled life. There is not room here to do justice to this sermon by giving a full account of the picture Wesley painted of life lived in the Spirit. For now, we must let it suffice to say that Wesley viewed spirit-filled Christians as those who love God, exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, participate in the spread of scriptural Christianity, and who are ‘dead to the world’ and ‘servants of all’. 268 As with his third sermon, Wesley concluded this one with a list of questions to be answered by those who would seek to live according to the pattern he laid out. They will sound familiar as the foundational questions of Wesley’s new doctrine of salvation by faith: ‘Do we know Jesus Christ? Hath God “revealed his Son in us”? And hath he “made us able ministers of the new covenant”? and so on. 269

267 Wesley, ‘Awake Thou That Sleepest’ (BE), 1:152.
268 Wesley, ‘Scriptural Christianity’ (BE), 1:159-80.
269 Wesley, ‘Awake Thou That Sleepest’ (BE), 1:177.
This evaluation of the first four sermons in *SOSO* demonstrates that Wesley’s orienting concern shifted after Aldersgate. Prior to 1738 he had focused on moralistic preaching. Now, following his heart-warming experience, his sermons, and those he put forward of his brother Charles, demonstrated a turn toward a focus upon the saving work of God in Christ. This shift of focus also began to show itself in Wesley’s evangelical theology.

### 2.6 Wesley’s Evangelical Doctrine of God

The previous chapter outlined Wesley’s inherited doctrine of God, which included his Triune nature and attributes. Wesley’s thoughts on these topics did not materially change throughout his life. However, his understanding of God’s character and work did undergo some revision as his inherited theology became evangelical.

#### 2.6.1 The Character of God

Of paramount importance to Wesley was his understanding that God is pre-eminently holy and loving. ‘Holiness is another of the attributes of the almighty, all-wise God. He is infinitely distant from every touch of evil. He “is light, and in him is no darkness at all”.’\(^{270}\) Yet his holiness does not stand alone, for though ‘He is a God of unblemished justice and truth,’ Wesley was quick to point out that, ‘above all is his mercy’.\(^{271}\) For Wesley, God’s reigning attribute is love.

God is often styled holy, righteous, wise; but not holiness, righteousness, or wisdom in the abstract, as he is said to be love: intimating that this is . . . His reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections.\(^{272}\)


\(^{271}\) Wesley, ‘The Unity of the Divine Being,’ (BE), 4:62

\(^{272}\) Wesley, *ENN*, 1 John 4:8.
The relationship of holiness and love was, for Wesley, key to his understanding of the law and grace, of salvation and sanctification. Wesley held these two seeming opposites in tension and demonstrated that the holiness of God does not exist apart from his love, nor does his love operate in the absence of holiness. Both holiness and love, according to Wesley, stem from the very nature of God. Charles R. Wilson captures this concept well:

The nature of God is the ground for the original conjoining of love and law, unless they are considered as being one derived from the other or from some other source. Wesley thought of them as having their origin in the nature of God and as being an expression of that nature. They are his acts and works; therefore, their inner unity lies in God. 273

It is because holiness and love flow from the very nature of God in beautiful tension that Wesley was able to view the law as an expression both of God’s holiness and his grace. The law, which is a reflection of God’s holiness condemns humanity for sin, but God’s grace is shown in this; that by the indwelling presence of his Spirit we are able to keep the law of God. This is not done by human effort, but purely by the grace of God bestowed upon humanity.

It is at this point where we begin to see a shift in Wesley’s doctrine of God following his Aldersgate experience. Wesley had taught since his earliest days at Oxford that holiness of heart and life are the command of God. However, leading up to 1738, Wesley viewed this striving for holiness as a human effort, prerequisite to finding the favour of God: ‘By my continual endeavour to keep his whole law . . . I was persuaded that I should be accepted of him.’ 274 This view of salvation by works of the law was transformed at Aldersgate, when Wesley was able to declare with

274 Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:244-45.
confidence ‘I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation.’

The doctrine of God that he had preached, with its tension between love and holiness, did not change. Wesley remained convinced that it is God’s desire that people become holy as that holiness is expressed in God’s law. What changed was Wesley’s understanding that holiness does not precede justification; rather, it follows out of the justified human heart in response to God’s grace.

2.6.2 The Work of God

Wesley’s view of God’s work can be summarized by three overarching themes: (1) the work of God in creation, (2) the work of Christ in Justification and Atonement, and (3) the work of the Spirit in assurance and regeneration. The work of God in creation is usually viewed as a two-fold work of creating and sustaining.

According to Wesley, ‘God reveals himself under a two-fold character; as a Creator, and as a Governor. These are no way inconsistent with each other; but they are totally different.’ The difference to which Wesley alluded is that ‘As a Creator, he has acted, in all things, according to his own sovereign will. Justice has not, cannot have, any place here.’ On the contrary, ‘Whenever . . . God acts as a Governor . . . he no longer acts as mere Sovereign, by his own will and pleasure; but as an impartial Judge, guided in all things by invariable justice.’ But there is another aspect to God’s work as Governor, that is, that he sustains all creation in himself. ‘And as this all-wise, all-gracious being created all things, so he sustains all things. He is the preserver as well as the creator of everything that exists.’

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276 Wesley, ‘Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty’ (Jackson), 10:361.
277 Wesley, ‘Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty’ (Jackson), 361.
278 Wesley, ‘Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty’ (Jackson), 362.
279 Wesley, ‘On Divine Providence,’ (BE), 2:538
The work of Christ in justification and the atonement form the very core of Wesley’s theology after 1738. Wesley preached on the work of Christ as necessary for holiness while still at Oxford, though he did not proclaim the message of ‘Salvation by Faith’ until he was encouraged to do so by Peter Böhler, and even then did so with trepidation until his heart was warmed on 24 May. After that time, his focus was always first on the work of Christ as a free gift of grace. We will explore the content of Wesley’s theology later in this chapter.

The work of the Spirit in assurance and regeneration held a special place for Wesley. This topic, among the others listed here, is unique to the post-1738 Wesley. He preached about the Spirit before then, but never in such a way as to describe the Spirit’s work in initial and full sanctification. Nor did he have an understanding of the Spirit’s role in assurance prior to 1738. We will explore Wesley’s post-1738 understanding of the work of the Spirit and how he connected this to his Christology in later chapters in this study.

A final significant change to Wesley’s understanding of God’s work was the order of importance he ascribed to its various aspects. The Thirty-nine Articles begin with the Triune nature of God. Wesley echoed this systematic approach to the doctrine of God with his Twenty-four Articles, maintaining the wording of Article I verbatim. However, when we turn to Wesley’s sermons, which stand as his primary method of teaching, the first sermon listed is ‘Salvation by Faith,’ which focuses instead on the work of Christ. Wesley arranged the rest of the sermons roughly in this order: sermons on the work of Christ, the fruits and witness of the Spirit, holiness in the lives of believers, the law, and Christian perfection. Wesley progressed from the work of Christ to the work of the Spirit and finally to the Law of God, an order that indicates his newfound focus upon the work of Christ as an orienting concern.
2.7 Wesley’s Evangelical Christology

The most significant change to Wesley’s evangelical theology, and the change that is most important for this study, centred on the work of Christ. After his return to London from Georgia, Wesley met with Peter Böhler, who began to counsel him that faith in the merits of Christ *alone* could grant him that which he most desperately sought, and encouraged Wesley to preach this faith until he had it himself. After his evangelical conversion on 24 May 1738, Wesley’s understanding of God’s grace shifted, and he became acutely aware *for himself* that Christ alone saves. This shift from an anthropocentric view of salvation to a focus upon salvation in Christ alone had immediate effects for his understanding of faith, which he began to develop significantly over the subsequent years. The most pronounced effect of this theological shift was on Wesley’s preaching, which very quickly turned to ‘salvation by faith’, as evidenced by his first volume of *Sermons on Several Occasions*. In a very real sense then, what Wesley gained at Aldersgate was, at the very least, a recovery of the Reformation principle of *solus Christus*. With this shift, his inherited Christology began to take on a new shape within his broader theology, and adopted a greater focus upon salvation in Christ alone.

2.8 The Work of Christ

Wesley’s theological shift towards an emphasis on salvation in Christ alone is most apparent in his evangelical Christology, which focused on the work of Christ. It is important to note here that Wesley’s pre-1738 preaching did not indicate a significant consideration of the work of Christ, though some understanding must have been tacitly present in his inherited theology, and only tangentially acknowledged his inherited theology of the person of Christ. This section will examine Wesley’s mature
view of the central role of Christ and indicate transitions that occurred after 1738, where applicable.

One common approach to the task of systematic theology begins with the attributes and nature of God, then moves systematically toward his work in creation, his redemptive work through Christ within the created order, and the Holy Spirit’s ongoing work in the life of the church. We will take a similar approach in this short summary of Wesley’s Christology, because this method offers a recognizable pattern. It is important to note, however, that this was not necessarily the way in which Wesley, himself, thought, nor is it the manner by which all people come to know God experientially.\(^{280}\)

Wesley came to the epistemological table with his own presuppositions about God. As we have already seen, his theology was significantly informed by his upbringing and theological tradition. However, following his 1738 evangelical conversion, Wesley began to reinterpret his assumptions in the light of his personal experience of Christ’s redemptive work. We have chosen to follow convention in presenting this summary of Wesley’s Christology according to the typical pattern. However, it would in some ways have been truer to Wesley’s thought had we begun where we now conclude, with the work of Christ.

Wesley’s view of Christ’s work can be broken down into two broad categories: his non-mediatorial activity in creation and his mediatorial activity of redemptive grace. John Deschner has demonstrated that no hard line exists between these two for Wesley.\(^{281}\) Christ is simultaneously the eternal, pre-existent Second

\(^{280}\) Wesley’s arrangement of sermons in *SOSO* placed the redemptive work of Christ first.  
\(^{281}\) Deschner, *WC*, 69.
Person of the Trinity, the divine Logos through whom all things were made, and also the incarnate Lord, the God-man Jesus Christ.

2.8.1 Christ’s Creative Work

For Wesley, Christ’s redemptive work takes place within the context of his creative and providential activity. God’s creative and redemptive works are both expressions of his grace, with God’s activity in creation and providence intended to move humanity toward redemption and growth in grace.  

Therefore, ‘[H]e is the Lord of all, having absolute, supreme, universal dominion over all things,’ and within this milieu he is ‘more peculiarly our Lord, who believe in him, both by conquest, purchase, and voluntary obligation.’

a) The Son and Creation

Wesley remained fully Trinitarian, even while placing his emphasis on the work of Christ in creation. In his 1780 sermon Spiritual Worship, Wesley defined ‘the foundation of all’ as the ‘happy and holy communion which the faithful have with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,’ and it is the testimony of Father, Son and Spirit on which faith in Christ is founded.  

It is by this reliable testimony about Christ that one knows him to be ‘the true God’ who has acted in creation. ‘He is “the true God”, the only Cause, the sole Creator of all things.’ And yet, paradoxically, Wesley was able to speak of Christ as the Word ‘by whom the Father speaking

282 Deschner, WC, 68.
283 Wesley, ‘A Letter to a Roman Catholic’ (Jackson), 10:81. See also Wesley, ENNT, Matt. 1:16.
284 Wesley, ‘Spiritual Worship’ (BE), 3:89-90.
maketh all things.’ What might at first appear as a problem with the relation of the Father’s and Son’s creative work becomes clear when one considers that Wesley repeatedly affirms that Christ and the Father are one. Not only are all the attributes of the Father ascribed to Christ, but also all his works, seeing that he is ‘God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; in glory equal with the Father, in majesty coeternal’.

Let all that breathe, Jehovah praise,  
Almighty, all-creating Lord!  
Let earth and heaven his power confess,  
Brought out of nothing by his Word.

He spake the Word, and it was done!  
The universe his Word obeyed.  
His Word is his eternal Son,  
And Christ the whole creation made.

*b) The Son and Providence*

As the eternal, pre-existent Son of God his creative work preceded his redemptive activity, but this creative work did not end with creation; it continues on through his providence, and all things have their being in him. ‘All things—beside God, were made; and all things which were made, were made by the Word.’ ‘He was the foundation of life to every living thing, as well as of being to all that is.’

The extent to which Wesley viewed Christ as participating in the ongoing providential activity of God, generally speaking, must be largely presumed from the earlier insistence that all which belongs to the Father belongs to Christ, i.e. his attributes and

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286 Wesley, ENNT, John 1:1; Heb. 1:3.  
288 Wesley, Collection (BE), 7:362.  
289 Wesley, ENNT, John 1:3.  
290 Wesley, ENNT, John 1:4.
works. This general providence covers all of creation and most especially humanity, and here we see a glimmer of Wesley’s understanding of God’s mercy:

Mercy o’er thy works presides;  
Thy providence displayed  
Still preserves and still provides  
For all thy hands have made;  
Keeps with most distinguished care,  
The man who on thy love depends,  
Watches every numbered hair,  
And all his steps attends.\(^{291}\)

Even if Christ’s role in general providence is left to some assumptions, one aspect of his activity was more clearly defined when the Wesley brothers connected God’s general providence to the specific providence of God’s people through Christ’s redemptive work on the cross.\(^{292}\)

Who can sound the depths unknown  
Of thy redeeming grace?  
Grace that gave thine only Son  
To save a ruined race!  
Millions of transgressors poor  
Thou hast for Jesu’s sake forgiven,  
Made them of thy favour sure,  
And snatched from hell to heaven.\(^{293}\)

It is through Christ’s death that one becomes witness to God’s providential care in the fullest sense. Since Wesley saw all of God’s providential activity as intended to move humanity toward redemption, Christ’s mediatorial work on the cross was the apex of providence, in which Father, Son, and Spirit act for the redemption and preservation of God’s creation. God’s preserving care is for all people and all are able to enjoy it,

\(^{291}\) Wesley, *Collection* (BE), 7:378.  
\(^{292}\) See *Appendix A* for a defence of the use of the 1780 *Collection* as primary source material for John Wesley’s theology.  
\(^{293}\) Wesley, *Collection* (BE), 7:379.
but his saving grace, which might be described as the fullest extent of his providence, can only be enjoyed by those who receive it through faith. ²⁹⁴

2.8.2 Christ’s Prophetic Work

According to Wesley, the natural state of humanity is ‘total darkness, blindness, ignorance of God and the things of God.’ ²⁹⁵ The effects of Adam’s sin are so severe that his descendants can have no knowledge of God, unless God himself supplies it. God begins this process of awakening by extending his grace, which enables humanity to respond to God in faith. ²⁹⁶ But what humanity yet needs is a prophetic witness ‘whereby heavenly mysteries are declared to men.’ ²⁹⁷ This, then, is the primary focus of Christ’s prophetic ministry, ‘to enlighten our minds, and teach us the whole will of God.’ ²⁹⁸

a) Christ and the Old Testament

Wesley took great care to demonstrate the continuity of Old and New Testaments, law and gospel, Israel and the church. ²⁹⁹ In his ‘Sermon on the Mount, I’, Wesley stressed that the authority with which Jesus spoke on the mountain is the authority given him as the eternal Son, ‘the Lord of heaven and earth’ who is ‘the Creator of all,’ the ‘Lord our Governor,’ the ‘great Lawgiver’ himself. ³⁰⁰ Wesley used

²⁹⁴ Wesley, ENNT, 1 Tim. 4:10.
²⁹⁵ Wesley, ENNT, Matt 1:16. We will discuss Wesley’s arrival at this declaration in Chapter Four, ‘Christ and Humanity’.
²⁹⁶ We will examine Wesley’s doctrine of original sin and his doctrine of grace more fully in later chapters.
²⁹⁷ Wesley, ENNT, Rom. 12:6.
²⁹⁸ Wesley, ENNT, Matt 1:16.
²⁹⁹ See Deschner, WC, 86.
³⁰⁰ Wesley, ‘Sermon on the Mount I’ (BE), 1:470.
these designations, not just to show Christ’s divine authority to speak, but also to show that this Christ is the same Lord revealed in the Old Testament. He is the ‘eternal Wisdom of the Father,’ and as such he alone ‘knows how we stand related to God, to one another, to every creature which God hath made.’ It is for this reason that he alone was sent to declare God’s will to humanity, ‘to “open the eyes of the blind”, “to give light to them that sit in darkness”.’

Wesley did not ground the connection of Old and New Testaments solely on Christ’s divinity, but also on his prophetic activity within creation. John Deschner has identified three primary ways in which Wesley related Christ to Old Testament prophecy: 1) Christ was physically present, speaking to Moses through the burning bush and in the giving of the Law, 2) Christ spoke through his messengers (primarily Moses and the prophets), and 3) Christ was manifest through typology, with many ‘types’ prefiguring Christ’s coming in the flesh. In this way, Wesley saw Christ as both the giver of the Law and prophecy in the Old Testament and their fulfilment in the New. As Kenneth Collins has aptly stated, ‘In a real sense, Christ as the Messiah of Israel is the nexus, the continuity between the covenants, in particular the moral law of the Old Testament, on the one hand, and that of the New Testament, on the other.’

b) Christ and the Law

It is notable that Wesley, following in the footsteps of the Reformers, differentiated between the ceremonial and the moral law, paying little attention to the former. He was by no means an antinomian, as can be clearly seen through his efforts

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301 Wesley, ‘Sermon on the Mount I’ (BE), 1:470.
302 See Deschner, WC, 86-88 for a more detailed analysis.
303 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 97.
to delicately balance faith and works throughout his theology. Even so, when Wesley spoke about ‘the law’ he was more specifically referring to the moral law of both the Old and New Testaments. And what specifically is the moral law? It is ‘supreme, unchangeable reason; it is unalterable rectitude; it is the everlasting fitness of all things.’ Furthermore, the moral law is ‘holy, just, and good’, for it is ‘a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature.’ It is ‘the face of God unveiled…the heart of God disclosed to man.’

The importance of the moral law for Wesley cannot be overstressed, and will be a subject of further discussion later in this study. For the moment Wesley’s descriptions of the law lead us to one particularly unusual feature of Wesley’s Christology, which we should briefly mention. Wesley so closely identified the moral law with the nature of God, and particularly Christ, that he even used the Christological language of Hebrews 1:3 to describe it, going so far as to say that ‘in some sense we may apply to this law what the Apostle says of his Son—it is the “streaming forth” or outbeaming “of his glory, the express image of his person”,’ and later, ‘it is the fairest offspring of the everlasting Father.’ Such language has led to questions about whether or not Wesley was ascribing to the law a semi-independent status apart from Christ, rather than describing the law as always subordinate to Christ.

Despite Wesley’s curious choice of language here, this theme is only a small piece of a much larger portrait, and not one that should distract the reader from the more central aspects of Wesley’s mature Christology. It is interesting, but does not

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308 Deschner, WC, 107-8.
hint at a deeper, hidden meaning, and Wesley does not develop this idea elsewhere. Even taken as an odd feature, it illustrates the importance that the moral law held for Wesley and stands as evidence that he wrestled with his own understanding of the hidden things of God over the course of a lengthy life and ministry. Not all elements of Wesley’s theology should be taken as normative for the whole, and this is one case where interpretations of Wesley’s language run the risk of suggesting more than he intended. Even as he raised the question, Deschner suggested that Wesley would reject such an idea outright ‘on the ground of Christological doctrine, and point to his assertion that the law is grounded in a created, not begotten, order.’

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In what ways, then, did Wesley primarily relate Christ’s work to the law? First, Christ is the ‘Author’ and giver of the law. The law was first introduced in creation, ‘being coeval with man, and having proceeded from God at the very time when “man became a living soul”,’ and was written on humanity’s heart. Wesley also saw Christ as the ‘giver of the Decalogue to Moses’. He wrote, ‘It was therefore the Son of God who delivered the law to Moses, under the character of Jehovah.’

Under the covenant of grace (to which the Ten Commandments belong), salvation now depends upon faith in Christ and his mediatorial work, rather than the law. However, as Deschner has shown, the first fruit of reconciliation ‘belongs to the prophetic office: the partial re-inscription of the law in sinful man’s heart.’

Secondly, Christ fulfilled (or re-established) the law by re-proclaiming it with a depth

309 Deschner, WC, 107.
310 Wesley, ‘Sermon on the Mount V’ (BE), 1:552-3.
311 Wesley, ‘Justification by Faith’ (BE), 1:184.
312 Wesley, ENNT, Acts 7:35.
314 Deschner, WC, 101.
of understanding not previously known, and by re-inscribing the moral law on to the hearts of believers through the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in the last days Christ will judge all humanity by its adherence to the Law.\footnote{Deschner, \textit{WC}, 98-100.}

\textit{c) Christ and the Church}

The prophetic work of Christ continues now in his Church, which he formed from those who hear his voice by faith, love him, and keep his commandments.\footnote{Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Heb. 12:25.} The church is ‘the whole body of true believers, whether on earth or in paradise.’\footnote{Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, John 10:27-29.} Christ rules as head of his church, filling her with his Spirit, purifying her members and guarding them from the evil one.\footnote{Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Heb. 12:23.} Wesley viewed the work of the church as a continuation of Christ’s work. This is accomplished generally through the preaching of Christ, the inward application of the preached Word by the Spirit, and the witness of the church’s holiness through good works.\footnote{Deschner, \textit{WC}, 131.}

\textit{2.8.3 Christ’s Priestly Work}

The priestly work of Christ includes his death, resurrection, and intercession for humanity. According to the Apostle Paul, to ‘preach Christ crucified’ is to proclaim the power and wisdom of God, and if the Christ is not truly resurrected then Christian faith is futile and ‘we are of all people most to be pitied’.\footnote{Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, 1 Cor. 1:23-25, 15:14-19.}
was squarely rooted in the traditions of the Church of England and the primitive
Christian faith. For Wesley, Christ’s priestly work is at the very heart of Christology.

a) The Wrath of God

It is impossible to appreciate fully Wesley’s understanding of Christ’s priestly
work apart from his views on the wrath of God as a response to humanity’s sin. His
views on original sin and human brokenness are some of his most fully developed
doctrines and were of considerable concern to him throughout his life. Chapter three
of this study is an examination of Wesley’s doctrine of humanity, including original
sin, so for the present it will suffice to outline the relationship between God’s wrath,
human sin, and Christ’s work in Wesley’s thought.

John Deschner defined the wrath of God as ‘the legal, just, holy, and good
answer of God to wilful sin.’ This definition adeptly summarizes and identifies key
elements in Wesley’s understanding. For Wesley, God’s wrath ‘presupposes sin’,
which evokes his righteous anger. God gave the law both to convict humanity of
sin and to reveal that his anger is justified. According to Wesley, God’s wrath is
‘the eternal vengeance’ for the ungodly, since God is himself eternal and is eternally
angered by sin. As such, God’s punishment for sin is also eternal, ‘running parallel
throughout eternity itself,’ and constitutes both the withdrawal of God’s prevenient
grace from sinners and also vengeance leading to their destruction, which Wesley
equated to banishment from the presence of God. Wesley saw Christ himself as the

322 Deschner, WC, 150.
323 Wesley, ENNT, Rom. 9:22; Matt. 27:46.
324 Wesley, ENNT, Rom. 1:17.
325 Wesley, ENNT, 1 Thess. 1:10.
326 Wesley, ENNT, 1 Thess. 1:10; Rom. 1:23-4; John 12:39.
one who will execute God’s wrath when he comes again in judgment, though this activity is more closely associated with Christ’s kingly work.\textsuperscript{327}

\textit{b) Christ’s Righteousness}

Christ’s righteousness is requisite to his role as mediator. Wesley divided his understanding of Christ’s righteousness into two parts: divine and human. Christ’s divine righteousness was understood by Wesley to be the very righteousness of the Father and belongs to his divine nature. ‘Now this is his eternal, essential, immutable holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth: in all which “he and the Father are one.”’\textsuperscript{328}

Correspondingly, Wesley linked Christ’s human righteousness to his human nature. ‘The \textit{human righteousness} of Christ belongs to him in his human nature, as he is “the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.”’\textsuperscript{329} It is this aspect of Christ’s righteousness, rather than the divine, which is primarily involved in Wesley’s doctrine of imputation, though both aspects of Christ’s righteousness were necessary for mediation. He was able to demonstrate cohesiveness between Christ’s divine and human natures with his further distinction between Christ’s \textit{internal} and \textit{external} human righteousness.

‘His internal righteousness is the image of God stamped on every power and faculty of his soul. It is a copy of his divine righteousness, as far as it can be imparted to a human spirit. It includes love, reverence, resignation to his Father; humility, meekness, gentleness; love to lost mankind, and every other holy and heavenly temper: and all these in the highest degree, without any defect, or mixture of unholiness.’\textsuperscript{330}

\textsuperscript{327} Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Rev. 14:20, 19:15; 1 Cor. 16:22.
\textsuperscript{328} Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:452.
\textsuperscript{329} Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:452.
\textsuperscript{330} Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:452-3.
Wesley differentiated between the divine righteousness of Christ and this *internal* righteousness imparted to Christ’s humanity as a copy of the divine image. It is only the second aspect of Christ’s righteousness, which is imputed to humanity.\(^{331}\) This does not suggest that Christ was in effect ‘super human,’ but rather hints at Wesley’s serious understanding of the effects of original sin on the *imago Dei* originally given to Adam before the fall, something we will discuss further in chapter four.

The second aspect of Wesley’s two-fold view of Christ’s human righteousness was the *external* righteousness of Christ, which included, but was not limited to the absence of outward sin in Jesus Christ. ‘It was the least part of his *external* righteousness that he did nothing amiss; that he knew no outward sin of any kind, “neither was guile found in his mouth”; that he never spoke one improper word, nor did one improper action.’\(^{332}\) But Wesley was careful to say that Christ’s external righteousness was not only negative, with the absence of sin, but also positive in his obedience to the Father. First, he was *actively obedient* to God in every action and word. ‘All he acted and spoke was exactly right in every circumstance.’\(^{333}\) The implication here is that Wesley viewed Christ as perfectly adhering to the law. Consequently, ‘He fulfilled all righteousness’. Secondly, Christ was *passively obedient* to the Father through his suffering and death, even ‘suffering the whole will of God from the time he came into the world till “he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree;” yea, till having made a full atonement for them “he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.”’\(^{334}\) Though Wesley distinguished between the active and passive righteousness of Christ here, he went on to caution that the two should never

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\(^{331}\) Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:452.

\(^{332}\) Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:453.

\(^{333}\) Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:453.

\(^{334}\) Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:453.
be separated ‘either in speaking or even in thinking,’ as both taken together are what is properly meant by the righteousness of Christ.

c) Atonement

Secondary literature in Wesley studies has endeavoured to identify which modern theory of atonement best fits with Wesley’s position, even though this modern framework did not appear until the nineteenth century. Such efforts have been complicated by Wesley’s diverse theological language. In the case of his views on the atonement, Wesley variously used language that fits satisfaction, ransom, penal substitution, and even moral influence themes. It is the general consensus of contemporary scholars that Wesley primarily employed a penal substitutionary understanding of Christ’s death and resurrection, which placed him firmly in the company of his contemporaries. Yet this consensus has made it all too easy to overlook the ways in which Wesley utilized other analogies. It is beyond the scope of this study to take up the task of clarifying Wesley’s position, though it appears that further clarification is needed, considering the great diversity of language found in his work. For the present task, we shall outline the core elements present in Wesley’s theology of atonement, and shall mark connections with other areas of his theology as they arise later in the study.

336 See Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 102-3 for a concise summary of dominant opinions.
337 See Darren Cushman Wood, ‘John Wesley’s Use of the Atonement.’ The Asbury Journal 62, no. 2 (2007), 62. Wood has argued Wesley’s language demonstrated a dual focus on both substitutionary and ‘participatory’ atonement in an effort to ‘maintain the centrality of the cross without creating antinomianism’.
Article II of the *Thirty-nine Articles* states the Church of England’s official understanding of the atonement. Jesus Christ, who is the Word of the Father, the eternal Son, ‘truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men.’ Wesley subscribed to this doctrinal statement, and copied it *verbatim* into his later *Twenty-four Articles*. But what is entailed in this reconciliation, for Wesley?

Kenneth J. Collins has taken a somewhat nuanced approach to describing the atonement for Wesley, emphasizing both objective and subjective aspects (that which God does *for us* and that which God does *in us*, respectively).\(^{338}\) Objective elements are those typically associated with the atonement, which include the atoning act itself. Subjective elements are not typically included in discussions of the atonement, yet are nevertheless closely linked to it. These elements are useful in this discussion, because they show how the atonement is applied to the lives of believers. For the purpose of summarizing Wesley’s doctrine of Christ and his saving work, we will highlight five of these objective and subjective aspects of the atonement that Wesley emphasized: 1) penalty for sin, 2) satisfaction, or the turning aside, of God’s wrath, 3) pardon, 4) liberation from sin, and 5) transformation. We will examine these themes more fully in the chapters to come, so this section exists to provide an anchoring point for that later work.

*Atonement as penalty for sin.* First, and foremost, Wesley viewed Christ’s sacrifice as a penalty for human sin. In his treatise on original sin, Wesley stated:

> Our sins were the procuring cause of all his sufferings. His sufferings were the penal effects of our sins. ‘The chastisement of our peace,’ the punishment necessary to procure it, ‘was’ laid ‘on him,’ freely submitting thereto: ‘And by his stripes’ (a part of his sufferings again put for the whole) ‘we are healed’;

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\(^{338}\) Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, 103.
pardon, sanctification, and final salvation are all purchased and bestowed upon us. Every chastisement is for some fault. That laid on Christ was not for his own, but ours; and was needful to reconcile and offended Lawgiver, and offending guilty creatures, to each other. So ‘the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all’; that is, the punishment due to our iniquity. 339

Just as Adam’s sin resulted in the penalties of pain and death for humanity, so also do our actual sins carry with them eternal penalty. Wesley consistently echoed the words of the Apostle Paul: ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23). Through the cross, Christ himself bore the penalty for both Adam’s sin (original) and our sins (actual).

The wrath of God. Wesley did not shy away from the idea that sin has incurred God’s wrath. God’s wrath should never be equated to a human understanding of anger or vengeance, ‘but understood in the light of divine holy love in its unswerving and resolute opposition to evil.’ 340 Wesley did not, in any way, view humanity as victims of either sin or God. Rather, he saw sin as the active participation of humanity in evil. God’s opposition is not to humans, but rather to evil itself, which is personified through the perpetration of sinful acts of rebellion. Christ’s work, then, is ‘the atoning sacrifice by which the wrath of God is appeased.’ 341

Pardon. One cannot express the Wesleyan theology of atonement apart from a juridical understanding of pardon from the guilt of sin. Through Christ’s sacrifice, the penalty for sin has been satisfied and God’s wrath has been appeased. Therefore, there is no more condemnation for sin, and sinners no longer must live under the guilt of their sin. ‘The atoning work of Christ stands as the universal basis upon which the

340 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 106.
341 Wesley, ENNT, 1 John 2:2.
forgiveness of sins is offered to all. This does not mean that all people will accept this pardon. But, through Christ, conditions have been met for their forgiveness.

Liberation from sin. The result of God’s offer of forgiveness and pardon to sinners, once accepted through faith, is freedom from the power and presence of sin. Through the cross, Christ has won a victory over Satan and destroyed his power over sinners. ‘The voluntary passion of our Lord appeased the Father’s wrath, obtained pardon and acceptance for us, and, consequently, dissolved the dominion and power which Satan had over us through our sins.’ It is important to note, as Maddox has, that Wesley did not here employ an understanding of atonement as ransom paid to Satan. Nor did he resort to military language, with Christ winning a victory over the Devil. For Wesley, the important element is the absolution of guilt. Freedom, then, is not wrested from Satan, so much as granted by God through pardon. God is always the primary actor, the initiator of grace, and it is he who sets the captives free in Christ. This freedom from the power of sin over humanity is the basis for Wesley’s theology of sanctification.

Transformation. The transformation of the individual, by the power of God enacted in the life of the believer, is the work that God does in us. It encompasses the full scope of God’s work in justifying, assuring, and sanctifying the one who has received the benefits of the atonement, by grace, through faith. Transformation is the move from the objective elements of the atonement to the subjective, from God’s initiating grace to receiving grace. As Collins has helpfully articulated, ‘It is this transition from knowing Christ as the Saviour of the world to knowing that he has

342 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 107.
343 Wesley, ENNT, Col. 1:14.
344 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 97.
saved you in particular…’

Again, for Wesley, the action is always divine action. But the action is never coercive. Humanity participates freely in the oikonomia of God, through received grace. Humanity is therefore responsible, not for the work of justifying, assuring, or sanctifying ourselves, but for choosing to freely accept and participate in the justifying, assuring, and sanctifying work that God does in us.

We will look more closely at these concepts in later chapters. For the moment, it is important to highlight that, for Wesley, God is always the initiator of grace, the ‘first mover’ in both the objective (what God does for us) and subjective (what God does in us) aspects of the atonement. The atonement is universal in its scope objectively and narrow in its scope subjectively. Christ’s sacrifice was made for all the sins of the whole world, and yet must be received individually by grace, through faith.

d) Intercession

The final element of Christ’s priestly work is his intercession at the right hand of God the Father. Deschner has noted that this aspect of Wesley’s Christology is underdeveloped, yet serves an important role for Wesley’s ecclesiology. Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father as his Son, bearing the wounds of the cross, which speak for humanity. As Deschner has illustrated, mediation is the effect of Christ’s intercession. According to Wesley, ‘The gifts of God all pass through Christ to us; and all our petitions and thanksgivings pass through Christ to God.’ These ‘gifts of

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346 Deschner, *WC*, 169. Deschner argued that Wesley preferred to express this aspect of Christ’s work in terms of the kingly office, since it parallels the role of the exalted Christ.
347 Wesley, *ENNT*, Rom. 1:8, 8:34; Heb. 2:17.
God’ are no less than justification, assurance, and sanctification for those who receive them.

Since Wesley so closely tied the intercessory work of Christ to his kingly office, it is only fitting that we now turn to the final aspect of Christ’s work in Wesley’s Christology.

2.8.4 Christ’s Kingly Work

The crux of Wesley’s Christology is certainly the priestly work of Christ, particularly Christ’s substitutionary death and the resultant atonement. This work is the foundation of human salvation and, as such, holds the preeminent position in Wesley’s thought. However, as noted earlier Wesley’s view of Christ’s death and resurrection was not limited to the themes of penal substitution, atonement, and justification. He also saw Christ’s death and resurrection as the work of a king, who has won, and indeed is still winning, a great victory. This kingly work of Christ is important for understanding Wesley’s concept both of what Christ has done for us (justification) and also for what Christ does in us (sanctification). So closely did Wesley link Christ’s kingly and priestly work, in fact, with the former in many ways dependent upon the later, that Deschner was led to the hesitant observation that ‘the kingly office, in general, is considered to be an aspect of the priestly work of Christ.’\footnote{Deschner, \textit{WC}, 126.} However, while Wesley may have occasionally blurred the lines between
the different offices, he nonetheless considered it imperative to preach all three, for ‘We are not ourselves clear before God unless we proclaim him in all his offices.’

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\[a)\] \textit{Christ the King}

Wesley’s clearest exposition of Christ’s kingly office appears in his sermon, ‘The Law Established through Faith, Discourse II’. Here he laid out the three roles of Christ as king.

Christ the king is, first, a lawmaker ‘giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood.’ Through the establishment of law, Christ provides a rule and measure by which to reign in humanity’s ‘strange misrule of appetites and passions.’

\[350\] The end of which is ‘to produce all manner of holiness, negative and positive, of the heart and of the life.’ Here we see that in Christ the law has been fulfilled, but not destroyed so leading to antinomianism. Rather, in Christ, the law has been recapitulated; it has been re-established as the law of love, written on the hearts of humanity. This role of the kingly office overlaps with the prophetic office in Wesley’s theology. Through his prophetic role, Christ guides humanity into the truth of the law, which he has established as king. Deschner located the authorship and giving of the law as a role of the prophetic office, while Collins located it with the kingly office. For Wesley, the law is such an important aspect of his theology that it touches on both.

The second role of the kingly office is the restoration of those whom Christ has purchased, ‘restoring those to the image of God whom he had first reinstated to his favour.’

\[351\] Here we begin to see Wesley’s connection between the priestly and kingly offices. Christ restores those who have received God’s gift of forgiveness

\[349\] Wesley, ‘The Law Established through Faith, II’ (BE), 2:37.
through faith, thereby receiving freedom from both the guilt and power of sin. And this restoration does not only presuppose the forgiveness supplied to the believer through Christ’s priestly work, rather the one cannot exist without the other, for ‘indeed, without an atonement first made for the guilt, we could never have been delivered from the power.’\textsuperscript{352} At the very least, this marks for Wesley the beginning of sanctification. As we shall see moving forward, it may further provide for him the foundation upon which his theology of Christian perfection rests.

The third, and final, role of the kingly office is ‘reigning in all believing hearts until he has “subdued all things to himself”; until he hath utterly cast out all sin, and “brought in everlasting righteousness.”’\textsuperscript{353} As Collins has rightly pointed out, this should not be taken to mean that Christ’s righteousness through active obedience to the law is imputed to the believer for sanctification; rather Christ’s righteousness is imputed through justification as the grounds upon which holiness rests.\textsuperscript{354} God is not content that believers should only appear righteous as those who have been justified by grace through faith, but desires that they should also become righteous, something Wesley relates to Paul’s language, in Philippians 2:8, of the knowledge of Christ as Lord. For Wesley, ‘to refer this [knowing Christ as Lord] to justification only, is miserably to pervert the whole scope of the words. They manifestly relate to sanctification also; yea, to that chiefly.’\textsuperscript{355} But it is clear also that, while the believer is expected to become actively righteous, it is Christ’s Spirit who works in the believer, through faith, to bring about obedience to God’s law.\textsuperscript{356}

\textsuperscript{352} Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, 1 Pet. 2:24.
\textsuperscript{353} See also Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Matt. 1:16.
\textsuperscript{354} Collins, \textit{Theology of John Wesley}, 174-5.
\textsuperscript{355} Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Phil. 2:8.
\textsuperscript{356} Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Phil. 2:9. ‘The righteousness which is from God—From his almighty Spirit; not by my own strength, but \textit{by faith} alone’. Wesley’s emphasis.
In the kingly office we find a clear link between the work of Christ for us as justification and the work of Christ in us as sanctifying the individual. Christ the king recapitulates the law of love; he restores believers to the image of God, thereby securing for them freedom from the power of sin, as well as guilt; and works in the life of the believer, through faith, to bring about righteousness and obedience to the law. In other words, humanity is not only forgiven in Christ, but is also made holy in him.\(^{357}\)

\[b) \textit{Christ’s Victory}\]

Christ’s atonement is also the King’s victory over the enemies of God: Satan, sin, and death.\(^{358}\)

Satan brought in sin, and sin brought forth death. And Christ, when he of old engaged with these enemies, first conquered Satan, then sin, in his death; and, lastly, death, in his resurrection. In the same order he delivers all the faithful from them, yea, and destroys these enemies themselves. Death he so destroys that it shall be no more; sin and Satan, so that they shall no more hurt his people.\(^{359}\)

God’s victory is decided, though the effects are still working their way throughout Creation as his kingdom comes in its fullness.\(^{360}\) This anticipatory aspect, wherein Creation (including humanity) waits expectantly for the full effects of Christ’s victory to be manifested, lends a character of spiritual warfare to Wesley’s theology of sanctification.\(^{361}\) Though the war has been won decisively, spiritual skirmishes continue with the enemy over the lives of individual persons and the faithfulness of

\(^{357}\) See Collins, \textit{Theology of John Wesley}, 111-13 for further discussion concerning the connection between the juridical theme of forgiveness and participatory theme of renewal in Wesley’s theology of the kingly office.

\(^{358}\) Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Heb. 2:14, 1 Cor. 15:56, 1 Cor. 15:26.

\(^{359}\) Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, 1 Cor. 15:26.


\(^{361}\) See Deschner, \textit{WC}, 123.
the church. This is the nature of the struggle between spirit and flesh. Nevertheless, the kingdom of God has broken in, with Christ as its Head.

c) Christ’s Kingdom

Wesley understood the inherent paradox of the kingdom of God, and regularly employed language to capture this idea, particularly the language of ‘kingdom of grace,’ or the inward kingdom, and ‘kingdom of glory,’ which is the heavenly kingdom. John Deschner identified following eight aspects of Wesley’s kingdom theology. These are 1) The kingdom is both a state on earth and a state in heaven, 2) Believers do not yet possess the kingdom in its fullness, 3) The state on earth includes both the sanctifying of the individual and the gathering of the church, 4) The state in heaven likewise includes both future ‘happiness’ for the individual, and a continuation in glory of the ‘society’ which Christ has formed on earth, 5) Both states, taken together, are one kingdom, 6) Christ’s work is essential to the establishment of the kingdom, 7) The kingdom of grace, Christ’s mediatorial kingdom, is only part of Christ’s everlasting rule with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and 8) Christ’s everlasting rule with the Father includes the government of all things, and the kingdom of glory is ultimately merged with it.362

Two things are immediately apparent from Deschner’s points. First, Wesley’s view of the kingdom of God is all-inclusive, incorporating the full scope of past, present, and future authority. There is no point in time when Christ does not reign as king, whether as the pre-existed Son, the incarnate Jesus, or the resurrected Christ.363

363 Deschner commented that ‘the mediatorial kingdom of grace would then be God’s royal way of bringing fallen men back to their rightful place in His eternal rule.’ (WC, 129). This indicates that the kingdom of grace/glory is the same kingdom established before Creation and Adam’s sin. The Son, who reigns eternally with the Father and
Second, this kingdom is Triune in nature. Christ is king, and yet he reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit in all stages of kingdom revelation.

2.9 Conclusion

The preceding summary of Wesley’s evangelical Christology provides a foundation from which to evaluate the role of Christ and his work in Wesley’s broader theology in the chapters to follow. It also demonstrates significant transitions in Wesley’s theology after 1738. Perhaps the most significant conclusions drawn from this examination is the realization that the pre-1738 Wesley had little to say about the work of Christ and so apparently little interest in it. His mature Christology was expressed only in his post-1738 work. This lends support to the claim of this study that a significant shift toward a focus on ‘Christ alone for salvation’ did occur for Wesley after Aldersgate.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, John Wesley espoused an orthodox view of God prior to his experience at Aldersgate in 1738 that remained mostly unchanged in its content throughout his life. The most significant change that occurred in Wesley’s doctrine of God after 24 May 1738 was not his understanding of God’s nature and attributes, but rather his perspective about the character and work of God, and particularly the work of Christ. Wesley’s perspective changed with regard to his understanding of the merits of Christ, and upon whom the work of salvation depends. He had been striving with all his effort to earn divine favour in the light of Spirit, is then co-ruler also of the pre-existent kingdom of glory, for the kingdom of God is eternal.

Deschner, WC, 128.
Christ’s sacrifice. At Aldersgate he came to recognize the merits of Christ alone as a sufficient and gracious gift of God for him.

Secondly, Wesley’s perspective was changed with regard to his status before God. He moved from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son, one who has been justified and given new life in the Spirit. He received an assurance of the Spirit that he was a child of God and found strength in the Spirit to seek all inward and outward holiness.

The result of this was a refocusing of his theology upon the grace of God, and salvation by faith alone, with the expectation that this will result in works of the Spirit, even the ‘love of God shed abroad in the hearts of men’. The real change for Wesley was a move away from an anthropocentric view of salvation, where humans were the main actors shouldering the responsibility for holiness, to a view of salvation, which understood Christ’s sacrifice, and faith in him alone, as sufficient for salvation.

Wesley’s views concerning the work of Christ followed a consistent, well-worn path that one would expect from a clergyman of the Church of England. He viewed the work of Christ as divided primarily into non-mediatorial activity in creation and mediatorial activity in redemption. It is noteworthy that Wesley took care to emphasize the non-mediatorial work of Christ. He was careful to describe Christ’s role in creation and providence, along with the Father and Spirit. This emphasis indicates Wesley’s view that all of the work of God is fully Triune. This Triune emphasis carried through every aspect of his Christology, and so one is never left with the impression from Wesley’s theology that Christ ever acts independently of Father and Spirit. When explaining the mediatorial work of Christ, Wesley utilized the typical offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. In Christ’s prophetic work, Wesley makes
a somewhat unusual effort to demonstrate the continuity of the Law and Christ’s relationship to it. By doing so, he was able to combat antinomianism, without slipping into a salvation based on works-righteousness.

Wesley’s views of the priestly office of Christ emphasized the wrath of God and Christ’s passive and active righteousness. His atonement theology tended toward the language and imagery of penal substitution, though he utilized a wide variety of language, and includes the core elements of a penalty for sin, the turning aside of God’s wrath, pardon for the sinner, liberation from the power and presence of sin, and transformation in the life of the believer. Wesley’s atonement theology is concerned both with objective (what Christ does for us) and subjective (what Christ does in us) aspects.

In the kingly office we find a clear link between the work of Christ for us as justification and the work of Christ in us as sanctifying the individual. Christ the king recapitulates the law of love; he restores believers to the image of God, thereby securing for them freedom from the power of sin, as well as guilt; and works in the life of the believer, through faith, to bring about righteousness and obedience to the law.

While Wesley tends toward language of penal substitution, the atonement is also a great victory won over the enemies of God: Satan, sin, and death. God’s victory is decided, though the effects are still working their way throughout Creation as his kingdom comes in its fullness. Though believers do not yet possess the kingdom of God in its fullness, it has been established through Christ’s work and with him as its head.
Wesley’s doctrine of Christ’s work was not particularly innovative, nor would he have wanted it to be considered so. He saw himself as following in the footsteps of the Reformers, and particularly the Church of England. The reasons for some of the unique emphases that one can see in Wesley’s doctrine become more clear when viewed in the context of his wider theological thought. The remainder of this study has this aim in mind, and so we now turn to our evaluation of the degree to which Wesley’s broader theology was shaped by, or arose from, his doctrine of the person and work of Christ, and how that may have changed following his 1738 evangelical conversion.
Chapter 3 - Christ and Humanity

3.1 Introduction

Harald Lindström once wrote, ‘The key to the understanding of any interpretation of Christianity must be the interpreter’s idea of the nature of man.’ His presumption was that, without first discovering who God created humankind to be and in what ways sin has affected that aim, it is impossible to understand rightly how God has responded in history and still responds today. Without a clear knowledge of the plight of fallen humanity, we are incapable of recognizing the need for rescue or the means by which God has ordained to save, thus the cross has no meaning and the Incarnation makes no sense. The purpose of this chapter will be to explore the relationship between Wesley’s doctrine of humanity and his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ, and to determine whether or not Lindström’s assumptions hold true for Wesley. Was his doctrine of humanity shaped by his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ, or was the opposite true?

Wesley has been occasionally accused of Pelagianism, of espousing a theology of salvation by works. Evidence from his pre-1738 sermons does indicate a strong tendency toward moralism. This moralistic view of salvation changed after 1738, but some aspects of his mature doctrine of humanity made an appearance prior to Aldersgate. Even as early as 1730, one can find strong evidence of his commitment to the total depravity of the human condition, which stems from lawlessness and resultant enslavement to sin, and is therefore incapable of salvation purely by adherence to the law. Wesley’s carried this early view of depravity forward into his

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366 See Wesley, ‘Seek First the Kingdom’ (BE), 4:219ff.
later thought. Lindström contended that Wesley’s mature doctrine placed him in direct opposition to the Deists of his day, and in line with the Reformation. This is apparent throughout Wesley’s post-1738 works, however it is also important to note that this was not peculiar to Wesley. Here again, as in so many other places, Wesley appealed to his own tradition for the basis of his understanding. From that firm foundation, he was able to develop his own thoughts on the matter, while remaining securely within the orthodox parameters of the Church of England. We will now consider the content of Wesley’s post-1738 doctrine of humanity.  

3.1.1 What is ‘Man’?  

John Wesley’s evaluation of the present state of humanity is sobering. Unlike the Deists of his day, Wesley saw nothing inherently good about the nature of fallen humanity. Echoing and expanding the language of the Articles, Wesley stated that ‘we [humanity] bring with us into the world a corrupt, sinful nature; more corrupt indeed than we can easily conceive, or find words to express.’ Evidences of this ‘natural corruption’ are humanity’s tendency to work evil and avoid good, to be full of pride and self-centeredness, and to become seekers of pleasure, rather than seekers of  

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367 Wesley scholars commonly divide Wesley’s career into three main stages, which reflect significant periods of his life and also denote periods of time when his thought underwent change. These divisions are: early (1725-1738), middle (1738-1767), and late (1768-1791). From now on, we will occasionally refer to these distinct stages as early, middle, and late Wesley.  

368 Wesley, ‘The Righteousness of Faith’ (BE) 1:212. See also ‘The Way to the Kingdom’ (BE) 1:225-6. See articles IX – XIV of the Articles for the position of the Church of England concerning the nature of fallen humanity, justification, and good works. It is notable that Wesley dropped article XIII, ‘Of Works Before Justification’ entirely from his Sunday Service, and modified the language of article IX, ‘Of Original or Birth Sin,’ making the article simpler and shorter. Changes to article IX are most notable, since Wesley eliminated language stating that believers are under no condemnation for the ongoing presence of sin after justification and baptism.
God. And these are just the inclinations of humanity, the impulses of a corrupted nature. He went on to point out that these have been manifested in grievous ways as a multitude of actual sins. Just as humanity is without choice in being born with a corrupted nature, since in Adam all have fallen, so too are humans helpless to overcome evil inclinations and avoid sin. Thus, all humans are deserving of God’s wrath.

3.1.2 What is Humanity’s Purpose?

In Wesley’s sermon, ‘What is Man? Psalm 8:4’, penned in 1788, one finds speculation about the end of life and the general resurrection that is typical of his later writings. Outler noted that the presence of a radical mind-body dualism reveals a Christian Platonist viewpoint mediated to Wesley by the likes of Norris and Malebranche. This dualism, however, was softened in Wesley’s later sermons, where he wrote about the unity of body and soul in present life and the life to come. When answering the question ‘What am I?’ Wesley responded, ‘Unquestionably I am something distinct from my body… For when my body dies I shall not die; I shall exist as I did before.’ Yet in the next breath, Wesley added ‘In my present state of existence I undoubtedly consist of both body and soul. And so I shall again after the

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370 Wesley sometimes referred to these inclinations as a ‘bent’ toward sin and disobedience. See ‘Self-denial’ (BE), 2:242. See also ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:196.
371 We will explore this concept of Adamic guilt vs. individual guilt further in our discussion of ‘original sin’ below.
372 Outler, Intro (BE), 4:19.
373 Wesley, ‘What is Man? Psalm 8:4’ (BE), 4:23. See also ‘Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels’ (BE), 4:165.
resurrection to all eternity. One might easily wonder if this shift away from an exclusively dualistic view was perhaps due to his looming mortality. While this may be true, he appears to have had more in mind with this affirmation of union between body and soul. It seems he was most concerned to demonstrate continuity between present and future bodily existence, in which the former is preparation for the latter.

Wesley viewed death as, ‘properly the separation of the soul from the body,’ however, this did not spell the end of existence for Wesley. The soul ‘with all its passions and affections, will continue to exist although the body be mouldered into dust.’ It is here that we begin to see Wesley’s agenda. For, if the human soul, which continues on after bodily death, does not contain what is essential to the individual, all of the work of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit -- all the grace of God worked for and in humanity -- was for nothing; if the work of God in the present is only for the present life, then what hope is there for the future, and what purpose is there in sanctification?

Sanctification, it would appear, was precisely Wesley’s point in emphasizing the continuance of the soul and continuity between bodily existence in this life and eternity. He expressed this with the question, ‘Why were we sent into the world?’ and the subsequent answer, ‘For one sole end, and for no other – to prepare for eternity.’

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375 Wesley, ‘What is Man? Psalm 8:4’ (BE), 4:23.  
376 Wesley, ‘What is Man? Psalm 8:4’ (BE), 4:25.  
3.2 The Image of God

Wesley’s understanding of the *imago Dei* is central to his doctrine of humanity. True human personhood is defined by the relationship of creature to Creator; the reflection of God’s character and will in and by his creation. When this image is marred by the presence of sin, human beings cease to be image-bearers and lose what it means to be distinctly and fully human. Indeed, when humans indulge in those passions and appetites that run contrary to God’s character and will, they debase themselves to the point that no difference remains between mankind and the beasts of the fields. Wesley spent considerable thought and ink in his efforts to describe both the substance of the image of God in humanity and how this image has been affected by the presence of sin. In the following sections, we will examine Wesley’s thought as it developed over time, particularly between the early and middle periods of his career.

3.2.1 The Image of God at Creation

Wesley first wrote about the image of God prior to his Aldersgate experience in his plainly titled 1730 sermon on Genesis 1:27, ‘The Image of God’ and, after thirty years of ministry and reflection, he returned to the topic in his 1760 sermon, ‘The New Birth’. The intervening years brought significant developments in Wesley’s thought.

In 1730 Wesley described Adam as living in a state of blissful perfection before the Fall.\(^{379}\) The image of God related first to Adam’s understanding. ‘He was

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endued, after the likeness of his Maker, with a power of distinguishing truth from falsehood,’ and was able to apply reason to observation in order to infer deeper truths from what was readily apparent. Since Adam was able to distinguish truth from falsehood, ‘his understanding was just’ and his perception was flawless and just to the extent that ‘it never was betrayed into any mistake; whatever he perceived, he perceived as it was.’\(^{380}\) Adam’s understanding was not only just, but it was also perfectly clear, quick, and expansive.\(^{381}\) It was an unerring understanding.

The second part of the image of God in Adam was a perfect will. For Wesley, this is far a greater gift than perfect understanding, yet it flowed out of the first aspect. Wesley described the perfect will in terms of the affections: ‘His affections were rational, even, and regular—if we may be allowed to say “affections”, for properly speaking he had but one: man was what God is, Love.’\(^ {382}\) Love was the substance of Adam’s will, which filled him up and emanated from him. Wesley noted that the object of Adam’s love was properly God ‘from whom it came’ and that it spilled over on to all creation, but particularly toward other humans, who were ‘likewise in the image of their Creator.’\(^ {383}\)

Thirdly, the image of God was given to Adam in the form of perfect freedom. According to Wesley, Adam was created free to live as he saw fit, without the need for governance or direction. ‘[I]t was left to himself what he would do; his own choice was to determine him in all things.’\(^ {384}\) Since Adam was endowed with perfect understanding and will, he could be trusted to govern himself and was free to decide what he would do and become.

\(^{380}\) Wesley, ‘The Image of God’ (BE), 4:293.
\(^{382}\) Wesley, ‘The Image of God’ (BE), 4:294.
These three aspects of Wesley’s early view of the image of God in Adam - an unerring understanding, an uncorrupted will, and perfect freedom - resulted in a life of perfect happiness and joy, with the freedom to indulge in pleasures and with the absence of pain of any sort.\textsuperscript{385} By 1760 Wesley’s view of the substance of the \textit{imago Dei} had undergone significant revision. He still held to a three-part definition of the image of God, but with the properties of unerring understanding, uncorrupted will, and perfect freedom now combined under the broader heading of the natural image. To this he added the categories of the political and the moral image.

\textit{a) Natural Image}

The natural image of God is most basically ‘a picture of his own immortality, a spiritual being endowed with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections.’\textsuperscript{386} Seung-An Im contended that, for Wesley, ‘the spirit or the soul is the natural image…endowed with three faculties.’\textsuperscript{387} Indeed, Wesley was consistent in his view of the natural image as spirit throughout his life. In his 1786 sermon ‘On Divine Providence’, Wesley reaffirmed his view that God created mankind after his own image spiritually, and he utilized the language of understanding, will, and liberty.\textsuperscript{388}

Wesley gave his clearest description of the natural image in his 1781 sermon ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’. Here he revised his 1730 formulation further. As we have noted above, Wesley previously argued in ‘The Image of God’ that Adam’s understanding was perfectly just, clear, quick, and expansive. Wesley later allowed

\textsuperscript{385} Wesley, ‘The Image of God’ (BE), 4:295.
\textsuperscript{386} Wesley, ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:188.
\textsuperscript{387} Seung-An Im, \textit{John Wesley’s Theological Anthropology: A Dialectic Tension Between the Latin Western Patristic Tradition (Augustine and the Greek Eastern Tradition (Gregory of Nyssa), Ph.D. dissertation (Drew University, 1994), 129. Emphasis is mine.
\textsuperscript{388} Wesley, ‘On Divine Providence’ (BE), 2:540-1.
for a qualified view of perfection by saying that Adam’s knowledge was in some way limited; that ignorance was inseparable from him, and though ‘it does not appear that he was mistaken in anything,’ yet Wesley believed Adam ‘was capable of mistaking, of being deceived, although not necessitated to it.’ This qualification appears to be limited to Adam’s potential for error, rather than any inclination toward it, as Wesley later affirmed that Adam’s ‘understanding was without blemish, perfect in its kind.’

Wesley also revised his view of Adam’s will. Where earlier he described Adam’s original will as love, he now said simply that Adam had a will ‘with various affections’ in order that ‘he might love, desire, and delight in that which is good.’ Despite these changes to his view of Adam’s original understanding and will, Wesley maintained that Adam was ‘endued with liberty, a power of choosing what was good, and refusing what was not so.’ These later changes appear to consider more fully the potential for Adam’s sin as a result of his ongoing commitment to humanity’s liberty, rather than a decreased view of the perfection of God’s image stamped on mankind at creation.

Kenneth Collins noted additionally that Wesley did not reserve attribution of these properties of the natural image to humanity alone; rather he characterized the original state of ‘brute creation’ in like manner. This was a later formulation, but one that bears out in multiple sermons in 1781. What Wesley had earlier offered as

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390 Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:475.
394 Wesley’s 1781 sermon ‘The General Deliverance’ (BE), 2:436-50 was a highly speculative consideration of the extent of God’s redemptive work throughout creation. Toward this end, Wesley discussed the original state of various aspects of the created order before the fall and the degree to which they will be restored in the new creation.
his complete description of the *imago Dei* in original humanity was later expanded to include all God’s creatures, and he relocated the defining human characteristic to another category of the divine image altogether.

*b) Political Image*

The second category Wesley employed to describe the image of God in Adam is that of the political image. Humanity was created in the political image of God to be ‘the governor of this lower world, having “dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth”’. Wesley notes that Adam’s ‘excellent faculties’ qualified him peculiarly for this ‘high charge’ of God, to be ‘God’s viceregent upon earth, the prince and governor of this lower world.’

Humanity’s governing activity was to be primarily understood in terms of mediation, rather than domination. According to Wesley, ‘Man was the channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole brute Creation.’ He was given responsibility to govern through the administration of divine blessing, so that ‘all the blessings of God flowed through him to the inferior creatures.’

Wesley briefly departed from this aspect of the divine image in 1781. He skipped the political image entirely in ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’, instead jumping from the natural image to the moral image, without consideration for this third aspect. However, he picked this element up again in ‘On the General Deliverance’. One has

Wesley’s repeated this idea in his 1781 sermon ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:475, though he qualified it with the phrase ‘It seems therefore…’, indicating this as a logical deduction, rather than a conviction.

to wonder, then, whether Wesley viewed the political image as soteriologically important or merely descriptive of humanity’s role within the created order.

c) Moral Image

Finally, and most importantly for Wesley, humanity was also created in the moral image of God, ‘which, according to the Apostle, is “righteousness and true holiness”.’[^399] It is this aspect of the divine image that Wesley attributes to humanity alone among creation. A quotation from his sermon ‘The New Birth’ will illustrate what Wesley meant by ‘righteousness and true holiness’.

In this image of God was man made. ‘God is love:’ accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth: so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. God is spotless purity: and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot. Otherwise God could not have pronounced *him* as well as all the other works of his hands, ‘very good’.[^400]

Adam’s righteousness and holiness were exemplified by his perfect affections, which were properly exercised and focused. ‘They were all set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects. And as a free agent he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding.’[^401] It is because of this moral image that humanity was able to enjoy true fellowship with God, since ‘all his ways were good and acceptable to God.’[^402]

[^399]: Wesley, ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:188.
[^400]: Wesley, ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:188.
[^401]: Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:475.
3.2.2 The Image of God After the Fall

Wesley’s views on the image of God in humanity beg the question: how could Adam, who originally enjoyed such a perfect and happy nature and communion with God, possibly have succumbed to temptation toward sin? The answer, for Wesley, comes back to his understanding of Adam’s liberty and mutability.

The early Wesley framed the issue of liberty in this way: ‘How it was this wise, virtuous, happy creature was deprived of these perfections, how man lost the image of God, we are…to inquire. And the plain answer is this: the liberty of man necessarily required that he should have some trial; else he would have had no choice whether he would stand or no, that is, no liberty at all.’ The idea of liberty without choice is an illusion. So, for Adam to experience true freedom as the natural and political image indicate, there must be the possibility for Adam to choose other than God. The later Wesley underscored Adam’s liberty by speaking about his mutability. ‘But although man was made in the image of God, yet he was not made immutable. This would have been inconsistent with that state of trial in which God was pleased to place him. He was therefore created able to stand, and yet liable to fall.’

Throughout his life, Wesley consistently taught that every aspect of the human nature was damaged by Adam’s sin. However, Wesley’s views concerning the initial consequences of Adam’s folly, which led to the ultimate loss of the divine image, changed after 1738 and reflect his new focus on salvation through Christ alone. In his pre-1738 sermon, ‘The Image of God’ Wesley contrasted his then understanding of the three-fold image of God as an unerring understanding, an uncorrupted will, and perfect freedom, with the effects of Adam’s sin: a depraved understanding, a

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corrupted will, slavery to vice, and ‘the reverse of happiness which flowed from them when in their perfection.’ In this early sermon, Wesley’s understanding of the effects of the fall centre on the introduction of mortality, which led to distress of the soul. ‘The instrument [the body] being now quite untuned, she could no longer make the same harmony: “the corruptible body pressed down the soul”, with which it soared so high during its incorruption.

After 1760, Wesley expanded his explanation of sin’s effects to include the natural, political, and moral images. The natural image stands out among the others, because it was retained at some level, though it was severely damaged. In ‘The Image of God’ he said, ‘[Adam’s] understanding first found the want of suitable organs; its notions were just no longer. It mistook falsehood for truth, and truth for falsehood.’ Interestingly, Wesley did not add anything on to this earlier understanding of sin’s effects on the natural image; he simply moved it to the new category. Indeed, the only indication of damage to the natural image that one finds in his sermon, ‘The New Birth’ are short references to Adam’s loss of knowledge, specifically the knowledge of God, and the perversion if his will. ‘Yea, so little did he retain even the knowledge of him who filleth heaven and earth that he endeavoured to “hide himself from the Lord God, among the trees of the garden…he had sunk into pride and self-will, the very image of the devil, and into sensual appetites and desires, the image of the beasts that perish.”

Wesley more fully developed his conception of the damage done by the destruction of the political image. With his knowledge impaired and his will

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407 Wesley, ‘The Image of God’ (BE), 4:298
corrupted, Adam was no longer fit to govern creation as God’s agent. His mediatorial work was cut off, putting him at odds with the rest of creation. ‘As all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off.’\textsuperscript{410} The result of this loss of communication between Creator and creation resulted in the current condition ‘wherein all the elements seem to be out of course, and by turns to fight man.’\textsuperscript{411}

It is with the moral image, however, that one can fully see the seriousness of sin and its systemic destruction of the divine image. Wesley’s post-Aldersgate comments on this topic clearly demonstrate his commitments to the total depravity of fallen humanity and the utter hopelessness of the human condition apart from God’s grace. Collins remarked, ‘Since Wesley postulates that the moral image is the principal image in that it is a reflection of the very righteousness and holiness of God, one would naturally expect the greatest disruption here.’\textsuperscript{412} Indeed, according to Wesley the moral image of God was utterly destroyed by Adam’s wilful disobedience. ‘The life of God was extinguished in his soul. The glory departed from him. He lost the whole moral image of God, righteousness and true holiness.’\textsuperscript{413} The end result of this devastating loss was that Adam became unholy, unhappy, and filled with sin, guilt, and fear. His soul became dead to God and so his body also began to

\textsuperscript{410} Wesley, ‘The General Deliverance’ (BE), 2:442.  
\textsuperscript{411} Wesley, ‘The General Deliverance’ (BE), 2:442.  
\textsuperscript{412} Collins, \textit{A Faithful Witness}, 112.  
\textsuperscript{413} Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:477.
die, becoming subject to all sorts of weakness and infirmity. Worst of all, this naturally led to eternal death.414

Wesley’s post-1738 developments not only took into account his revised categories for the image of God, but also relocated the source of Adam’s problems away from his bodily mortality and linked it to his spiritual life with God. Adam’s sin, then, was a rejection of God’s gift of the divine image, and led to immediate and dire consequences. Wesley’s words here are sobering:

By this wilful act of disobedience to his Creator, this flat rebellion against his sovereign, he openly declared he would no longer have God rule over him; that he would be governed by his own will, and not the will of him who created him, and that he would not seek his happiness in God, but in the world, in the works of his hands. Now God had told him before, “In the day that thou eatest” of that fruit “thou shalt surely die.” And the word of the Lord cannot be broken. Accordingly in that day he did die: he died to God, the most dreadful of all deaths. He lost the life of God: he was separated from him in union with whom his spiritual life consisted. The body dies when it is separated from the soul, the soul when it is separated from God.415

Wesley’s view shifted from an impersonal concept of the fall toward a personal one. In other words, Wesley moved from an understanding of corruption as the result of human mortality toward a consideration of the fall as primarily the consequence of broken relationship, or loss of union with God.416

3.2.3 The Image of God in Christ

If the Adamic perfection of the image of God in humanity at creation was damaged in the fall, leading to a tendency toward sin in Adam’s descendants, how

416 According to Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today, 48: ‘The meaning of the Fall [for Wesley] is that man has fallen away from this relationship [with his Creator]…’.
then did Wesley view the image of God in Christ as the incarnate Son of God, who is fully God and fully human? It is at this point one can see more clearly where Wesley’s Christology began to shape his anthropology.

As Chapter Two demonstrated, Wesley described the image of God in Christ using the language of divine and human righteousness. Christ’s divine righteousness is associated with his divine nature.

His divine righteousness belongs to his divine nature, as he is ὃ ὅν, ‘He that existeth, over all, God, blessed for ever:’ the supreme, the eternal, ‘equal with the Father as touching his godhead, though inferior to the Father as touching his manhood’. Now this is his eternal, essential, immutable holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth: in all which ‘he and the Father are one.’

This divine righteousness is an aspect of his divinity, so it differs from the original righteousness that Adam enjoyed before the fall. It is peculiar to Christ, because only he is both fully God and fully human. This uniqueness is also demonstrated by Wesley’s description of Christ’s righteousness as ‘inferior to the Father as touching his manhood’. Though Christ is fully God, his divinity has not swallowed up his humanity; Christ is also fully human.

According to Wesley, the image of God was also stamped on Christ’s human nature. He referred to this as the internal human righteousness of Christ, saying, ‘His internal righteousness is the image of God stamped on every power and faculty of his soul. It is a copy of the divine righteousness, as far as it can be imparted to a human spirit.’ With this language Wesley maintained that Christ’s divine nature is the exact image of the Father, while acknowledging the insufficiency of the human nature to fully encompass the divine.

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417 Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:452.
418 Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:452.
3.3 Original Sin

One could summarize Wesley’s view of the *imago Dei* as the ideal – perfect nature of humanity, its disfigurement as the current state of unregenerate humankind, and its restoration as the goal of salvation. We have spoken generally of the fall and the qualitative change Wesley believed it rendered to the image of God in humanity. Now we shall turn to his view of original sin.

A preliminary observation about the place of the Doctrine of Original Sin within Wesley’s wider thought is in order. The importance of this doctrine for Wesley cannot be overstated. He defined it as the ‘very foundation of all revealed religion’ and regularly returned to its themes in his sermons and letters. Wesley’s longest theological treatise is a defence of the doctrine against Dr. John Taylor and the Rational Dissenters written in 1757, and demonstrates the relative weight of the subject within Wesley’s broader theological system. Original sin is intricately linked to Wesley’s understanding of divine grace, because it prevents humanity from pursuing what is good apart from that grace. He wrote of ‘man’, ‘His only hope is the free grace of God.’ Furthermore, Wesley regarded original sin as the reason for Christ’s coming.

Outler has shown that Wesley embraced a common view of the origins of evil informed by Hesiod, Plato, Tertullian, and others. Maddox has likewise pointed out that Wesley’s view of the effects of original sin echoes a Reformation theology of

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422 Wesley, ‘The Doctrine of Original Sin’ (BE) 12:293. Wesley referred to the fall as ‘the reason of Christ’s coming into the world.’ See also Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 31.
423 See Outler’s notes on Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:476.
total depravity. His approach was not innovative, so our approach will be to delineate which aspects of this common tradition are particular to Wesley.

3.3.1 The Source of Original Sin

It is important to clarify that Wesley did not view God as the author of evil and sin; rather both sin and subsequent evil originated with the devil.

‘How came evil into the world?’ It came from ‘Lucifer, son of the morning’: it was ‘the work of the devil’. ‘For the devil,’ saith the Apostle, ‘sinneth from the beginning;’ that is, was the first sinner of the universe; the author of sin; the first being who by the abuse of his liberty introduced evil into the creation.

It was Lucifer, then, who appeared to Adam and Eve as the serpent in the garden and presented them with an opportunity to choose evil over good. The devil was the ‘first sinner’ and duly influenced our first parents, but original sin, properly understood, does not refer to Lucifer’s prideful rebellion, but rather to Adam’s.

Wesley viewed humanity’s sin as a direct act of the human will in opposition to the will of God. Wilful disobedience, then, requires freedom of the will and also

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424 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 82.
425 Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:476. See also Wesley, ‘On the Fall of Man’ (BE) 2:401-2.
426 Wesley defined sin as ‘the wilfull transgression of a known law of God,’ (see Wesley, ‘On Obedience to Parents’ (BE), 3:372 and Wesley’s June 16, 1772 letter ‘To Mrs. Bennis’ in Telford, vol. 5) which does not include violations of the law due to infirmities or ignorance. It is noteworthy that by redefining sin in this way, Wesley equated Adam’s sin, which was committed when infirmity and ignorance did not exist, with the sins of humanity after the fall, when transgressions sometimes occur from these weaknesses; in all cases for which humans are morally culpable, sin is the enacted will of the individual or group in a way that violates the law and runs contrary to God’s will. In this way, Wesley preserved the notion that responsibility for sin rests
understanding of God’s law. The nature of Eve’s sin was unbelief, since ‘she gave more credit to the word of the devil than to the word of God.’ However, Eve’s sin was brought about by the serpent’s deception. Adam’s transgression was greater than Eve’s because he was not deceived. He ‘sinned with his eyes open,’ thereby openly rebelling against God and committing the sin of idolatry, by ‘loving the creature [Eve] more than the Creator.’

As Randy Maddox highlighted, Wesley’s main disagreement with Taylor concerned the inherited nature of original sin. Taylor maintained that physical death was the only consequence passed on to Adam’s progeny, while Wesley argued vehemently that spiritual death accompanied physical death for Adam’s offspring, as part of God’s judgment. As a representative of all humanity, Adam’s loss of the divine image affected all those he represented. Original sin was for Wesley, ‘the loathsome leprosy of sin, which he [humanity] brought with him from his mother's womb, which overspreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof.’

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427 Wesley, ‘On the Fall of Man’ (BE), 2:402-3; ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:477.
430 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 66-7. Collins here provides an excellent summary of Wesley’s view of Adam as a federal head and inherited guilt, even among infants. See also Wesley’s notes on Romans 5:12, 19 in ENNT.
431 Wesley, ‘Sermon on the Mount, I’ (BE), 1:477.
3.3.2 The Effects of Original Sin

We have already presented Wesley’s view concerning the effects of the Fall on the image of God in fallen humanity. Wesley also wrote about the manifest consequences of original sin for the lives of ‘natural man’. These consequences entail both personal and social dimensions in the present, as well as eternal repercussions for the soul.

a) Personal Consequences

Adam’s sin incurred immediate consequences, which Wesley summarized in his sermon, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’.

And ‘in that day’, yea, that moment, he ‘died’. The life of God was extinguished in his soul. The glory departed from him. He lost the whole moral image of God, righteousness and true holiness. He was unholy; he was unhappy; he was full of sin; full of guilt and tormenting fears. Being broke off from God, and looking upon him now as an angry Judge, ‘he was afraid.’ But how was his understanding darkened, to think he could ‘hide himself from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden’! Thus was his soul utterly dead to God! And in that day his body likewise began to die; became obnoxious to weakness, sickness, pain—all preparatory to the death of the body, which naturally led to eternal death.\(^\text{432}\)

These consequences, passed on to Adam’s offspring, were a loss of holiness and happiness, a propensity to sin, fear, a ‘darkened understanding’, and physical weakness, sickness, pain, and ultimately death. In essence, there is no part of Adam’s existence that was not touched by his sin; likewise original sin touches every life aspect of those born in Adam’s line.

\(^\text{432}\) Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 2:477.
b) Societal Consequences

The personal dimension of original sin cannot help but affect community as well. In Part I of his treatise on *The Doctrine of Original Sin* Wesley presented evidence for the existence of original sin and its effects on society, by recounting a short history of the world and observations about human nature, civilization, and war from scripture and literature. Wesley demonstrated that virtue and wisdom are elusive traits that seldom go unpunished by evil men, and, even at their best, fall far short of God’s moral standard. Furthermore, ordinary persons rarely even live up to that insufficient standard of morality. His conclusion was that there exists no society on earth, which is not consumed by wickedness. The result of this reality is universal misery.\(^{433}\) Universal misery is at once a consequence and a proof of this universal corruption. Men are unhappy (How very few are the exceptions!) because they are unholy.\(^{434}\)

Even acts deemed ‘good’ by objective moral standards are considered sinful by Wesley, when performed by one who is separated from God by sin. As Colin Williams correctly stated, 'It is the relationship with God which is determinative. Anything which is not of faith is sin, so that even morally good acts, performed by the sinful man, are sinful.'\(^{435}\) Therefore, every society is filled with sin, which ultimately leads to misery.

c) Eternal Consequences

The spiritual death that Wesley associated with original sin stems from inherited guilt, which separates humanity from a right relationship with God. As

\(^{435}\) Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 49.
Collins pointed out, this guilt extends to all of Adam’s heirs—even to infants.\(^{436}\) All humans are then deserving of God’s wrath and punishment, because of Adam’s sin.

Lindström argued that Wesley maintained an orthodox view of original sin as it relates to punishment in the form of spiritual and physical death, yet diverged from orthodoxy with the view that, although subject to the punishment for original sin, humanity has been absolved of the guilt of original sin as a result of the atonement, and is not damned by this evidence alone.\(^{437}\) Wesley made clear his view that all of Adam’s race are born to sin and are deserving of its penalty.

The Scripture avers that ‘by one man’s disobedience all men were constituted sinners’; that ‘in Adam all died’, spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God; that fallen, sinful Adam then ‘begot a son in his own likeness’; nor was it possible he should beget him in any other, for ‘who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?’ That consequently we, as well as other men, ‘were by nature’ ‘dead in trespasses and sins’, ‘without hope, without God in the world’, and therefore ‘children of wrath’; that every man may say ‘I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me;’ that ‘there is no difference, in that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,’ of that glorious image of God wherein man was originally created.\(^{438}\)

However, Wesley did not believe that any person is subject to reprobation because of original sin; rather ‘they are so for their own outward and inward sins, which through their own fault spring from the infection of their nature.’\(^{439}\) Each person incurs guilt for his or her own sins, but has been absolved of the guilt of Adam’s sin through the work of Christ in the atonement. ‘That text, “As by one man’s disobedience all men were made sinners, so by the obedience of One, all were made righteous,” we conceive means, by the merits of Christ, all men are cleared from the guilt of Adam’s


\(^{438}\) Wesley, ‘Original Sin’ (BE), 2:173.

This represents Wesley’s clear understanding of the universal atonement grounded upon the person and work of Christ, which shaped his doctrine of Original Sin.

3.3.3 Christ and Original Sin

Adam sinned in spite of the image of God stamped on his soul, but Christ persevered in righteousness. As we showed previously, Wesley viewed the internal righteousness of Christ as the image of God imprinted on his human nature. However, unlike Adam, Christ exhibited continued external righteousness, which Wesley understood as both active and passive obedience. Wesley described Christ’s active righteousness, saying,

It was the least part of his external righteousness that he did nothing amiss; that he knew no outward sin of any kind, ‘neither was guile found in his mouth’; that he never spoke one improper word, nor did one improper action. Thus far it is only a negative righteousness . . . But even his outward righteousness was positive too . . . In the whole course of his life he did the will of God on earth as the angels do it in heaven. The whole and every part of his obedience was complete.\(^{441}\)

For Wesley, the active righteousness of Christ is the expression of the image of God stamped on his human nature. Wesley considered active obedience the lesser obedience; even so, Adam failed to live it out himself. Wesley viewed Christ’s passive obedience as an even greater expression of the image of God. He wrote, ‘But his [Christ’s] obedience implied more than all this. It implied not only the doing, but

\(^{440}\) Wesley, Minutes (Jackson), 9:277.

\(^{441}\) Wesley, ‘The Lord Our Righteousness’ (BE), 1:453.
suffering: suffering the whole will of God from the time he came into the world till “he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree . . .”.  

According to Wesley, Adam rejected the image of God stamped on his soul, was disobedient, and committed sin, but Christ embraced the image of God stamped on his soul, was actively and passively obedient to the Father, and overcame sin. This contrast between Adam and Christ demonstrates a connection between Wesley’s doctrine of original sin and his Christology, but it is a loose connection at best. Wesley’s doctrine of original sin would have been incomplete without reference to the new Adam, but his understanding of Christ’s righteousness and the image of God seems as much informed by his doctrine of humanity as the other way around. Both his views of original sin and Christ’s righteousness are closely tied to the inherited theology he received from his upbringing and theological tradition, and they do not show the nuanced approach that one finds in other areas of his thought.

3.4 Restoration: ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’

Albert Outler noted in his preface to John Wesley’s sermon ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ that 1 John 3:8 held a place of particular importance in Wesley’s preaching from 1742 to 1789. He regularly returned to the problem of moral evil, and Christ as the solution, during those years. As we discussed previously, moral evil stems from the loss of the moral image of God, which occurred as a consequence of

443 Noble has argued in Holy Trinity: Holy People, 134-7 that Wesley connected the atonement with justification (pardon for acts of sin), but did not really connect the atonement with sanctification, particularly with the cleansing from ‘inbred sin’.
444 Outler, Intro (BE) 2:471. Outler has revealed out that Wesley reportedly preached on 1 John 3:8 twenty-seven times from 1742 to 1789, and that these sermons were spread out fairly evenly over those years.
Adam’s sin. Therefore, any solution to the problem must necessarily include restoration of the image that has been lost. But that cannot be accomplished as long as the ‘works of the devil’ (i.e., sin and its fruit) remain.

3.4.1 The Image of God Restored

The central focus of Wesley’s theology is the ongoing restoration of the divine image in humanity, predicated upon Christ’s atoning work on the cross, and including a cooperative human response to the free grace of God, through faith. We have referred to this more broadly as the work that Christ does for us, and will explore this theme in the following chapter.445

As Maddox noted, Wesley’s affirmation of total depravity left him in a theological bind.446 How could fallen humanity, totally stripped of any ability to respond to God, possibly be restored without affirming the doctrine of unconditional election and limited atonement? In other words, how could Wesley maintain a balance between depravity and the need for a human response to God’s grace? Prevenient grace, which Wesley described as the grace that goes before us, met this need by partially restoring the lost image of God, and enabling humanity to respond to God’s saving work through faith. This is the first step of salvation, offered universally and prior to justification.

Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) ‘preventing grace’; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight, transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life, some degree of

445 This discussion includes Wesley’s understanding of grace as both free and co-operant.
446 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 83.
salvation, the beginning of deliverance...Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation, whereby ‘through grace’ we ‘are saved by faith’, consisting of these two grand branches, justification and sanctification.447

Collins has shown that Wesley identified five chief benefits conveyed to humanity by prevenient grace.448 The first benefit is a restoration of the basic knowledge of God and his attributes. The second is a reinscription of God’s law on human hearts, which gives humanity a basic understanding of right and wrong. Third, prevenient grace acts as mankind’s inner judge and conscience. Fourth, a measure of free will is bestowed upon humanity, allowing them to respond to God’s grace with faith. And finally, humanity’s limited knowledge of God, the reinscription of the law upon their hearts, the guiding presence of conscience, and some degree of free will naturally lead to a partial restraint of wickedness in the world.

A sixth benefit of prevenient grace exists for Adam’s offspring, namely the remission of the guilt, though not the presence, of original sin. Wesley’s understanding about the means by which Christ’s atoning work is applied to the lives of individuals will illustrate this sixth benefit. Though he nowhere developed this aspect of his theology in detail, Wesley indicated a view of baptism, which reveals both his doctrinal heritage and his commitment to the prevenient grace of God at work in people’s lives prior to repentance, justification, and new birth.

In his journal entry for May 24, 1738, Wesley provided a short spiritual autobiography in which he made an observation about the state of his soul as a boy. ‘I believe, till I was about ten years old I had not sinned away that ‘washing of the Holy

448 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 77-80.
Ghost’ which was given me in baptism.\textsuperscript{449} The prevailing practice of Wesley’s day was to baptize infants, with the understanding that the water of baptism effected the removal of original guilt from the child, and he clearly understood this to be his own experience. This fits well with Wesley’s previously mentioned statements about total depravity and the reprobation of infants (or lack thereof). While all people share in Adam’s guilt from birth and inherit a sinful nature, by ‘the merits of Christ, all men are cleared from the guilt of Adam’s actual sin.’\textsuperscript{450} Wesley was never quite clear about the relationship between baptism and the remission of original sin, neither was he clear about how the unbaptized experience God’s grace to overcome original sin.

All six of these benefits, taken together, form the beginning of the restoration of the divine image in humanity. They rest firmly on Wesley’s doctrine of grace, and mark the entrance to the path of salvation for those who receive God’s grace, through faith.

3.4.2 The Works of the Devil Destroyed

If restoration of the divine image is the goal of salvation, then the initiation provided by prevenient grace is not sufficient on its own. Only a full and complete restoration will fit the bill. But, in order for that renewal to occur, Wesley believed the ‘works and fruits’ of the devil must be utterly destroyed in people’s lives. And this is the ultimate ‘end of Christ’s coming.’\textsuperscript{451}

\textsuperscript{449} Wesley, \textit{Journals and Diaries I} (BE), 18:242-3.
\textsuperscript{450} Wesley, \textit{Minutes} (Jackson), 9:277. See also ‘Article IX’ of the \textit{Articles}.
\textsuperscript{451} Chapter 5 explores this theme of restoration more fully in the discussion about Wesley’s doctrine of Christian Perfection.
What I understand from the whole tenor of Scripture is that the eternal, almighty Son of God, ‘who is over all, God, blessed forever’, having reconciled us to God by his blood, creates us anew by his Spirit, and reigns till he hath destroyed all the works of the devil.\textsuperscript{452}

This is the work that Christ does \textit{in us}, and it includes the complete eradication of sin and the introduction of holy love in the life of the believer. This concept finds its fuller expression in Wesley’s doctrines of justification and sanctification, which we will explore in later chapters, but it has bearing for his anthropology as well.

Wesley was, in many ways, a product of his doctrinal heritage as a Church of England clergyman. However, he was unafraid to diverge from tradition when he felt it rested upon shaky theological ground. One such divergence is noteworthy for the present topic. According to the Articles of the Church of England, original sin carries a life-long consequence, even for regenerate people.

\begin{quote}
And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek, \textit{phronema sarkos}, which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.\textsuperscript{453}
\end{quote}

Wesley appears to have disagreed, at least in part, with this interpretation, presumably because it cuts at the root of what he believed to be the full purpose of the atonement—the eradication of sin and the corrupted nature. According to the language of the article, the desire of the flesh will remain, even in regenerate believers, though they remain pardoned for it, because of the effects of original sin. This did not sit well with Wesley’s belief that Christ came to eradicate all the works

\textsuperscript{452} Wesley, ‘The Doctrine of Original Sin’ (BE), 12:219.
\textsuperscript{453} Article IX.
of the devil, including sinful lust. When he published his Sunday Service, Wesley removed this language, indicating his view that God works to sanctify even the affections of believers.\textsuperscript{454} The state of ‘natural man’ need not be the continued state of those who are found to be in Christ, for Christ came to abolish these works by striking at the root, the ‘sinful nature’.

It should be noted that when Wesley spoke about the eradication of the devil’s works and the effects of original sin, he was primarily speaking about the restoration of the moral image. He understood that some effects of the Fall remain, even for the regenerate, until death.

But it may be observed that the Son of God does not destroy the whole work of the devil in man, as long as he remains in this life. He does not destroy the bodily weakness, sickness, pain, and a thousand infirmities incident to flesh and blood. He does not destroy all the weakness of understanding which is the natural consequence of the soul’s dwelling in a corruptible body.\textsuperscript{455}

Yet, Christ’s final victory—complete eradication of the devil’s works and a full restoration of the divine image—will come through physical death, so that even the curse of sin will be transformed into God’s blessing for humanity. ‘Then error, pain, and all bodily infirmities cease: all these are destroyed by death. And death itself, ‘the

\textsuperscript{454} Article IX of the Thirty-nine Articles reads as follows: ‘Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is ingendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek, phronema sarkos, which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.’ In Article VII of his Twenty-four Articles, Wesley removed all of the text after the phrase ‘is of his own nature inclined to evil’ and simply added ‘and that continually’.

\textsuperscript{455} Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 482.
last enemy’ of man, shall be destroyed at the resurrection,’ so that when ‘this corruptible body shall put on incorruption,’ the work of Christ will be fully realized through the destruction of ‘this last work of the devil.’\textsuperscript{456}

3.5 Conclusion

It is the burden of this study to determine to what extent Wesley’s theology arose out of, or was shaped by, his new focus on salvation through ‘Christ alone’. This is no simple task, when talking about the naturally anthropocentric doctrine of humanity. Yet the question remains, was Wesley’s doctrine of humanity significantly tied to his emphasis upon salvation in Christ alone?

There is a surprising continuity between Wesley’s early and late thought. One might expect to find significant development in a theme, which held such central importance for so many years. However, while Wesley’s manner of conveying his doctrine of humanity took various forms, the content remained largely the same. Wesley’s doctrine of humanity pivots on his theology of the three-fold divine image imparted to Adam and Eve at creation. The fall is described foremost as a loss of this image, as a penalty for wilful disobedience. His doctrine of original sin describes the consequences of the fall for humanity, while also expressing his understanding of how the sinful nature passed from Adam to his descendants. Christ’s atoning work, while offering a complete answer to the fall, is always presented as subsequent to the problem of sin. Given this, one could argue that Wesley’s approach is not centred on Christ, because it predicates God’s response upon Adam’s lawless actions. In other words, Christ’s coming is a response to original sin, without which his sacrifice would

\textsuperscript{456}Wesley, ‘The End of Christ’s Coming’ (BE), 482.
not have been necessary. In a very real sense, then, Wesley began with the problem in creation and moved toward the divine solution, rather than starting with the attributes of a holy and just God and moving toward the rebellion of Adam against his holiness and justice.

Such an analysis, however, would miss a critical component of Wesley’s doctrine; that is, the blessings of God in Christ, which could only be found through the curse. Wesley considered this idea ‘a truth of the deepest importance’ and expressed his surprise that so little had been written concerning it.\textsuperscript{457} Even so, Wesley believed that God’s greatest desires for humanity, ‘being more holy and happy on earth’ and ‘being more happy in heaven’ could not have been realized, had Adam never sinned. Indeed, ‘For if Adam had not fallen Christ had not died.’\textsuperscript{458} Though Wesley was careful to ascribe the authorship of sin and evil to the devil, as we argued previously, this idea of a greater blessing being made available through Adam’s curse pulls the focus of Wesley’s doctrine of humanity back around toward Christ and his work. By doing so, the central character and action of Wesley’s doctrine ceased to be Adam and sin, and instead became Christ and his atonement. The atonement is no longer just a response to sin, but also an expression of divine love enacted before the offence was given.

With this shift in focus from Adam to Christ, Wesley’s theology takes on a new framework in which the doctrine of humanity provides a full explanation of humanity’s origin, the problem of sin, and God’s loving response that can only be rightly understood in the light of God’s higher purposes for humanity. Purposes which, far from being derailed by sin and death, find their greatest possible fulfilment

\textsuperscript{457} Wesley, ‘God’s Love to Fallen Man’ (BE), 424.  
\textsuperscript{458} Wesley, ‘God’s Love to Fallen Man’ (BE), 425.
through the brokenness of humanity and the resulting need for Christ. Ultimately, what this means is that Wesley’s doctrine of humanity can be understood more fully in the light of his doctrine of salvation in Christ alone, even though his doctrine of salvation in Christ alone did not significantly alter the content of his doctrine of humanity.
Chapter 4 - Christ Working for Us

4.1 Introduction

Studies of Wesley’s soteriology have long attempted to organize various tenets in a strictly linear fashion. While technically accurate, this method sometimes misses out on the dynamic interplay of different aspects of his theology with one another. Kenneth Collins has helpfully offered some other categories which, rather than focusing on the order of events, instead attempt to group doctrines according to their orienting concern.459

Following Collins’ lead, this chapter will evaluate the aspects of Wesley’s theology related most closely to justification as an orienting concern. These elements, taken together, represent the work of Christ for us. The goal of this chapter, then, is to consider to what extent these aspects of Wesley’s theology arose out of or were shaped by his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ. In the next and final chapter, we will consider those doctrines most closely related to sanctification as an orienting concern, which represent the work that Christ does in us.

4.2 Grace

The primary task of this study is to discern the relationship of Wesley’s broader theology to his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ. In considering Wesley’s theology of grace, we must examine both the character of grace and the relationship between grace and the human response of faith.

459 See Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*. 
Wesley’s theology of grace underwent considerable change after his 1738 evangelical conversion. What had been an abstract concept for Wesley prior to Aldersgate became personalized through his experience. Grace was no longer simply the favour of God bestowed upon creation generally or earned through the merit of the devotee to the commands of scripture; Wesley now understood grace to be God’s unmerited favour poured out on him specifically, through no merit of his own, but as a free gift of God grounded upon the merits of Christ alone.\(^{460}\) Even more specifically, the grace of God which saves is the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ.\(^{461}\) Wesley captured his new understanding with his reflection that ‘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.’\(^{462}\) This free grace both precedes and enables the human, and personal, response of faith.

Yet, despite his newfound emphasis on the grace of God extended to humanity apart from humanity’s work or merit, Wesley continued to emphasize that grace demands a human response. ‘God worketh in you; therefore work...’\(^{463}\) The preeminent response to grace is faith, expressed in repentance and leading to justification, and then working itself out privately and communally through obedience

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\(^{460}\) Wesley, *ENNT*, Romans 1:7. Wesley captured the particularity of grace in his comments on the book of Romans, where he described grace as ‘the peculiar favour of God.’ See also Wesley's clarification in his comments on Romans 6:14 that grace is the mercy of God which grants victory over sin to those who are under the influence of the spirit of Christ. The full power of grace, then, is predicated upon the person and work of Christ.

\(^{461}\) Wesley, *ENNT*, 2 Corinthians 13:13. Wesley was equally comfortable speaking of grace as the favour of God (generally) and the favour of Jesus Christ (specifically) indicating that he viewed grace as a Trinitarian work, specifically manifest in and through Christ.

\(^{462}\) Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:250. With this statement, Wesley confirmed that he had received the answer to his ‘continual prayer for this very thing, 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.’ *Journal* (BE), 18:248-9.

\(^{463}\) Wesley, ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’ (BE), 3:208
and good works. But always Wesley emphasized that it is God alone who saves, not because of our works, but in spite of them.

Scholars have tended to examine Wesley’s understanding of grace within the context of the *ordo salutis*, emphasizing the particular aspect of grace, which enables each successive movement of the faithful toward God. Colin Williams, for example, noted the necessity of separating doctrines from one another for the sake of a more systematic examination.\(^{464}\) While it is no doubt helpful for gaining a thorough understanding of Wesley’s thought, this approach has sometimes led to a modal description of grace (albeit using Wesley’s own descriptive terms such as prevenient, convincing, justifying, and regenerating), which suggests that grace comes in different ways at different times, and which does not always capture the overarching reality that these varied aspects of grace are really just different ways of describing the same gift of God. More recent scholarship has addressed this weakness by highlighting an overarching two-fold nature of Wesley’s understanding of grace as both co-operant and free within this context, demonstrating Wesley’s fluid and holistic understanding of grace in the midst of an otherwise linear framework.\(^{465}\) With the understanding that all aspects of grace point to the same divine gift, then, it remains for us to ask in what sense is grace co-operant and in what sense is grace free?

\(^{464}\) Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today*, 39.

\(^{465}\) Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today* represents a good example of the traditional approach to Wesley, which examines grace linearly according to the *ordo salutis*, while K. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, and R. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, represent the more recent scholarship which emphasizes the two-fold nature of grace, which appears throughout Wesley’s *ordo*. 
4.2.1 Co-operant Grace

Wesley understood grace as co-operant in the sense that grace evokes a human response, when it is received by faith. Grace, then, is the activity of God on behalf of humanity, which nevertheless requires a human response to be fully realized in the life of the individual and community. It is a free gift of God, but a gift which must be received in order for its full benefits to be realized.

As Maddox has noted, Wesley’s sermon on Philippians 2:12-13 ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’ contains the clearest exposition of this understanding of co-operant grace. In his introduction to the sermon in the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley’s works Albert Outler concluded that, while the date of this sermon manuscript is uncertain and Wesley preached on the text just five times that we can be sure of, still it “must be considered as a landmark sermon, for it stands as the late Wesley’s most complete and careful exposition of the mystery of divine-human interaction.” We cannot know from available sources whether the content of Wesley’s preaching varied from his first sermon on this Biblical text in 1732 and the publication of ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’ in 1785, but we may consider this late sermon as representative of his mature thought on the matter.

Wesley began his exposition of co-operant grace by underscoring that all human will and action that could be called faithful has its source in the divine initiative and will. Humanity cannot act independently of God's enabling presence.

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466 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 19. Maddox has termed this ‘responsible grace’ in order to describe his view of a two-fold ‘orienting concern’ in Wesley’s theology: ‘without grace, we cannot be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God’s grace will not save.’ Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 155-6 has referred to this understanding of grace as a ‘Catholic emphasis’ and has noted that for Wesley any human response rests upon the grounds of the prevenient activity of God.

467 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 147.
468 Outler, Intro (BE), 3:199.
Wesley’s concern here was to make clear that humanity has no room for boasting in any good work, nor does any act of the human will lead to a divine response; rather, God’s ‘motive to work lay wholly in himself’.\(^{469}\) He went on to say that it is by this motive alone that God works both inward and outward holiness, what he called the ‘proper Christian salvation,’ which entails both instantaneous and gradual salvation, ‘consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification.’\(^{470}\) By locating the source of co-operant grace in the divine will and initiative Wesley avoided the Pelagianism with which he was sometimes labeled. He placed due emphasis on the divine initiative of prevenient grace at work in the lives of individuals before any movement toward God is possible, and continued his emphasis on divine initiative at each stage in the order of salvation.

After thoroughly establishing that salvation is the work of God alone, Wesley then asked the question, ‘But how are we to "work out" this salvation?’\(^{471}\) In other words, how can one understand grace as co-operant, when God alone initiates and enables any human response? As we have seen so often already, Wesley broke down his answer into two parts.

First, grace is co-operant in that God’s work creates an opportunity for human response.\(^{472}\) Though all persons are sinful by nature and unable to leave the life of sin unattended, still all persons are imbued with conscience, a sense of right and wrong. According to Wesley, this conscience is not a natural phenomenon; rather it is God’s preventing (or prevenient) grace working to enable humanity to respond to God in

\(^{471}\) Wesley, ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’ (BE), 3:204.
faith and to convict humanity of actions which violate that conscience. Because of prevenient grace, each person is responsible for his or her sin. ‘[N]o man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.’ Even though many will choose to act in violation of conscience and continue to sin, still God’s grace has made it possible for all people to respond to God in faith, should they so choose.

Secondly, grace is co-operant in that God’s work creates an imperative for ongoing human response. As we have already noted, salvation for Wesley was both instantaneous (justification) and gradual (sanctification). Quoting St. Augustine, Wesley argued that the gradual nature of salvation requires a continual cooperation with God to use the grace that he continually bestows. Wesley wrote, ‘Even St. Augustine . . . makes that just remark, “he that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves.”’ Human co-operant responsibility does not end with belief, but continues in daily subduing the desires of the flesh and seeking to live in faithful obedience. Without this ongoing cooperation, Wesley doubted the final salvation of those who have called on the Lord for their justification.

He will not save us unless we ‘save ourselves from this untoward generation’; unless we ourselves ‘fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life’; unless we ‘agonize to enter in at the straight gate,’ ‘deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily’, and labour, by every possible means, to ‘make known our own calling and election sure.’

Still, this is only possible through God’s grace, not human effort. It is God who works to bring about the gradual sanctification of the individual, but only with the

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473 See the previous chapter ‘Christ and Humanity’ for a brief discussion of preventing (or prevenient) grace.
475 Wesley, ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’ (BE), 3:208. ‘He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves.’
476 Wesley, ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’ (BE), 3:208. See Outler’s note concerning this quote for further information on its source.
cooperation of the believer. For this reason Wesley encouraged the reader to ‘Go on, in virtue of the grace of God preventing, accompanying, and following you, in "the work of faith, in the patience of hope, and in the labour of love."'.

The co-operant nature of grace, then, is such that it not only enables human response, but also commands it. Or, as Wesley said, ‘God works; therefore you can work; God works, therefore you must work.’ This cooperation is always initiated by God and based upon his work in the lives of persons, while maintaining human responsibility.

4.2.2 Free Grace

Wesley, secondly, understood grace as free in the sense that it is given by God in spite of humanity’s unworthiness. It is not based on any human merit, but solely upon the merits of Christ and the character of God. God’s grace is also freely offered to all, without reservation, for to restrict the gift would be to dismantle the gospel. These ideas were best captured in Wesley’s sermon ‘Free Grace’.

‘Free Grace’ was published in 1739 and went through ten or eleven revisions before it was included in his Works. Wesley never included this sermon in his SOSO collections, perhaps because of its controversial nature. However, he continued to republish the text as a separate sermon. Wesley softened in his polemical stance against the Calvinists in later years, but he persisted in his view of grace as free in every sense laid out in this sermon. Its first appearance so soon after Aldersgate may suggest Wesley’s sensitivity to his own attempts to earn God’s grace prior to 1738 and his desire to keep others from the same.

480 Outler, Intro (BE), 3:542-3.
‘Free Grace’ begins with a declaration of Wesley’s purpose to convince the reader that ‘The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all.’\textsuperscript{481} It is first ‘free in all to whom it is given’, by which Wesley meant that God does not extend his grace to individuals based on any merit of their own, not by good deeds or ‘good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions.’\textsuperscript{482} In fact, Wesley argued that these things cannot exist without God’s grace making a way. Good works and holy tempers ‘are the streams only, not the fountain.’\textsuperscript{483} These flow out of God’s grace, and cannot precede the gift. And this gift of free grace flows out of the character of God,’ who freely gave us his own Son, and "with him freely giveth us all things".\textsuperscript{484} This first part of Wesley’s definition of grace concerns its source.

Grace has no grounding in the human will or actions, but originates with God alone as a free gift offered to all persons.

The Calvinists could agree with the first part of Wesley’s definition, since it holds true to the doctrine of original sin and the total depravity of fallen humans. Wesley assumed this agreement in asking the question which lays out the second part of his definition of grace. ‘But is it free for all, as well as in all?’\textsuperscript{485} This aspect of Wesley’s definition of grace concerns its scope, and it is tied closely to his understanding of the Atonement as universally efficacious, and yet not universally received or applied. It is here that Wesley and the Calvinists diverged.

Wesley proceeded to attack the doctrine of predestination as incompatible with the revelation of God in scripture on the grounds that it makes void the ordinance of God to preach, that it ‘tends to destroy that holiness which is the end of all the

\textsuperscript{481} Wesley, ‘Free Grace’ (BE), 3:544. Emphasis mine.
\textsuperscript{482} Wesley, ‘Free Grace’ (BE), 3:545.
\textsuperscript{483} Wesley, ‘Free Grace’ (BE), 3:545.
\textsuperscript{484} Wesley, ‘Free Grace’ (BE), 3:545; CF. Romans 8:32.
\textsuperscript{485} Wesley, ‘Free Grace’ (BE), 3:545.
ordinances of God,’ that it steals away the happiness of Christianity which is
grounded upon the ‘full assurance of faith’ given by the Holy Spirit, that it destroys
zeal for good works, and that it has a ‘direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the
whole Christian revelation’ by making the gospel unnecessary, and therefore
untrue.\footnote{486 Wesley, ‘Free Grace’ (BE), 3:548-51.}

While the strength of Wesley’s arguments can be disputed, his zeal cannot be
overstated. For Wesley, the doctrine of predestination or was not a matter of simple
disagreement, but one of first importance. He felt it slandered the very character of
Christ.

[Let it be observed that this doctrine represents our Blessed Lord--’Jesus
Christ the righteous’, ‘the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and
truth’--as an hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common
sincerity...You represent him as mocking his helpless creatures by offering
what he never intends to give.\footnote{487 Wesley, 'Free Grace' (BE), 3:554-5.}

Wesley’s definition of grace as ‘free for all’ was predicated on his deep conviction
that the God who freely gave his Son for the redemption of humanity has freely
extended his grace to all who will receive it by faith. To undercut this understanding
of grace as free would be to destroy the foundation upon which the gospel rests.

4.2.3 Co-operant and Free

Just as Wesley himself was a conjunctive theologian, the most robust
exposition of Wesley’s theology holds the co-operant and free aspects of grace in
dynamic tension. Grace is free \textit{in all} because it has been given by the God who freely
offered his Son for the sake of the lost, without any reference to the worthiness of its
recipients. Grace is free \textit{for all} because the effects of the Atonement are universal in
scope, offered as a free gift to all people. Grace is free, because it is without cost to the one who receives it by faith. It is costly, because it is predicated on the merit of Christ’s sacrifice for fallen humanity. This costly yet free grace is also co-operative, because it is a gift of God, which must be received in order for its full benefits to become realized. Though it is universally given it is not universally applied, because this would violate individual free will. Grace is freely offered and must be freely received.

4.2.4 Co-operative and Free, but Christological?

Wesley’s mature understanding of grace was that it is both co-operative and the free gift of God, but in what sense, if any, was this understanding related to his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ?

As indicated above, Wesley spoke of grace generally as the favour of God given to undeserving humanity. However, he also particularized his definition at times by referring to grace as the favour of the Lord Jesus Christ. Free grace is predicated upon the person and work of Christ alone, yet its full power rests in its acceptance as the only road to the Father and its adoption as the power of the Spirit of Christ in the life of the believer.

Likewise, at the close of his sermon, ‘On Working Out Our Own Salvation’,
Wesley tied the co-operative nature of grace back to Christ. In the first place, co-operative grace is predicated upon, and directed toward, the posture of Christ, which is ‘the greatest instance both of humiliation and obedience.’488 Though he did not explicitly draw it out here, the implication of this emphasis for Wesley’s theology is that Christ is viewed as both foundation and exemplar; his sacrifice provided the

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grounds for free grace and also stands as the ultimate example of co-operant grace fully embraced. Secondly, the God who enables and compels humanity to respond to him in faith is no other than ‘the great Shepherd of the sheep...Jesus’ who works to ‘make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you what is well-pleasing in his sight.’

God’s grace is bestowed according to Christ’s merit alone, and it is Christ himself who enacts his will in the lives of those who respond to God in faith.

In this way, Wesley held together in dynamic tension the understanding that grace is both free and co-operant, and in both senses is centred upon Christ alone. Grace is, in fact, ‘the free love of God in Christ Jesus’ which grants ‘redemption from the guilt and power of sin, through his blood’ to all those who receive this gift in faith.

4.3 Stages of Faith

In chapter two we considered at length Wesley’s changing understanding of the nature of faith, concluding that Wesley viewed faith as a normative epistemological authority, which is to say that without faith a true knowledge of God cannot exist. The true knowledge of God finds its fullest expression in saving faith, through which the believer is justified, but for Wesley any knowledge of God that is genuine must be understood according to faith. So, while saving (or justifying) faith is expressly concerned with faith in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins, any movement toward God as a response to God’s grace is still, in some sense, an expression of faith. In order to understand Wesley’s soteriology, then, we must also

consider the various ways faith operates in the life of the individual. Wesley’s sermon, ‘The Almost Christian’ offers a good summary of his views of the degrees of faith, leading up to and including that ‘right living faith’ which saves.\textsuperscript{491}

It is important to recognize that, for Wesley, there was no faith apart from God’s grace. Even the earliest overtures of the human heart, directed toward God, are only possible because God has made them possible through his prevenient grace. As we argued in chapter four, humanity is incapable of responding apart from God’s gracious activity, which has restored part of the divine image in fallen humanity. Therefore, Wesley was able to consistently emphasize both divine initiative and human responsibility in his soteriology.

4.3.1 Faith of a Heathen

Wesley began his discourse in ‘The Almost Christian’ by describing the one who has had his or her heart awakened by God’s prevenient grace and has begun to recognize right from wrong. Wesley called this ‘heathen honesty’, which might be better understood as conscience.\textsuperscript{492} It is heathen honesty which leads the common person to obey the basic rules of society, such as refraining from theft, dishonesty, and oppression of others. But it is also proactive, in the sense that heathen honesty leads a person to consider how to help others, in the same way they hope others will help them as needed.

\textsuperscript{491} Wesley, ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE), 1:138. Wesley was remarkably consistent in his views on the stages of faith between this 1741 sermon and his 1788 sermon, ‘On Faith’ (BE), 3:492ff. In the later sermon, Wesley built upon his earlier work and applied his broader stages of faith to particular groups of people, but his conclusions remained the same.

\textsuperscript{492} Wesley, ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE), 1:131. Outler noted that Wesley probably had in mind the classical sense of ‘honesty’ as honour or self-discipline. It is our judgment that ‘conscience’ fits Wesley’s meaning here more fully, as a product of God’s prevenient grace at work in preparing the heart of the individual for response to God.
They expect whatever assistance anyone could give another without prejudice to himself. And this they extend, not only to those little offices of humanity which are performed without any expense or labour, but likewise to the feeding the hungry if they had food to spare, with clothing the naked with their own superfluous raiment, and in general the giving to any that needed such things as they needed not themselves.\textsuperscript{493}

It is important here to note a distinction between this heathen honesty and true virtue. Heathen honesty may lead a person to assist another out of abundance, but it does not do so out of sacrifice or obedience. Wesley argued elsewhere that virtue is the natural outworking of Christianity, the ‘beauty of holiness’.\textsuperscript{494} It is a light which points those of heathen honesty toward God, but must arise itself out of ‘the heart which is renewed in the image of God.’\textsuperscript{495} Heathen honesty may move a person to consider the benefit of helping another out of abundance, so one might receive aid in return. But virtue is the product of a living faith at work in the life of the believer. It is the passing on of grace received. ‘It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself on every side, to all those among whom are you.’\textsuperscript{496} The faith of a heathen, then, is identified as the recognition of right and wrong illuminated by prevenient grace, and the first attempts by an individual to act according to what is right.

4.3.2 Faith of a Servant

According to Wesley, the faith of a servant is one step beyond heathen honesty in the human response to God’s grace.\textsuperscript{497} The characteristic that most

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  \item \textsuperscript{493} Wesley, ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE), 1:132.
  \item \textsuperscript{494} Wesley, ‘Upon Our Lord’s Sermon On The Mount IV’ (BE), 1:531ff.
  \item \textsuperscript{495} Wesley, ‘Upon Our Lord’s Sermon On The Mount IV’ (BE), 1:531.
  \item \textsuperscript{496} Wesley, ‘Upon Our Lord’s Sermon On The Mount IV’ (BE), 1:537.
  \item \textsuperscript{497} Wesley did not use the phrase ‘faith of a servant’ in his sermon ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE), 1:131ff, but he used it to describe the same condition of a person who both fears punishment (heathen honesty) and seeks to serve God in his sermon ‘On
\end{itemize}
identifies a servant is obedience to a master. Therefore, a servant ‘does nothing which the gospel forbids.’ For the ‘almost Christian’ this produces an outward adherence to the commandments of God, or what Wesley called the ‘form of godliness’, referencing 2 Timothy 3:5. The servant of God who acts obediently abstains outwardly from all wicked pursuits and works to live by God’s commandments. This includes God’s positive command to love others. In addition to avoiding evil the servant of God does good, even at great personal sacrifice. ‘And in doing good he does not confine himself to cheap and easy offices of kindness, but labours and suffers for the profit of many, that by all means he might help some.’ For Wesley, ‘doing good’ implies both works of mercy and evangelism. The servant of God who has the form of godliness attends to the physical and spiritual needs of others.

The faith that leads to a form of godliness also lends itself to the practices of personal piety. ‘He that hath the form of godliness uses also the means of grace; yea, all of them, and at all opportunities.’ The practice of piety also includes the serious participation in regular corporate worship, as well as private and family prayer. This person truly recognizes his or her own sinfulness, and expresses devotion to God in all things.

One further thing marked the faith of a servant as distinct from heathen honesty: sincerity. Wesley defined sincerity as ‘a real, inward principle of religion

the Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:35: ‘The faith of a servant implies a divine evidence of the invisible and the eternal world; yea, and an evidence of the spiritual world, so far as it can exist without living experience. Whoever has attained this, the faith of a servant, "feareth God and escheweth evil;" or, as it is expressed by St. Peter, "feareth God and worketh righteousness." This definition of the faith of a servant is consistent with his description of the faith exhibited by one who has only ‘the form of godliness’ but not the power. It is also the term he used to describe his own faith just prior to 24 May 1738, as noted in Chapter 1.

from whence these outward actions flow.\textsuperscript{501} Sincerity is more than simple fear of punishment, which is a motivation even for the heathen; it is more particularly ‘a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will’.\textsuperscript{502} Sincerity is the principle which drives all outward obedience to God’s will.

Anticipating serious objections to his insistence that all these things amount to a person being only ‘almost a Christian’, Wesley offered himself as an example of one who fitted this definition of faith, prior to his 1738 evangelical conversion.

I did thus go for many years...using diligence to eschew all evil, and to have a conscience void of offence; redeeming the time, buying up every opportunity of doing all good to all men; constantly and carefully using all the public and all the private means of grace; endeavouring after a steady seriousness of behaviour at all times and in all places. And God is my record, before whom I stand, doing all this in sincerity; having a real design to serve God...and to ‘lay hold of eternal life’. Yes my own conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost that all this time I was but ‘almost a Christian’.\textsuperscript{503}

4.3.3 Faith of a Son

The fullest expression of faith along Wesley’s continuum was that of a son (or child) of God, which he defined as that faith which leads a person to obey God out of love, rather than fear.\textsuperscript{504} This filial obedience is marked by the true love of God and neighbour. The true love of God ‘engrosses the whole heart . . . takes up all the

\textsuperscript{501} Wesley, ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE), 1:134. Outler noted here that ‘sincerity’ was of particular interest in the Eighteenth Century, and tended to carry a meaning of ‘honesty of intention’.
\textsuperscript{503} Wesley, ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE), 1:136-7. In his commentary on this passage Outler stated that Wesley occasionally varied his view of what classified a person as ‘Christian’. Wesley’s teaching can be a bit confusing on this topic, particularly when he employs language of acceptance. See Wesley, ‘On The Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:35. However, after 1738 Wesley’s message was consistent that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone, which produces love and good works in the life of the believer. Wesley later questioned whether he was not altogether a Christian prior to Aldersgate, but never reversed his view that the grounds of his salvation was predicated upon faith in Christ alone. His later reflection concerned the fact of his faith prior to Aldersgate, not the substance of that faith.
\textsuperscript{504} Wesley, ‘The Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:35.
affections . . . fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties. It is an all-encompassing, selfless desire for God, which delights in God as one’s Saviour. Likewise, the true love of neighbour is a boundless determination to love ‘every man in the world’ including ‘our enemies, or the enemies of God and their own souls’, and to seek only the good of others for the sake of their souls, ‘that they might be saved’.

Finally, the faith of a son expresses itself as ‘a "sure trust and confidence" which a man hath in God "that by the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God",’ and out of which flows a loving heart, which seeks to be obedient to God’s commands. Wesley viewed this as the only ‘right and true Christian faith’, and it is the faith which separates the ‘altogether Christian’ from the ‘almost Christian’.

4.3.4 Justifying Faith

The faith of a son, then, is synonymous with justifying faith, which is more specifically faith in Christ alone for salvation. ‘What faith is it then through which we are saved? It may be answered: first, in general, it is a faith in Christ—Christ and God through Christ are the proper object of it.’ But justifying faith is not simply rational acceptance of a propositional truth about Christ; it is a reorienting attitude of the heart. ‘[I]t is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of

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505 Wesley, ‘The Almost Christian’ (BE), 1:137. It is interesting that Wesley used such language to describe the ‘faith of a son’ and did not reserve it to describe Christian perfection. In a later chapter we shall see that his view of perfection entailed a further liberation of the thoughts and tempers from the influence of sin, while even ‘babes in Christ’ were so far perfect as to love God fully.
509 Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:120.
ideas in the head,’ for even demons have this type of faith, because they know the fact of Christ’s identity; justifying faith must also be ‘a disposition of the heart,’ which not only acquiesces to the facts of Christ’s identity, his death, and his resurrection, but also trusts in Christ’s power to save.⁵¹⁰ Here Wesley even went so far as to differentiate justifying faith from the faith of the apostles while Christ was still with them, because ‘it acknowledges the necessity and merit of his [Christ’s] death as the only sufficient means of redeeming man from death eternal, and his resurrection as the full restoration of us all to life and immortality.’⁵¹¹

Wesley’s broad use of the term ‘faith’ to describe the various stages of human response to grace, along with his changed understanding justification after 1738, have led to some differing opinions about the relationship of faith and justification in his ordo salutis.⁵¹² Randy L. Maddox and Kenneth J. Collins represent the two predominant views about this relationship of faith and justification. Maddox has argued that Wesley was inclined to view justification as effecting faith, thereby emphasizing the action of God in restoring the imago Dei in the life of the individual.⁵¹³ Maddox’s conclusion fits with his view that Wesley was primarily concerned with a therapeutic understanding of salvation that focuses on the restoration of the divine image. Kenneth J. Collins, on the other hand, has argued that, for Wesley, it is faith, which leads to justification, though this faith is itself the result of God’s free grace. According to Collins, Wesley’s encounter with Peter Böhler led him to rediscover for himself the insights of the Reformation, which pointed to the ‘peace that flows out of a sense of forgiveness (justification)’ as a fruit of saving

⁵¹⁰ Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:120.
⁵¹¹ Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:121.
⁵¹² See Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 165-81 for a thorough evaluation of Wesley’s differences from his tradition, with regard to the ordo salutis and particularly the relationship of justification and sanctification.
⁵¹³ Maddox, Responsible Grace, 172-3.
faith. Collins’ conclusions are consistent with a juridical view of justification as primarily the removal of guilt, while restoration of the divine image comes primarily from the regenerating presence of the Holy Spirit after justification. Both views rightly identify God as the initiator of justifying action, but differ in their view of the individual’s participation in that justifying activity.

If we allow Wesley to speak for himself here we find that, as is so often the case, his position is not truly an either/or proposition; rather it is both/and. Faith both precedes and results from justification. It is faith in Jesus Christ, predicated upon God’s free gift of grace, which justifies the believer, and this results in greater faith through the regenerative effects of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Wesley described this responsive and co-operant movement of the individual as going ‘from faith to faith’. ‘[H]e passes "from faith to faith;" from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son; from the spirit of bondage unto fear, to the spirit of childlike love: He will then have "Christ revealed in his heart".

Wesley captured this whole movement from faith to faith, when he spoke of the ‘proper voice of a child of God,’ which testifies to the reality that ‘the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.’ This faithful declaration of the believer results in justification and new birth; a total change, both of inward orientation and relationship with God.

For Wesley, every step of faith—even heathen honesty—is a response to the free grace of God, empowered by the Spirit, and directed toward Christ. It is, therefore, Triune. But the faith of a son, which both results in and flows from justification, is truly focused upon Christ. It is faith in Christ alone for salvation.

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4.4 Repentance

One of the challenges of studying Wesley’s soteriology is that it becomes quickly apparently that imposing a rigid timeline of events will not do. For Wesley, repentance, justification, and new birth happen almost in an instant. They are intertwined aspects of God’s grace. In order to study Wesley’s thought, though, one must approach these aspects in a linear fashion. Scholars typically do this by progressing from repentance to justification to new birth to sanctification and so on. It is no surprise, then, that contemporary scholars have tended to emphasize the placement of repentance prior to justification in the ordo salutis.

For his part, Williams emphasized Wesley’s understanding of repentance as occurring prior to faith and justification.\(^{517}\) He suggested this as a problematic aspect of Wesley’s theology which set him at odds with the Reformers, because of its indication of some sort of good works as a precondition to justification. He defended Wesley’s position as an attempt to give appropriate weight to the prevenient work of Christ prior to justification.\(^{518}\) Collins likewise emphasized the pre-justification aspect of repentance, but more carefully demonstrated that this was always seen by Wesley as a prevenient work of the Holy Spirit, which prompts a human response. Collins also mentioned the difference between Wesley and the Reformers on this issue, but downplayed the importance of this difference by reminding the reader that Wesley referred to the doctrine of repentance as the ‘porch’ to the house of religion and not the door or religion itself.\(^{519}\) Maddox presented the idea that Wesley’s views on repentance grew out of his struggle to find balance between justification by faith

\(^{517}\) Williams also wrote about repentance in the life of the believer, but framed the discussion around the Means of Grace as a method for continually working to align oneself with God. See Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today, 126-40.

\(^{518}\) Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today, 59-61.

\(^{519}\) Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 156.
alone and the call to holy living. Stressing Wesley’s two-part definition of repentance as ‘a thorough conviction of sin, and entire change of heart and life’, Maddox suggested that it was only the first part (a conviction of sin) which Wesley placed prior to justification in the ordo. Like Collins, he made note that this was an example of co-operant grace, by which the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit elicits a human response, but that Wesley’s emphasis in later decades shifted to the second aspect of repentance as an ongoing work of sanctification.  

No true consensus exists as to what Wesley intended to achieve with his doctrine of repentance, and any attempt here to reduce his thought to a simple definition would fall flat. However, we can determine from Wesley’s definition that repentance both flows out of faith as a human response to grace and also precedes greater expressions of faith. It does indeed precede justification as a distinct work of the Spirit, but repentance also continues after justification as the believer grows in grace. Wesley referred to the first stage of repentance as the ‘first’ or ‘legal’ repentance, and the second as ‘evangelical’ repentance.

Legal repentance is most simply ‘a thorough conviction of sin’. This ‘first repentance’ occurs ‘previous to faith’ and requires a thorough self-knowledge. By this Wesley meant that legal repentance is awakening to the deep personal conviction of total depravity, the inability to please God, and an understanding of the ‘wages of death’.

Awake, then, thou that sleepest. Know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art. Know that corruption of thy inmost nature, whereby thou art very far gone from original righteousness . . . that thou are corrupted in every power, every faculty of the soul . . . The eyes of thine understanding are darkened, so that they cannot discern God or the things of God . . . And

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520 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 162-3.
521 See Wesley, ‘The Way to the Kingdom’ (BE), 1:225 and also ENNT, Matt. 3:8.
522 Wesley, ENNT, Matt. 3:8.
knowest thou not that ‘the wages of sin is death’? --death not only temporal, but eternal.  

This aspect of Wesley’s definition aligns with what is more typically understood as repentance. It is a conviction of sin and acknowledgment that humanity is unable to escape the consequences without divine intervention. Further, it is a genuine desire to escape wrath and obey God and recognition that these are only possible through genuine faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Wesley diverged from what is typically understood as repentance with the second half of his definition: ‘evangelical repentance’. A thorough definition of evangelical repentance is more difficult to pinpoint. Maddox has suggested that Wesley used this idea synonymously with sanctification. This is consistent with Wesley’s note on Matthew 3:8, where he simply defined evangelical repentance as ‘a change of heart (and consequently of life) from all sin to all holiness.’ But it is clear that Wesley had more in mind with this phrase than just another term for sanctification. Though he did not state it as such, Kenneth Collins has identified perhaps the most thorough definitions of evangelical repentance. In an early manuscript sermon "Hypocrisy in Oxford" Wesley defined repentance as a collection of works:

Now repentance is not one work alone, but is, as it were, a collection of many others, for in its compass the following works are comprehended: (1) sorrow on account of sin; (2) humiliation under the hand of God; (3) hatred to sin; (4) confession of sin; (5) ardent supplication of the divine mercy; (6) the love of God; (7) ceasing from sin; (8) firm purpose of new obedience; (9) restitution of ill-gotten goods; (10) forgiving our neighbour his transgressions against us; (11) works of beneficence, or almsgiving.

525 Maddox, Responsible Grace, 163.
526 Wesley, ENNT, Matt. 3:8.
528 Wesley, ‘On Hypocrisy in Oxford’ (BE), 4:397.
And later, in *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*, Wesley defined repentance as:

[F]orsaking of sin . . . living in obedience to God’s will, when there is opportunity; and even when there is not, a sincere desire and purpose to do so . . . and a faith in God’s mercies through Christ Jesus.\(^\text{529}\)

In the first definition, parts one through five would fall under what Wesley more simply defined as a thorough conviction of sin, or ‘legal repentance’, while parts six through ten fit more under the heading of ‘evangelical repentance’ as the fruit of justification and sanctification. Part eleven might fit well into either category, which further demonstrates Wesley’s dynamic view. Similarly, in the second definition Wesley used the term repentance, but clearly has in mind ‘evangelical repentance’ as a fruit of justification and sanctifying grace.

The main difficulty in evaluating Wesley’s two-fold definition of repentance is that he most often combined these parts into one whole, as we have just seen. So, while Wesley often used the simple and unified term ‘repentance’, he had in mind the two separate aspects of ‘legal’ and ‘evangelical’ repentance. These were not one monumental event for Wesley; rather, like faith itself, repentance is an aspect of the Christian life, which is dynamic and fluid, yet punctuated by specific and instantaneous moments of growth. Wesley always saw repentance, whether legal or evangelical as the work of the Holy Spirit, which nevertheless requires a cooperative human response.

When it comes to Wesley’s doctrine of repentance, the role of Christ is somewhat vague. Williams has noted that in the *Minutes* of 1745 Wesley approached the subject of Cornelius’ prayers prior to his justification by saying that it is clear that whatever he did was done as a result of the grace of Christ first being present with

Yet neither Williams, nor Wesley himself, fully explain what this means. Wesley was far more prone to talk about the prevenient work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about repentance and faith. So, it would be misleading to suggest that Wesley was explicitly focused upon Christ in his doctrine of repentance. However, when we consider the second, evangelical aspect of Wesley’s definition, we must assume an implied connection to his Christology. As in the case of Cornelius, those who act in accordance to the law prior to justification, including repentance, do so under the prevenient grace of the Spirit. However, evangelical repentance, which follows justification as a distinct work in the life of the believer, is grounded upon a sure trust and confidence in the merits of Christ to bring about the fruit of repentance. As Maddox has said, ‘Repentance prior to justifying faith is characterized as a conviction that is not initially mitigated by a sense of forgiveness. By contrast, repentance within the Christian life retains the confidence of one’s renewed pardoning relationship with God [through Christ]. For Wesley, the first repentance is grounded upon the prevenient grace of God at work through the Holy Spirit prior to justification. The second repentance, while still a work of the Holy Spirit, is grounded upon the person and work of Christ as appropriated by the believer through faith.

4.5 Fruits Meet for Repentance

As we have just seen, Wesley viewed repentance as the believer’s response to the grace of God, a response that is itself enabled by God’s grace. While this response can be understood primarily a change of inward orientation, Wesley also believed this inward response to grace expresses itself in an outward fashion, which Wesley

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530 Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today*, 60.
532 Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 165.
referred to ‘fruits meet for repentance’. He hesitated to use the phrase ‘good works’ for the fruits of repentance, ‘because they do not spring from faith and the love of God.’ Wesly means here that the good deeds that flow out of repentance prior to justification should not be viewed as of the same order as the good works that flow from the justified believer. When Wesly speaks of the ‘fruits meet for repentance’ he is referring to good works prior to justification.

Wesly defined the ‘fruits meet for repentance’ as ‘forgiving our brother, ceasing from evil, doing good, using all the ordinances of God, and in general obeying him according to the measure of grace which we have received.’ Keneth Collins made an interesting observation that three of these elements - ceasing from evil, doing good, and using the ordinances of God - appear elsewhere numerous times in Wesly, and even goes so far as to suggest they form a structural triad for Methodism. All of these elements accompany what we have already come to understand as the ‘first’ or ‘legal’ repentance, which is a thorough conviction of sin.

4.6 Christ’s Imputed Righteousness

We explored the topic of Christ’s righteousness in chapter two, but a further word of explanation about Wesly’s views on imputation is needed here. As Collins has carefully demonstrated, Wesly clearly held a doctrine of imputation and affirmed the basic meaning behind common expressions of it, even while qualifying his own use of the term. While Wesly himself subscribed to a doctrine of imputation, he

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534 Wesly, A Farther Appeal (BE), 11:106.
did not force others to do so, since he did not see it as explicit in scripture. An excerpt from the *Minutes* of June 25, 1744 illustrates this well.

Q. 16. In what sense is the righteousness of Christ imputed to all mankind, or to believers?

A. We do not find it expressly affirmed in Scripture, that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to any; although we do find that ‘faith is imputed’ to us ‘for righteousness.’

That text, ‘As by one man’s disobedience all men were made sinners, so by the obedience of One, all were made righteous,’ we conceive means, by the merits of Christ, all men are cleared from the guilt of Adam’s actual sin.

Wesley affirmed his hesitancy to recommend the term ‘imputed righteousness’ in *Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ*, which he wrote in response to a tract published under his name, which made claims he felt he needed to clear up. Wesley used the phrase ‘the righteousness of Christ’ sparingly, because he did not find it in scripture, and offered up ‘the righteousness of God’ in its stead, which he described as the mercy of God and God’s method of justifying sinners. He then suggested that the proper phrase for discussion should be ‘Christ our Righteousness,’ which he did find in scripture, as ‘the sole meritorious Cause, both of our justification and sanctification.’

At this point Wesley shifted focus, and explained his underlying concern with the doctrine, that is, a concern that too much emphasis on imputed righteousness lends itself to antinomianism. ‘I myself am more sparing in the use of it, because it has been so frequently and so dreadfully abused; and because the Antinomians use it at this day

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537 It should be noted that this was also Wesley’s stance on the use of the word Trinity. Though he held to the doctrine of the three-in-one God, he would not force others to use the term Trinity, because it is not found in scripture. See Wesley, ‘On the Trinity’ (BE), 2:373-86.
538 Wesley, ‘Minutes of Some Late Conversations’ (Jackson), 8:277
539 Wesley, *Thoughts on The Imputed Righteousness of Christ* (Jackson), 10:312-15.
540 Wesley, *Thoughts on The Imputed Righteousness of Christ* (Jackson), 10:312-13
541 Wesley, *Thoughts on The Imputed Righteousness of Christ* (Jackson), 10:313.
to justify the grossest abominations.⁵⁴² Wesley expressed this same concern in his Sermons. ‘[W]hat we are afraid of is this: lest any should use the phrase “the righteousness of Christ”, or, “the righteousness of Christ is ‘imputed to me’,” as a cover for his unrighteousness.’⁵⁴³ This wasn’t a hypothetical concern for Wesley, either, for he went on to say ‘We have known this done a thousand times.’⁵⁴⁴

Though Wesley continued to affirm a doctrine of imputation, he did not recommend its use more often than was absolutely necessary. He used this terminology sparingly himself, and only applied it to teaching on justification.⁵⁴⁵ Wesley did not reject the doctrine of imputation, but rather the notion that imputation can be used as an excuse for antinomianism.

4.7 Adoption

The final aspect of Wesley’s soteriology we will discuss in this chapter is his understanding of adoption. We might have located this section within the earlier discussion about faith, since Wesley primarily spoke of adoption with reference to the assurance of faith. However, Wesley also used the category of adoption to denote initiation into a renewed participation in the life of God, so it seems prudent to consider this topic on its own.⁵⁴⁶

In the first place, Wesley viewed adoption as the removal of fear associated with the guilt of sin. Thus, believers ‘being saved from guilt, they are saved from fear . . . from fear of punishment, from fear of the wrath of God, whom they now no

⁵⁴² Wesley, Thoughts on The Imputed Righteousness of Christ (Jackson), 10:315.
⁵⁴⁵ Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 175.
⁵⁴⁶ Maddox, Responsible Grace, 168.
longer regard as a severe master, but as an indulgent Father.\textsuperscript{547} The reason being that ‘They have not received again the spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption . . . the Spirit itself also bearing witness with their spirit, that they are the children of God.’\textsuperscript{548} The immediate fruit of justification is the reception of the ‘Spirit of adoption’ (i.e. the Holy Spirit) who declares the believer to be free from both the guilt and power of sin.\textsuperscript{549} This ultimately results in assurance, which is a topic we shall discuss in the next chapter. But it also serves as the starting point for renewed participation with God.

Not only does the ‘Spirit of adoption’ grant freedom from the guilt and power of sin, but he also restores hope in for the full renewal of the divine image, that is ‘the glorious image of God, the full "renewal of his soul in righteousness and true holiness",’ along with the hope of eternal life.\textsuperscript{550} This newfound freedom and hope, which result directly from the Spirit of adoption, go on to produce ‘that filial love of God’ and a desire to please God that expresses itself as love of neighbour ‘not in word only, but in deed and truth.’\textsuperscript{551}

Adoption, then, confers to the believer an awareness of newfound freedom from the guilt and power of sin and the fear of wrath, while simultaneously producing hope and the true love of God and neighbour. As Maddox has observed, ‘The importance of this is that our grateful perception of our reconciling Father is precisely what invites and empowers us to be obedient children.’\textsuperscript{552} In other words, it is the ‘Spirit of adoption’ that grants believers the ability to know that they have been

\textsuperscript{547} Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:122.
\textsuperscript{548} Wesley, ‘Salvation by Faith’ (BE), 1:122; Cf. Romans 8:15-16.
\textsuperscript{549} Wesley explicitly defined the phrase ‘Spirit of adoption’ as a reference to the Holy Spirit in ENNT, Romans 8:15. Wesley also used this phrase in ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:417.
\textsuperscript{550} Wesley, ‘Scriptural Christianity’ (BE), 1:162.
\textsuperscript{551} Wesley, ‘Scriptural Christianity’ (BE), 1:162-3; Cf. 1 John 3:18.
\textsuperscript{552} Maddox, \textit{Responsible Grace}, 168.
reconciled to God through faith and enables them, as children of God, to respond to
the Father with genuine love and faithful obedience and good works.

It is important to note that the ‘Spirit of adoption’ is bestowed as a fruit of
justification. Therefore, he is given only to those who confess faith Jesus as Lord. But
Wesley goes even further and says that the ‘Spirit of adoption’ is the very Spirit of
Christ whose presence confirms the believer’s adoption. ‘Because he [the believer]
was a son, God had sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying "Abba,
Father". ⁵⁵³ Adoption is both a result of faith in Christ’s sacrifice and also a distinct
work of Christ in the believer’s life. This doctrine is inherently tied to his doctrine of
salvation in Christ alone, though Wesley did not make it a major part of his
soteriology.

4.8 Conclusion

The first orienting concern of Wesley’s soteriology is justification and the
related doctrines that represent Christ working for us. This includes the doctrines of
grace, faith, justification, repentance, the fruit of repentance, imputation, and
adoption, which result in the relative change of one’s outward relationship to God. ⁵⁵⁴
But to what extend were these doctrines, for Wesley, centred upon the person and
work of Christ alone?

We have seen first, that Wesley spoke of grace in general terms as the favour
of God given to undeserving humanity. However, he also particularized his definition
at times by referring to grace as the favour of the Lord Jesus Christ. We also

⁵⁵³ Wesley, ‘Scriptural Christianity’ (BE), 1:162-3.
⁵⁵⁴ See Wesley, ‘The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God’ (BE), 1:431-2. These
doctrines concern the relative change of relationship with God (i.e. the change
from enemies to children of God), while the doctrines more closely associated with
sanctification concern the real change of inward and outward holiness.
demonstrated that for Wesley grace was understood as both free and co-operant.
Grace is given freely on the merits of Christ alone, yet its efficacy depends upon the individual accepting this grace as the only means to the Father and relying upon this grace as the power of the Spirit of Christ for daily living. With regard to the co-operant nature of grace, Christ is both foundation and exemplar; his sacrifice provided the grounds for grace and also stands as the ultimate example of co-operant grace fully embraced. And it is Christ himself who compels humanity to respond in faith. God’s grace is bestowed according to Christ’s merit alone, and it is Christ himself who enacts his will in the lives of those who respond to God in faith.

Wesley viewed faith as operating in distinct stages, where every step of faith is a co-operative response to the free grace of God, empowered by the Spirit, and directed toward Christ.555 It is, therefore, Triune. But the faith of a son, which both results in and flows out of justification, is truly focused upon Christ. It is faith in Christ alone for salvation.

When it comes to Wesley’s doctrine of repentance, the role of Christ is harder to pinpoint. It would be misleading to suggest that Wesley was explicitly Christological throughout his doctrine of repentance. However, when we consider the evangelical aspect of Wesley’s definition, we must assume an implied connection to his Christology. Evangelical repentance, which follows justification, is grounded upon faith in Christ alone to bring about the fruit of repentance. For Wesley, the first repentance is grounded upon the prevenient grace of God at work through the Holy Spirit prior to justification. The second repentance is grounded upon the person and work of Christ as appropriated by the believer through faith.

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555 See the earlier discussion about grace as both co-operant and free.
With regard to Wesley’s concept of ‘fruits meet for repentance’ we discovered that Wesley only intended these to apply to that repentance, which precedes justification, and they are, therefore, not inherently dependent upon Christ. On the contrary, Wesley thought the doctrine of imputation was best applied to justification itself, and was, therefore, inherently dependent upon Christ, because the focus is on the application of the work of Christ to the believer.

Finally, Wesley understood adoption to be both a result of faith in Christ’s sacrifice and also a distinct work of Christ in the believer’s life. This doctrine is explicitly tied to his understanding of salvation in Christ alone, but it did not hold a significant place in Wesley’s soteriology.

Taken together, these themes in Wesley’s soteriology overwhelmingly point back to Christ as both the source and goal. There are some aspects, which tend more toward a general Trinitarian emphasis, but it is safe to say that the majority was shaped by his understanding of the person and work of Christ and his post-1738 conviction that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
Chapter 5 - Christ Working in Us

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined the Wesleyan doctrines related most closely to justification as an orienting concern. These doctrines, taken together, represent the work of Christ for us to reconcile humanity to God. In this final chapter, we will consider the group of doctrines most closely related to sanctification as an orienting concern for Wesley. These doctrines represent the work that Christ does in us to transform believers into holy persons who exhibit the perfect love of God.

John Deschner tied Wesley’s language about the kingdom of God very closely to the doctrine of sanctification, saying, ‘Wesley begins with the assertion that this sanctification is “the peculiar business of Christ”’.\(^\text{556}\) He went on to note that, for Wesley, the kingdom, which Christ establishes in our hearts, is expressed through the language of being buried and then raised again with Christ.\(^\text{557}\) But to what extent did Wesley truly demonstrate that sanctification is the ‘business of Christ’? It is the aim of this chapter to examine these related doctrines and determine to what extent they were shaped by or arose out of Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ.

5.2 New Birth

As Outler explained, Wesley’s early teaching in S O S O was directed toward establishing the foundation for his doctrine of justification by faith alone. Once

\(^{556}\) Deschner, \textit{WC}, 130. See also Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Matt. 4:17.

\(^{557}\) Deschner, \textit{WC}, 130. See also Wesley, \textit{ENNT}, Matt. 11:11.
established, he turned toward the subject of the Christian life. Outler has suggested that Wesley’s interest may have been in part due to his desire to reconcile his experience of evangelical conversion with his presuppositions about baptismal regeneration, which he inherited from his tradition. We considered this briefly in our discussion of Wesley’s doctrine of humanity, as an aspect of his theology which he never fully resolved, but which remained in the background to inform his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ.

Whatever his motivations for returning to the subject, Wesley consistently tied his understanding of new birth very closely to the ‘faith of a son’, which we discussed in the previous chapter. New birth is a work of God, which is distinct from justification, yet given concurrently with it. It is a change in which the new believer moves from being a servant to being a child of God. For this reason, one might be tempted to consider new birth something that God works for us. However, for Wesley the objective reality of new birth goes further than the change of status one finds through justification; it also entails a material change in the human ability to respond to God faithfully. It is an actual appropriation of God’s power into one’s life, which enables faithful action. Though God is always the source of this power through the Holy Spirit, it is the empowered believer who now acts righteously. For this reason, new birth may be more properly viewed as a work that God does in us.

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558 Outler, Intro (BE), 1:415.
560 Outler, Intro (BE), 1:415.
561 Wesley, ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:417. Wesley again referred to the objective reality of the presence of God - the ‘Spirit of adoption’ - who testifies that we are God’s children through faith.
Wesley clarified this understanding of the difference between justification and new birth, and indicated its doctrinal importance, in his 1760 sermon, ‘The New Birth’.

If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental they are doubtless these two--the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.\footnote{Wesley, ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:187.}

For Wesley the new birth is the foundation upon which any understanding of the Christian life must stand. ‘It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life: when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness . . . In a word, it is that change whereby the “earthly, sensual, devilish” mind is turned into “the mind which was in Christ”.’\footnote{Wesley, ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:193-4.}

5.2.1 Regeneration

The synonymous terms ‘new birth’ and ‘regeneration’ were common vernacular in Wesley’s day. However, Wesley preferred to use the language of being ‘born again’, ‘born of God’, ‘born from above’, or ‘born in the Spirit’.\footnote{Wesley, ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:192.} This is not because Wesley denied regeneration (he affirmed it as a doctrine of the Larger Catechism), but rather because some of his contemporaries were equating regeneration with sanctification, which he saw as a great error.\footnote{Wesley, ‘The New Birth’ (BE), 2:198. Particularly William Law. See Outler’s note concerning Wesley’s response to Law’s The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration or the New Birth.} The issue for Wesley centred on the distinction between the instantaneous and the progressive work
of God in the life of the believer. Law had argued that regeneration is the progressive restoration of the soul, by which the ‘old man’ is cast aside and the ‘new man’ emerges. Wesley argued against this idea, saying that sanctification is certainly a progressive change toward inward and outward holiness, but new birth must occur in an instant.

[T]he new birth is not the same as sanctification. This is indeed taken for granted by many; particularly by an eminent writer in his late treatise on ‘the nature and grounds of Christian regeneration’. . . it all along speaks of regeneration as a progressive work carried on in the soul by slow degrees from the time of our first turning to God. This is undeniably true of sanctification; but of regeneration, the new birth, it is not true. This is part of sanctification, not the whole; it is the gate of it, the entrance into it. When we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness, begins. And thenceforward we are gradually to ‘grow up in him who is our head’. 567

For Wesley, new birth is the beginning of sanctification, but not sanctification itself. We shall see shortly that what is at stake with this distinction is whether or not justified humanity remains enslaved to the power of sin for any duration. If regeneration is progressive, then sin must still remain, at least for a time. If, however, regeneration is an immediate restoration of the divine image, then sin has no place in the life that has been restored.

Regeneration should also be distinguished from God’s work of justification, though the two occur together in an instant. 568 Kenneth Collins has offered a helpful summary of the key components of justification and regeneration for Wesley, which will serve to illustrate their differences. 569 Justification implies a relative change in

569 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 201. See also Wesley, ‘On Sin in Believers’ (BE), 1:319-20.
which God does something for us that changes our outward relationship with God and restores us to the favour of God by taking away the guilt of sin. Regeneration implies a real change in which God does something in us that changes our inmost souls and restores us to the image of God by taking away the power of sin.

Whatever he chose to call it, Wesley expressed very clear views about what is meant by regeneration. As he saw it, the whole purpose of regeneration is restoration of the image of God - specifically the moral image. We showed previously that Wesley viewed the effect of the fall as total destruction of the divine image in humanity.

And ‘in Adam all died,’ all humankind, all the children of men who were then in Adam’s loins. The natural consequence of this is that everyone ascended from him comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God, wholly ‘dead in sin’; entirely void of the life of God, void of the image of God, of all that ‘righteousness and holiness’ wherein Adam was created.570

Through prevenient grace, God has partially restored this image so that humanity is capable of responding to God in faith. A genuine faith response leading to justification results in removal of guilt. But guilt is only part of the problem. For Wesley, once guilt has been removed the moral image must still be restored. This regeneration is at the heart of new birth.

From hence it manifestly appears what is the nature of the new birth. It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it to life: when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is ‘created anew in Christ Jesus’, when it is ‘renewed after the image of God’, ‘in righteousness and true holiness’…571

Wesley carefully tied his understanding of regeneration back to the person and work of Christ himself. Regeneration of the moral image is, in fact, a total transformation of the sin-seeking soul into the very likeness of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. ‘In a word, it is that change whereby the “earthly, sensual, devlish” mind is turned into “the mind which was in Christ’.”\(^{572}\) It is a gift of God to anyone who trusts that ‘through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God.’\(^{573}\)

Regeneration, then, is the restoration of the moral image, which was marred in the fall, granted by God through faith in the merits of Christ. It is a real change, tied to, but distinct from the relative change of justification, which then bears real fruit in the believer’s life. It is the beginning of holiness. And, for Wesley, the fruit of new birth manifests as liberation: 1) freedom from the power of sin, 2) freedom from the presence of sin (to a degree), and 3) freedom to love as God loves.

5.2.2 Freedom from the Power of Sin

As we mentioned earlier, Wesley was concerned that a progressive understanding of regeneration (i.e., that regeneration occurs gradually over time) would lead to inadequate expectations about the ongoing presence of sin in the lives of believers. We showed in the previous chapter that, in concert with the Reformers, Wesley primarily understood justification as the removal of guilt. His further concern was how this removal of guilt leads to actual lives of holiness. With the guilt removed, what then should be the justified believer’s relationship to sin? Wesley’s

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response was to argue that a proper understanding of new birth logically concludes, not just that the removal of guilt has occurred in justification, but also that the ensuing regeneration has resulted in freedom from the power of sin in the believer’s life. He articulated this as a reversal of the power structure; those who were once servants to sin now live in submission to God through Christ. This results in those who are dead in sin being raised to life in Christ and gaining power over the sin that once reigned over them. And this is not a temporary or periodic change; rather it is a constant and pervasive transformation for those who continue in faith.

An immediate and constant fruit of this faith whereby we are born of God, a fruit which can no wise be separated from it, no, not for an hour, is power over sin: power over outward sin of every kind; over every evil word and work; for wheresoever the blood of Christ is thus applied it ‘purgeth the conscience from dead works’. And over inward sin; for it ‘purifieth the heart’ from every holy desire and temper.\textsuperscript{574}

Wesley had experienced this immediate freedom and power over sin for himself, and it had come to define for him the essence of what it means to be a Christian. In a letter to his brother, Samuel, he wrote, ‘By a Christian I mean one who so believes in Christ that sin hath no more dominion over him.’\textsuperscript{575} He went on to explain that, until his experience at Aldersgate Street he had struggled against sin and lost, but ever since he had gained victory. And this, he believed, was the expectation for all those born of God. Wesley substantiated his claim by appealing to 1 John 3:5.

In the fifth verse of this chapter he had said, ‘Ye know that he (Christ) was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.’ What is the inference he draws from this? ‘Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither know him.’\textsuperscript{576}

\textsuperscript{574} Wesley, ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:419. 
\textsuperscript{575} Wesley, 30 October 1738 in Letters (BE), 25:575. 
\textsuperscript{576} Wesley, ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:421.
Wesley was convinced that new birth immediately resulted in the power to stop committing sin. But in order to fully grasp his meaning, one must first understand that Wesley held a nuanced definition of sin. In a letter to Mrs. Bennis in 1772, he defined sin in this way: ‘Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of a known law of God. Therefore every voluntary breach of the law of love is sin; and nothing else, if we speak properly.’\(^5^7^7\) This definition was derived from his earlier musings that sin is ‘an actual, voluntary “transgression of the law”; of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God acknowledged to be such at the time that it is transgressed.’\(^5^7^8\)

According to Wesley’s definition, sin properly understood is a wilful action in direct violation of God’s commandments. So, when he said that a justified believer immediately ceases to sin, he is talking about intentional decisions to do so. He is not accounting for actions or thoughts, which might unknowingly or involuntarily violate the law. This narrows the scope of what might be considered sin considerably. Despite this qualification, some of Wesley’s contemporaries took issue with his claim and chose to alter it in their teaching, saying instead that believers do not sin habitually.\(^5^7^9\) Wesley’s response to this was hard and swift.

\textit{Habitually! Whence is that? I read it not. It is not written in the Book. God plainly saith, he ‘doth not commit sin’. And thou addest, ‘habitually’! Who are thou that mendest the oracles of God? That ‘addest to the words of this Book’? Beware, I beseech thee, lest God ‘add to thee all the plagues that are written therein’!}\(^5^8^0\)

\(^5^7^7\) Wesley, Telford, 5:325.
\(^5^7^8\) Wesley, ‘The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God’ (BE), 1:436.
\(^5^7^9\) See Outler’s notes on Wesley, ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:420 and also Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 219.
\(^5^8^0\) Wesley, ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:420.
It was clear that Wesley would accept nothing short of complete power over sin in the lives of those born of God, so long as they continue in faith. The power granted through Christ must be sufficient to cancel all sin, or it is not sufficient for any.\textsuperscript{581}

For Wesley, the power of the believer to conquer sin is directly related to the work of Christ. First, this power over sin is the direct result of the purifying power of Christ’s blood. Wesley wrote, ‘for wheresoever the blood of Christ is thus applied it “purgeth the conscience from dead works” . . . it “purifieth the heart” from every unholy desire and temper.’\textsuperscript{582} Second, because the heart has been purified by Christ’s blood the old self has been crucified with Christ, even as the believer has been made alive again to God through Christ. In other words, the believer shares in the death and resurrection of Christ, through faith. And since the believer has died to sin and been made alive in Christ, ‘sin shall not have dominion’ any longer.\textsuperscript{583}

5.2.3 Freedom from the Presence of Sin (In Part)

Wesley was adamant that freedom from the power over sin ought to result in lives freed from the presence of sin, as well. This was, after all, the fundamental claim of his doctrine of Christian perfection. But this claim carried with it an inherent tension, which Wesley needed to reconcile. On the one hand, the common experiences of justified Christians (and his own experience) suggested a continued struggle against sinful desires. On the other hand, Wesley wanted to maintain the

\textsuperscript{581} See Chapter 3 for more concerning Wesley’s nuanced definition of sin, which excluded involuntary transgressions of the law caused by things such as infirmities. He understood that Christians continue to commit these transgressions until death, but did not call them sin.
\textsuperscript{582} Wesley, ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:419.
\textsuperscript{583} Wesley, ‘The Marks of the New Birth’ (BE), 1:419.
expectation that those born of God do not continue to commit sin, along with the hope that God’s grace is sufficient to completely restore fallen humanity to the image of God. Albert Outler showed that Wesley’s final position attempted to provide a middle way between the two polarities of the Lutheran doctrine of fomes peccati, which teaches that sin remains, though it is covered by Christ’s imputed righteousness, and the Moravian claim of sinless perfection for all those who are born of God. As he sought to hold these opposing views in tension, Wesley was sometimes misunderstood and misrepresented by either side. In an effort to correct what he saw as mischaracterizations of his teaching, Wesley published two sermons, ‘On Sin in Believers’ (1763) and ‘The Repentance of Believers’ (1767), with the intent that they should clarify his position. We shall discuss the second of this pair of sermons a bit later.

Referencing 2 Corinthians 5:17 as his starting text for ‘On Sin in Believers’, Wesley cut straight to the issue by asking the questions, ‘Is there then sin in him that is in Christ? Does sin remain in one that “believes in him”? Is there any sin in them that are “born of God”, or are they wholly delivered from it?’ His answer to these

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584 In his sermon, ‘The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God’ (BE), 1:436, Wesley clarified his expectation of living without sin by saying he understood this to mean ‘outward sin’ according the definition of sin noted previously: ‘an actual, voluntary “transgression of the law”’. Wesley was not always consistently clear on the matter. In A Plain Account, 23-6, he said very simply that ‘A Christian is so far perfect, as to not commit sin.’ He did not refer to his nuanced definition of sin here, nor did he specify ‘outward’ as opposed to ‘inward’ sin. While the context of this passage may suggest that Wesley was referring to the entirely sanctified Christian, he clarified his position, saying that even baby Christians do not commit sin.

585 Outler, Intro (BE), 1:314-5.

586 Noble, Holy Trinity: Holy People, 73-5 has argued that Wesley’s doctrine of Christian Perfection, which we shall explore more fully in this chapter, may often lead to confusion (though Wesley was not himself confused), due to its complexity and vocabulary, and also because Wesley never laid out his doctrine in systematic fashion.

questions was somewhat perplexing, and as was often the case for Wesley, it consisted of two seemingly opposite propositions held together in tension.

The first part of Wesley’s answer was affirmation. He emphasized his longstanding belief that, at the moment of justification and new birth, a believer receives sufficient grace from God to gain power over both outward and inward sin.

We allow that the state of a justified person is inexpressibly great and glorious. He is ‘born again, not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God’. He is a child of God, a member of Christ, and heir of the kingdom of heaven . . . And he has power both over outward and inward sin, even from the moment he is justified.  

Wesley was adamant that this power shows itself as the cessation of outward sin. Outward sin is a sign that the devil, rather than God, rules a person’s heart. Therefore, there is no place for continued outward sins in the life of a child of God. Simply put, those who are born of God do not commit sin.

Wesley’s stance became less clear with regard to inward sin. He affirmed that justification and new birth grant power over inward sin as well as outward, but having the power and exerting it fully are two separate things. So, while he affirmed that it is possible for a person to live in victory over inward sin from the moment of justification and new birth, he was not willing to declare that this was a common experience. It was dependent upon whether or not the believer continued walking in love. This recognition that inward sin is not destroyed at the outset of salvation led Wesley to the second part of his answer, which was denial that believers are truly ‘freed from all sin’ the moment they are justified. Although the newly justified and

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589 By ‘inward sin’ Wesley ultimately meant ‘evil thoughts and tempers’, which we will discuss later in this chapter.
born again believer has all the grace necessary to exert control over both outward and inward sin, yet that ability does not instantly lead to the eradication of sinful desires, which still wage war in the hearts of Christians. Anticipating the objection of his opponents, Wesley wrote,

‘But was he not then “freed from all sin”, so that there is no sin in his heart?’ I cannot say this: I cannot believe it, because St. Paul says the contrary. He is speaking to believers, and describing the state of believers in general, when he says, ‘The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh . . .’ The Apostle here directly affirms that ‘the flesh’, evil nature, opposes ‘the spirit’, even in believers.\(^{591}\)

So, while Wesley affirmed the possibility that a justified person could avoid all intentional sin from the moment of justification, he understood that this was not the common experience of Christians, even in scripture.

One might wonder how Wesley could make such claims, while still holding to his doctrine of Christian perfection. The answer is that Wesley was here only talking about ‘babes in Christ’, those who have been newly justified and received the new birth. Though new believers have been given new life in Christ, they have yet to grow up into it. They are ‘still in a measure carnal’.\(^{592}\) In fact, Wesley went on to argue that being a new believer and having a worldly nature are one and the same thing, ‘plainly showing that every believer is (in a degree) “carnal” while he is only a “babe in Christ”’.\(^{593}\)

Wesley’s expectation for mature believers was something altogether different, as we shall see shortly. But for the new believer freedom from the power of sin, which does result in freedom from the presence of committed sins, does not instantly

\(^{592}\) Wesley, ‘On Sin in Believers’ (BE), 1:321.
\(^{593}\) Wesley, ‘On Sin in Believers’ (BE), 1:322.
translate into complete freedom from the presence of sinful inclinations. Even though the new believer should not and does not give in to these sinful inclinations, they still war with the temptation to do so. There is still a ‘bent to backsliding’.

By differentiating between expectations for immature and mature believers, Wesley was underscoring that gradual change must still occur through sanctification, even while affirming the sufficiency of the instantaneous change that occurs in regeneration. On the one hand, even new believers experience freedom from the presence of actual sins, both outward and inward. On the other hand, they are not yet truly free from sin, because they still wage war against it in their hearts. By holding these two poles in tension, Wesley was attempting to reconcile the scriptural claim that one has gained true freedom, having been ‘made new’ in Christ, with the common experience of Christians who still struggle against the temptation to sin. In this way, he endeavoured to show the power of Christ’s atonement at work in the lives of believers from the moment of justification, while encouraging them to seek after the perfection he saw as the promise of God through Christ.

Wesley’s views on freedom from sin were grounded upon the person and work of Christ in the same way as his views on the believer’s power over sin. Wesley believed that freedom from the power of sin should result in freedom from the presence of sin. He also made this connection between Christ and the liberation from sin more explicit in his notes on 1 John 3:5 writing, ‘That he [Christ] came into the world for this very purpose - to take away our sins - To destroy them all, root and branch, and leave none remaining.’ For Wesley, the work of Christ enables, and

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594 Wesley, ‘On Sin in Believers’ (BE), 1:323.
596 Wesley, ENNT, 1 John 3:5. Emphasis is Wesley’s.
the presence of Christ enacts, the removal of sin from the believer’s life, through faith.

5.2.4 Freedom to Love as God Loves

The third liberation of the new birth is the freedom to love as God loves. Of all the marks of the new birth, Wesley saw this as the greatest. The one who has been born of God has crossed over from servant to child of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit is now able to cry out to God with pure dependence and delight.

By this Spirit, continually looking up to God as their reconciled and loving Father, they cry to him for their daily bread, for all things needful whether for their souls or bodies . . . Their delight is in him. He is the joy of their heart, ‘their shield, and their exceeding great reward. The desire of their soul is toward him; it is their ‘meat and drink to do his will’; and they are ‘satisfied as with marrow and fatness, while their mouth praiseth him with joyful lips’. 597

God alone is the object of their love. And because they love God earnestly, they also love ‘the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity’. 598

This newfound love of God results in fruit of two varieties. The first fruit is the love of neighbour, ‘of every soul which God hath made’. 599 This love of neighbour includes one’s enemies, and as such is a reversal of the self-centred love produced by the corrupted will. The surest evidence of this love for neighbour is a readiness to lay down one’s life for another in union with Christ’s offering for us. Wesley said, ‘If we feel ourselves ready to do this, then do we truly love our

neighbour:’ 600 Furthermore, this love for neighbour stands as confirmation that one has indeed been born of God, ‘because he hath given us his loving Spirit.’ 601

The second fruit of the freedom to love as God loves is complete obedience to God and the surrender of self-will to God’s will. This entails ‘obedience to all the commands of God, internal and external; obedience of the heart and of life, in every temper and in all manner of conversation.’ 602 Wesley framed obedience as a positive rather than a negative command. It is not merely abstaining from what is evil; rather it is zealously pursuing what is good.

Wesley’s words here are somewhat confusing, as we shall see shortly. Though he advocated a complete renewal of the heart through the new birth, which includes a reordering of a person’s thoughts and tempers, it is specifically the thoughts and tempers that Wesley viewed as the last battleground for the complete eradication of sin and complete renewal in the image of God. With this in mind, it is important to reiterate that the love Wesley spoke of as the fruit of the new birth is not itself what he termed Christian perfection, though it is an early step in that direction.

5.3 Assurance of Faith

In his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Wesley wrote about the relationship between remission of sins (justification), assurance (the witness of the Spirit), and the reception of a new and clean heart (Christian perfection), saying that

he knew of no instance when these all happened concurrently. Rather, these three events in the life of the soul occur on a continuum, which varies from person to person. This was not always the case for Wesley, who had initially conflated justification and full assurance together after his evangelical conversion in 1738, though he later revised his stance on the issue. Even so, these three events are closely related. Assurance of faith holds a unique place in this list, because it accompanies both justification and entire sanctification at their diverse positions along the soteriological continuum. On the one hand, he taught that assurance of faith is an immediate fruit of justification for all true Christians. On the other hand, the full assurance of faith is reserved for those whom God has entirely sanctified.

According to Wesley’s doctrine, assurance of faith is dependent upon a believer’s experience of testimony (i.e., witness) to the evidences of faith in his or her life. It is the moment in which a believer recognizes the Spirit’s presence and personal witness. This understanding of spiritual witness was easily misconstrued as subjectivism or blind intuition, which led Wesley to detail carefully the ways in which one might experience assurance. As was so often the case, Wesley chose a middle way between the opposing views of the ‘enthusiasts’ and ‘rationalists’, and stressed the believer’s own indirect perception of God’s approval, while giving

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604 For a thorough evaluation of the changes Wesley’s doctrine of assurance went through in the years following his evangelical conversion, see Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley* and Richard P. Heitzenrater, ‘Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,’ in *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, ed. Randy L. Maddox.
605 See Wesley, ‘A Letter to John Smith’ in *Letters* (BE), 26:232 for clarification on Wesley’s use of testimony/witness as opposed to ‘inspiration’.
priority to the direct witness of the Spirit as preceding any sense of felt assurance.\textsuperscript{607} Outler suggested that Wesley sought to further guard against subjectivity ‘by insisting that the gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of assurance, are always to be judged by reference to the [objective] fruit of the Spirit.’\textsuperscript{608}

5.3.1 The Indirect Witness

The first testimony comes from the indirect witness of one’s own spirit. At the most basic level it is the clear conscience, ‘and is the result of reason or reflection on what we feel in our own souls.’\textsuperscript{609} But this testimony is not restricted to a mere ‘feeling’, because it is also objectively verifiable. Wesley wrote of this, ‘Nor do we assert that there can be any real testimony of the Spirit without the fruit of the Spirit. We assert, on the contrary, that the fruit of the Spirit immediately springs from this testimony.’\textsuperscript{610} Furthermore, the testimony of our own spirit is corroborated by the believer’s obedience to God’s commands, especially the command to love.\textsuperscript{611} The fruit of the Spirit and obedience to God’s commands confirm that the believer is a child of God and validate the indirect testimony of the conscience. In Wesley’s words, ‘It all resolves to this: those who have these marks, they are the children of God. But we have these marks: therefore we are children of God.’\textsuperscript{612}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{607} Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, I’ (BE), 270. See also Outler, ‘An Introductory Comment’ (BE), 1:267-8.
\item \textsuperscript{608} Outler, Intro (BE), 1:268. See also Cunningham, John Wesley’s Pneumatology, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{609} Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, II’ (BE), 1:287.
\item \textsuperscript{610} Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, II’ (BE), 1:288.
\item \textsuperscript{611} Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, I’ (BE), 1:272.
\item \textsuperscript{612} Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, I’ (BE), 1:272.
\end{itemize}
Wesley anticipated his opponents’ response, asking how can one know whether or not they indeed have these marks? His answer appealed to the subjective spiritual senses as evidence of the objective reality of acceptance. He wrote,

How does it appear that you are alive? And that you are now in ease and not in pain? Are you not immediately conscious of it? By the same immediate consciousness you will know if your soul is alive to God; if you are saved from the pain of proud wrath, and have the ease of a meek and quiet spirit. By the same means you cannot but perceive if you love, rejoice, and delight in God . . . if you are kindly affectioned to all mankind. And with regard to the outward mark of the children of God, which is (according to St. John) the keeping his commandments, you undoubtedly know in your breast if, by the grace of God, it belongs to you. 

By this, Wesley demonstrated his belief that assurance of faith is granted, at least in part, by an inward self-awareness that one has been conformed to the image of Christ and is engaged in thoughts and behaviours that are pleasing to him.

5.3.2 The (Direct) Witness of the Spirit

The second testimony resulting in assurance is the direct witness of the Holy Spirit to the human spirit. Wesley’s clearest definition of this witness stated that ‘the testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly “witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God”; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.’ Wesley argued that the witness of the Spirit is both immediate and direct upon the believer’s justification and, therefore, precedes the indirect witness. According to Wesley,

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That ‘the testimony of the Spirit of God’ must, in the very nature of things, be antecedent to ‘the testimony of our own spirit’, may appear from this single consideration: we must be holy in heart and life before we can be conscious that we are so. But we must love God before we can be holy at all, this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God till we know he loves us . . . And we cannot know his love to us till his Spirit witnesses to our spirit.\(^616\)

The direct witness of the Spirit is then confirmed by experience, both of believers throughout history and of those who are under the conviction of sin. According to Wesley, the experience of believers confirms that a sense of pardon and love is immediately impressed upon the soul of one who believes, while the one who is under conviction will settle for nothing less than direct testimony from the Spirit that God is merciful and remembers their sins no longer.\(^617\)

Wesley felt the weight of two witnesses was sufficient to overrule any objections that such a witness of assurance was untrustworthy or delusional. On their own, each witness might be suspect, but taken together, ‘They are fit to be trusted in the highest degree, and need nothing else to prove what they assert.’\(^618\) Though they are to be taken together, these two witnesses are yet distinct. Joseph W. Cunningham articulated well the relationship between the indirect and direct witness, when he wrote, ‘The direct witness of the Spirit is God’s mode of conveying the personal dimension of his love to human beings, which humans experience by faith. In turn, the indirect witness is marked by our spirit’s acknowledgement of God’s love -- a physical awareness, which gives birth to practical holiness.’\(^619\)

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\(^617\) Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, II’ (BE), 1:291
\(^619\) Cunningham, John Wesley’s Pneumatology, 80.
such importance to Wesley that he declared anyone who denied it was, in effect, denying justification by faith.\textsuperscript{620}

5.3.3 Degrees of Assurance

Wesley was firm about the facts of the two witnesses of assurance, but he was less so about the timing and degree to which the witness is perceived in the believer’s life. So, how does one know that he or she is entirely sanctified? Wesley answered,

We know it by the witness and by the fruit of the Spirit. And, First, by the witness. As, when we were justified, the Spirit bore witness to our spirit, that our sins were forgiven; so, when we were sanctified, He bore witness that they were taken away. Indeed, the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first (as neither is that of justification); neither is it afterward always the same, but like that of justification, sometimes stronger, and sometimes fainter.\textsuperscript{621}

For Wesley, there were degrees of assurance, just like there are degrees of faith. At first, one receives assurance of justification, when one crosses over from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son. This degree of assurance is directly linked to the ‘Spirit of adoption’ we spoke of earlier. Wesley had an immediate sense of this assurance for himself at Aldersgate Street. However, he soon realized that, not only does this assurance sometimes waver (as his did), but it might not be perceived clearly at the moment of conversion. According to Wesley, ‘But many doubts and fears may still remain, even in a child of God, while he is weak in faith, while he is in the number of those whom St. Paul terms “babes in Christ”.’\textsuperscript{622}

\textsuperscript{620} Wesley, ‘The Witness of the Spirit, II’ (BE), 1:292.
\textsuperscript{621} Wesley, \textit{A Plain Account}, 86.
\textsuperscript{622} Wesley, ‘On the Discoveries of Faith’ (BE), 4:36.
The second degree of assurance is the ‘full assurance of faith’, which accompanies entire sanctification. This assurance is qualitatively different from the assurance of faith associated with justification, because it excludes all doubt and fear. Wesley wrote, ‘But when his [the believer’s] faith is strengthened, when he receives faith’s abiding impression, realizing things to come, when he has received the abiding witness of the Spirit, doubts and fears vanish away.’ As Collins has indicated, this full assurance of faith is not primarily directed toward future events, but the present reality of the believer. In Wesley’s words, ‘That assurance of faith which these enjoy excludes all doubt and fear. It excludes all kind of doubt and fear concerning their future perseverance; though it is not properly . . . an assurance of what is future, but only of what is now.’

The third degree of assurance is different from the previous two. While those are concerned with the status of the believer in the present life, the third degree of assurance, which is the ‘full assurance of hope’, concerns the status of the believer both now and after death. This degree of assurance is even greater than that received at entire sanctification. Wesley wrote of this degree of assurance, ‘God “sealeth us with the Spirit of promise,” by giving us “the full assurance of hope”; such a confidence of receiving all the promises of God, as excludes the possibility of doubting; with that Holy Spirit, by universal holiness, stamping the whole image of God on our hearts.’

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625 Collins, The Theology of John Wesley, 137.
627 Wesley, A Plain Account, 91.
Once again, Kenneth Collins has summarized the degrees of assurance for Wesley in a helpful way. The justified and regenerated believer receives a *measure* of assurance, which is occasionally marked by doubt and fear. The full assurance of faith, which accompanies entire sanctification, provides a clear conviction of being now in the favour of God, which excludes all fear. And the full assurance of hope, which might occur at any time along the soteriological timeline, excludes even the possibility of doubt and fear about one’s final salvation.\(^{628}\)

But how does Wesley’s doctrine of assurance relate to his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ? The answer lies in the content of the testimony given.

‘The testimony now under consideration is given by the Spirit of God to and with our spirit. He is the person testifying. What he testifies to us is “that we are the children of God”.’\(^{629}\) The content of the Spirit’s testimony and the grounds of our own spirit’s witness is the saving work of Jesus Christ, by which one is adopted as a child of God. It is the very same ‘Spirit of adoption’, which we spoke of in the previous chapter, who confirms for the believer that ‘Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me’.\(^{630}\) The Holy Spirit witnesses to the human spirit, and the fruits of the Spirit confirm, that the believer has genuine faith, hope, and love, which drives out fear and gives assurance that the believer is being saved in both the present and the future.

\(^{628}\) Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, 141.


5.4 Christian Perfection

Many excellent analyses of Wesley’s views on Christian perfection have been written, since the resurgence in Wesley studies of the mid-twentieth century. As Wesley’s most controversial doctrine, Christian perfection has received a great deal of attention. It would be impossible for us to recreate such comprehensive work here, but a summary of the main points of Wesley’s view is important for our goal of assessing the relationship between his theology of Christian perfection and his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ.

We have already seen some of the building blocks of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection. Beginning with his understanding that even newly reborn Christians - those who have only just experienced the remission of guilt in justification and regeneration in the new birth - have been freed to overcome the power and presence of sin and granted power through the Holy Spirit to love as God loves, Wesley concluded that full salvation must also entail complete freedom from fear and the propensity to sin. In other words, there is a further work of grace to be given by God, even after justification and new birth. The gifts of initial salvation, while substantial, do not constitute the fullness of God’s redemptive plan; rather, they are steps toward that end. In response to those who had grouped the whole scope of salvation into a singular event, Wesley wrote:

Neither dare we affirm, as some have done, that all this salvation is given at once. There is, indeed, an instantaneous, as well as a gradual work of God in His children; and there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received, in one moment, either a clear sense of forgiveness of their sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance,

631 Significant sources for this study include Collins, Theology of John Wesley; Maddox, Responsible Grace, Lindsröm, Wesley and Sanctification, and Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today.
Wesley sought to emphasize both the instantaneous and gradual aspects of salvation, while underscoring his theme of salvation as liberation for the human soul and life. Therefore, according to Wesley’s clearest definition of Christian perfection, ‘A Christian is [firstly] so perfect, as not to commit sin.’ This is the instantaneous gift of God to all who believe, even ‘babes in Christ’. Yet this is not the whole picture of the salvation that God works. Just as the fruit of regeneration is freedom from sin and empowerment to love, so there is further freedom available to those who continue to trust in God through faith in Christ.

Freedom from Evil Thoughts and Tempers

What is the nature of this further freedom? We must return to Wesley’s definition of Christian perfection. A Christian is, secondly, perfect in the sense that they have been ‘freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers.’ Firstly, Wesley explained that ‘evil thoughts’ are not the same thing as thinking about evil actions of others. It is not sinful to have a thought concerning sin. Rather, evil thoughts are those which entail ‘all the reasonings of pride and unbelief against the declarations, promises, or gifts of God . . . and every high thing that exalteth itself against the

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632 Wesley, A Plain Account, 30-1. Interestingly, Mark Olson has argued convincingly that Wesley’s early expectation for his own conversion was that he would receive perfection immediately after justification. His later experience did not corroborate this assumption and may have led him to teach this opposite view later on. See Olson, Mark. ‘Exegeting Aldersgate: John Wesley’s Interpretation of 24 May 1738.’ PhD Thesis, (The University of Manchester, 2016), 102-105, 112-13.

633 Wesley, A Plain Account, 25-6.

634 Wesley, A Plain Account, 26.
knowledge of God. Wesley went on to say that thoughts such as these have no place in the life of the believer, because thoughts flow out of the disposition of the heart, and ‘If therefore his heart be no longer evil, then evil thoughts can no longer proceed out of it.’ Since the God purifies the hearts of those whom he justifies, there is no more evil root from which evil thoughts might stem. Quite the contrary, Wesley considered it a ‘happy privilege’ of all real Christians that God works to bring ‘into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.’

Secondly, Wesley argued that Christians are freed from evil tempers, which might be understood as sinful motivations or inclinations of the heart. These have been purged from the heart of the believer by Christ, who has ‘purified their hearts by faith’. But what are these evil tempers? According to Wesley they are pride, self-will, and unrighteous anger. The believer’s heart is purified from each of these through the very presence of Christ.

He [the sanctified believer] is purified from pride; for Christ was lowly of heart. He is pure from self-will or desire; for Christ desired only to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work. And he is pure from anger, in the common sense of the word; for Christ was meek and gentle, patient and long-suffering.

In this way, Wesley argued, God saves his people from sins of the heart, even as he saves them from outward manifestations of sin.

Just as he did with regard to evil thoughts, Wesley grounded this freedom from evil tempers on his understanding of the real Christian who has received a

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637 Wesley, ‘Christian Perfection’ (BE), 2:118.
purely heart. He expressed this with both negative and positive declarations about the renewed heart, saying,

> Every one of these [real Christians] can say with St. Paul, ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me’—words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as outward sin. This is expressed both negatively, ‘I live not’—my evil nature, the body of sin, is destroyed—and positively, ‘Christ liveth in me’—and therefore all that is holy, and just, and good.\(^640\)

It is important to note that while Wesley kept referring to real Christians here, he did not apply this second understanding of Christian perfection to all believers equally, though he considered even new believers to be real Christians. In fact, he qualified the second part of his definition of perfection by acknowledging that it can only be affirmed of mature Christians, though even ‘babes in Christ’ are perfect in the sense that they are no longer compelled to sin.\(^641\) In his 1741 sermon ‘Christian Perfection’, Wesley went into a bit more detail about the stages of Christian life and expectations with regard to the level of perfection one might attain at each stage.

But it should be premised that there are several stages in Christian life as well as in natural: some of the children of God being but new-born babes, others having attained to more maturity. And accordingly St. John, in his First Epistle, applies himself severally to those he terms little children, those he styles young men, and those whom he entitles fathers.\(^642\)

When Wesley’s spoke of full or entire sanctification, he was expressly talking about mature Christians. Even so, Wesley was convinced this gradual liberty culminating in complete freedom is both the promise and goal of Christ’s work. ‘Thus

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\(^{640}\) Wesley, ‘Christian Perfection’ (BE), 2:118.
\(^{641}\) See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 187.
\(^{642}\) Wesley, ‘Christian Perfection’ (BE), 2:105.
doth Jesus save His people from their sins; not only from outward sins, but from the sins of their hearts.\(^ {643} \)

For Wesley, ‘the end of Christ’s coming’ was not just forgiveness for wayward sinners, but also full restoration of the divine image in all those who believe. His doctrine of perfection was not tacked on to his broader theology in an effort to produce fruitful disciples; rather he saw perfection as the entire point of Jesus’ sacrifice. If Christ’s work is to be understood as complete, then the implications of that work must conclude with complete transformation, both \textit{outward} and \textit{inward}, of those who submit to him in faith and are filled with his very presence and given a purified heart. This transformation is the work of God, which nevertheless invites human participation. As such, Wesley’s theology made room for means by which a believer may grow in their experience of God’s transforming grace. Two things, in particular serve this purpose: 1) evangelical (i.e., believer’s) repentance and 2) the Means of Grace. We shall briefly examine each.

5.4.1 Repentance of Believers

In the previous chapter we discussed Wesley’s two-fold view of repentance as necessary prior to justification (legal repentance) and also as necessary for spiritual growth or sanctification (evangelical repentance). We have shown how and when repentance operates in the life of the believer. Now, it will benefit the study to briefly examine in what sense Wesley thought believers must repent after justification. In other words, what is the content of evangelical repentance? Wesley began by

\(^{643}\) Wesley, \textit{A Plain Account}, 26.
explaining what he meant by evangelical repentance, and how this is different from what is commonly understood as repentance.

Repentance frequently means an inward change, a change of mind from sin to holiness. But we now speak of it in a quite different sense, as it is one kind of self-knowledge—the knowing ourselves sinners, yea, guilty, helpless sinners, even though we know we are children of God.\(^\text{644}\)

He then cautioned against allowing the first wave of euphoria that occurs ‘when we first find redemption in the blood of Jesus, the love of God is first shed abroad in our hearts and his kingdom set up therein’ to mislead one into the assumption that sin has been not only covered (the guilt removed) but also completely destroyed.\(^\text{645}\) That total destruction of wilful sin, at least as far as the thoughts and tempers are concerned, does not occur until entire sanctification has been granted, as we just saw. True self-knowledge, of the sort identified with evangelical repentance, recognizes this fact and acknowledges that sin has been conquered through Christ, even while its presence is still felt.

But though we readily acknowledge, ‘he that believeth is born of God,’ and ‘he that is born of God doth not commit sin,’ yet we cannot allow that he does not feel it within: it does not reign, but it does remain. And a conviction of the sin which remains in our heart is one great branch of the repentance we are now speaking of.\(^\text{646}\)

According to Wesley, only a further work of repentance and faith can lead the believer into entire sanctification and the full deliverance from sin in his or her life. This second repentance involves the recognition that ‘we are not yet whole, that are hearts are not yet fully purified, that there is yet in us “a carnal mind” which is still in its nature “enmity against God”; that a whole body of sin remains in our heart,

\(^{644}\) Wesley, ‘The Repentance of Believers’ (BE), 1:336.
\(^{645}\) Wesley, ‘The Repentance of Believers’ (BE), 1:336.
Weakened indeed, but not destroyed.\textsuperscript{647} This second repentance leads the believer to recognize, once again, that only God can deliver the human soul from sin and death, and cultivates a response of renewed faith in Christ alone for salvation. In Wesley’s words, ‘Hereby we are brought to “magnify him”, indeed, to “give him all the glory of his grace”, to “make him a whole Christ, and entire Saviour”, and truly to “set the crown upon his head”.\textsuperscript{648}

Just as repentance prior to justification is an acknowledgement of the insufficiency of human effort to please God and a full reliance on the merits of Christ for salvation, so too is the evangelical repentance an acknowledgement that only the merits of Christ provide a sufficient ground and hope for full deliverance from sin in this life. In this way, Wesley tied his understanding of evangelical repentance back to his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ and the sufficiency of ‘Christ alone for salvation’.

5.4.2 The Means of Grace

For Wesley, the grace of God is often mediated by the Holy Spirit to the life of a believer through specific \textit{instituted} or \textit{prudential} ‘means of grace’. Several recent scholarly works have already undertaken the task of exploring the depths of this aspect of Wesley’s theology.\textsuperscript{649} While this subject holds a significant place in

\textsuperscript{647} Wesley, ‘The Repentance of Believers’ (BE), 1:350.
\textsuperscript{648} Wesley, ‘The Repentance of Believers’ (BE), 1:352.
Wesley’s broader theological system, and we do not wish to diminish its role, our goal is to determine whether or not his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ significantly informs this aspect of his theology. For our purposes, then, we will succinctly examine Wesley’s basic meaning behind the phrase ‘means of grace’, and then discuss its importance for Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection.

Let us begin with Wesley’s definition. He wrote, ‘By “means of grace” I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.’\(^{650}\) That is, they are methods or observances through which God extends his grace in an ordinary way. Some of the means Wesley mentioned early on as part of this definition are private and corporate prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Along with this definition, Wesley urged caution that observers keep the means of grace in their proper place, as means to an end and not the end themselves. For, ‘all these means, when separated from the end, are less than nothing, and vanity.’\(^{651}\)

The means of grace have a full and rich history in the church, beginning with the Catholic faith and finding a home in Protestant churches during the Reformation. Wesley was familiar with the use of the means of grace within his own Anglican tradition, as well, and had encouraged their use early on in the Methodist societies through his sermons.\(^{652}\) However, Dean Blevins has argued that Wesley intensified

\(^{650}\) Wesley, ‘The Means of Grace’ (BE), 1:381.
\(^{651}\) Wesley, ‘The Means of Grace’ (BE), 1:381.
\(^{652}\) Blevins, ‘John Wesley and the Means of Grace’, 138-49
his teaching about the means of grace following the ‘stillness’ controversy in the Fetter Lane Society.653

The means of grace are best categorized under three broad headings: the instituted means, the prudential means, and works of mercy. As Collins has noted, ‘the instituted [means], are what most people think of by the phrase “the means of grace,” and they are often referred to as “works of piety.”’654 These include the practices mentioned above, such as prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, among others.

The prudential means of grace are more vague and may vary from person to person. These include ‘particular rules posited by reason and experience in light of the guidance of the Holy Spirit with the goal of growing in grace.’655 In other words, they are regulations, which have been identified through reason and experience as having a positive effect on the spiritual growth of believers. Though some of these prudential means of grace might be common to many, or even all, people, others might be more personal in nature, relating to a particular weakness of the individual.656

The third category of the means of grace for Wesley is ‘works of mercy’. Actions falling under this category are those which demonstrate a genuine love of neighbour as evidence of the purified heart, such as feeding and clothing the needy,

654 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 257. See also Wesley, ‘The Scripture Way of Salvation’ (BE), 1:166.
655 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 266.
656 Collins, Theology of John Wesley, 266.
offering hospitality to strangers, visiting with the sick and prisoners, ‘or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death,’ through edification.\textsuperscript{657}

Wesley’s definition of the means of grace indicates their role in both justification and sanctification, but he directed his attention primarily to the second. Maddox’s observation that this is likely due to his focus on cultivating growth in holiness among his societies is astute.\textsuperscript{658} However, he also explicitly taught that the means of grace are a necessary aspect of sanctification.\textsuperscript{659} Though we think of sanctification as primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, Wesley always had in the back of his mind that the Spirit is working to mediate God’s grace made possible through the work of Christ. This Christological undergirding is present throughout his theology of the means of grace, but it is largely presumed, rather than made explicit. One place where his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ does come through more fully is in his caution against trusting too much in the means, instead of the end. He wrote, ‘Settle this in your heart, that the \textit{opus operatum}, the mere work done, profiteth nothing; that there is no \textit{power} to save but in the Spirit of God, no \textit{merit} but in the blood of Christ; that consequently even what God ordains conveys no grace to the soul if you trust not in him alone.’\textsuperscript{660} In other words, the means of grace are nothing of themselves; only the Spirit can convey God’s grace to the soul through these ordinary means, and he does so solely based on the merits of Christ’s atoning work.

\section*{5.4.3 The Second Work of Grace}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{657}Wesley, ‘The Scripture Way of Salvation’ (BE), 1:166.
  \item \textsuperscript{658}Maddox, \textit{Responsible Grace}, 202.
  \item \textsuperscript{659}Wesley, ‘The Scripture Way of Salvation’ (BE), 1:166.
  \item \textsuperscript{660}Wesley, ‘The Means of Grace’ (BE), 1:396.
\end{itemize}
We have discovered that what Wesley primarily meant by full or entire sanctification is that the believer has been fully delivered from the presence of sin, even in the thoughts and tempers. We have shown that Wesley taught that sanctification begins with justification and new birth, and then continues through growth in grace. Indeed, Wesley argued that this growth never ends prior to death, but he was resolute that progressive growth alone was not the final goal. Rather, just as there is an instant when a believer is justified by faith, so also there must be a second instantaneous moment of transformation signifying that entire sanctification has occurred, even though further growth in grace was possible beyond that point. It is here, at the instantaneous moment of entire sanctification, where Wesley drew spiritual growth back to its source in the person and work of Christ.

Indeed this is so evident a truth that well nigh all the children of God scattered abroad, however they differ in other points, yet generally agree in this, that although we may ‘by the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body’, resist and conquer both outward and inward sin, although we may weaken our enemies day by day, yet we cannot drive them out. By all the grace which is given at justification we cannot extirpate them . . . Most sure we cannot, till is shall please our Lord to speak to our hearts again, to ‘speak the second time, “Be clean”’. And then only the leprosy is cleansed . . . But if there be no such second change, if there be no instantaneous deliverance after justification, if there be none but the gradual work of God . . . then we must be content, as we can, to remain full of sin till death.\footnote{Wesley, ‘The Repentance of Believers’ (BE), 1:346.}

Wesley could not accept such a possibility that sin would not be completely destroyed until death. For him, there must be further work of grace after justification, or Christ did not fully conquer sin on the cross. In Wesley’s theology, regeneration is made available to all those who trust fully in Christ and his atonement to remove the guilt of sin and its power. Likewise, entire sanctification is made available to all those who trust in Christ to finish the work he has begun by destroying to the uttermost the
sin which once entangled the believer’s soul. However, those who have been justified by grace through faith, should they fail to press on toward perfection and receive God’s second work of grace in their lives, become subject once again to guilt deserving of wrath. In Wesley’s words, ‘[I]f there be none but the gradual work of God . . . then we must be content, as well as we can, to remain full of sin till death. And if so, we must remain guilty till death, continually deserving punishment.’

The only solution, for Wesley, was evangelical repentance, the knowledge of self that proclaims, ‘Without [Christ] I can do nothing,’ and which leads to even greater faith that ‘I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.’ This faith, in turn, results in the believer receiving even greater degrees of God’s mercy, with full deliverance from bondage to sin, and a transformed heart that experiences complete freedom in Christ. Despite this language and insistence upon entire sanctification as full deliverance from sin, Wesley, who was ever the pragmatist, acknowledged that the Christians might experience ‘perfection’, and yet still be fallible and act or think in ways contrary to the law. We shall explore this further in the next section.

5.4.4 Perfection in Love

This leads us to a final and important aspect of Wesley’s doctrine of Christian Perfection. Thomas Noble has argued that full deliverance from sin was not the final goal for Wesley; rather he viewed entire sanctification as a gateway to the perfect love of God. And this positive aspect of Christian perfection held primary importance for Wesley.

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664 Wesley, A Plain Account, 82.
But for Wesley, this ‘entire sanctification’ was merely a means to an end, not something to be sought for its own sake. In itself, the phrase has something of a negative ring since, rightly or wrongly, ‘sanctify’ tends to be equated with ‘purify,’ and seems to prompt the question: from what are we purified or sanctified? But in Wesley’s thinking, the positive is primary. For him . . . holiness is not primarily a negative, freedom or purification from sin, but a positive.665

This emphasis upon the positive aspect of perfection as the love of God is found in the later part of his *A Plain Account*. There, he emphasized the importance of avoiding the trap of focusing too much on lesser gifts of God, and pressing on toward the greatest gift of love.

It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this, -- ‘the heaven of heavens is love.’ There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, ‘Have you received this or that blessing?’ if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham’s bosom.666

For Wesley, love was the end to which entire sanctification was the means. To confuse the means with the end was the greatest example of error and enthusiasm.667

We mentioned at the end of the last section that Wesley qualified his view that Christian perfection necessarily entails the full deliverance from sin. And he claimed to have held a consistent view of Christian perfection throughout his ministry, at least

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from 1725 until 1765. He expressed his view of qualified perfection in his *A Plain Account* in this way:

> I know many that love God with all their heart. He is their one desire, their one delight, and they are continually happy in him. They love their neighbour as themselves . . . But even these souls dwell in a shattered body, and are so pressed down thereby, that they cannot always exert themselves as they would, by thinking, speaking, and acting precisely right. For want of better bodily organs, they must times think, speak, or act wrong; not indeed through a defect of love, but through a defect of knowledge. And while this is the case, notwithstanding that defect, and its consequences, they fulfil the law of love. Yet as, even in this case, there is not a full conformity to the perfect law, so the most perfect do, on this very account, need the blood of atonement, and may properly for themselves, as well as for their brethren, say, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'

Even though a believer might experience the true love of God and neighbour, the essence of Christian perfection, still they are subject to infirmities and imperfect knowledge, which are a natural part of mortal human bodies. In other words, Wesley believed that perfection in love could exist, even in the absence of perfect adherence to the law of God. So long as the intention of the heart is love, the believer is still innocent according to the law of love. This idea fits well with Wesley’s nuanced definition of sin as a ‘wilful transgression’ which we discussed earlier in the chapter.

As Noble has noted, Wesley continued to struggle, especially later in life, with clarifying this idea of an ‘imperfect perfection’. But he found solace in his deep conviction that all people, even those believers who have been perfected in love, find their hope in Christ alone. By this mooring he anchored his doctrine of Christian perfection in his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ.

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668 Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 118.
669 Wesley, *A Plain Account*, 84.
The holiest of men still need Christ, as their Prophet, as ‘the light of the world.’ For he does not give them light, but from moment to moment; the instant he withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ.671

5.5 Conclusion

The second orienting concern of Wesley’s soteriology is sanctification and the related doctrines that represent Christ working in us to transform believers into holy persons who exhibit the perfect love of God. This includes the doctrines of new birth, assurance, and Christian perfection.

We have seen first, that for Wesley the new birth is the foundation upon which any understanding of the Christian life must stand. It is the real change that God works in the human soul when he raises it from death to life, and he equated it with ‘the mind which was in Christ’. The new birth entails regeneration. For Wesley, the fruits of regeneration are manifest as liberty: freedom from the power and presence of sin and the freedom to love as God loves. His understanding that children of God receive freedom from the power of sin grew out of his conviction that the power granted through faith in Christ must be sufficient to cancel all sin, or it is not sufficient for any. His view that this freedom from the power of sin should eventually result in freedom from the presence of sin grew out of his understanding that all justified believers have truly been ‘made new’ in Christ. Finally, Wesley believed that all justified and regenerated believers are free to love as God loves, and when they do

671 Wesley, A Plain Account, 82.
so their actions confirm that they are indeed children of God, through faith in Christ, and have been filled with Christ’s love.

Though Wesley connects the content of the Spirit’s testimony back to the work of Christ and adoption, his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ only loosely informs his doctrine of assurance. It is Triune in the sense that Wesley was careful to indicate that the Spirit gives testimony to the believer based on his or her justification by faith in Christ and adoption as a child of God. However, Wesley’s doctrine of assurance is much more pneumatological in nature. This is not a weakness by any means, but an indication that, while Wesley was striving to make Christ ‘all in all’, he understood that salvation is a Triune activity, in which each person of the Godhead has a significant role to play. In the case of assurance of faith, that role belongs primarily to the Holy Spirit. Having said this, Wesley did appeal to the work of Christ with regard to the content of the testimony given by the Spirit. The content of the Spirit’s testimony and the grounds of our own spirit’s witness is the saving work of Jesus Christ, by which one is adopted as a child of God. The Holy Spirit witnesses to the human spirit, and the fruits of the Spirit confirm, that the believer has genuine faith, hope, and love, which drives out fear and gives assurance that the believer is being saved, through Christ’s work, in both the present and the future.

Finally, Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection was founded upon his conviction that Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient to utterly destroy both the power and the presence of sin in the believer’s life and also produce the true love of God in the believer’s soul. Justification is made available to all those who trust fully in Christ and his atonement to remove the guilt of sin and its power. Likewise, entire sanctification and perfection in love are made available to all those who trust in Christ to finish the work he began by liberating the soul from sin.
Wesley’s theology of sanctification was not always explicitly linked to his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ. This is not altogether unexpected, since the role of the Holy Spirit becomes more prominent in the doctrines most closely related to the work of Christ in us. However, there is an implicit Christological undergirding to Wesley’s theology, which he made explicit at some points along the way. His Christology may not have been the most prominent feature of these doctrines, but he endeavoured to tie each of them back to the sufficiency of Christ and salvation by faith in him alone.
Conclusion

In his journal entry for 24 May 1738 John Wesley described his experience of a heart-warming encounter with Christ, which altered the course of his life and ministry. Other studies have sought to understand the content of that experience by attempting to discern what Wesley meant when he said, ‘I felt my heart strangely warmed.’ This study is more interested in what happened next as a result of that experience, by considering what Wesley meant by his next sentence, ‘I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation.’ Did Wesley’s doctrine of Christ change after Aldersgate, and if so, what effect did it have on his broader theology? As stated in the introduction, the first goal of this study was to demonstrate that a change to Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ occurred around his 1738 ‘evangelical conversion’, and to describe the implications of this shift for Wesley’s inherited theology.

Chapter One described the method of Wesley’s inherited theology through his upbringing, examined its affects on his pre-1738 sermons, and described its influence on his spiritual development. We then described the content of Wesley’s inherited theology, focusing specifically on his doctrine of God and Christology.

Wesley’s upbringing and early education instilled in him a sincere desire to please God and make his election to eternal life sure. Evidence that Wesley believed he could accomplish this under his own power is evident from his early sermons, which taught that individuals should pursue God out of duty and to ensure one’s standing before God. Wesley’s early ministry in Oxford and Georgia, while

672 Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I* (BE), 18:250.
successful in many ways, left him with a sense of his own insufficiency to achieve such a goal and a growing fear of death.

During these early years Wesley’s theology lacked any clear focus upon Christ and God’s saving work in Christ. His theology of the nature and attributes of God and his theology of the person of Christ were inherited from his tradition and remained mostly unchanged throughout his life. And though he was beginning to think deeply about some aspects of his inherited theology, such as the nature of faith and how one comes to knowledge of God (epistemology), he had not yet connected these to his Christology.

Wesley’s understanding of the person of Christ leaves some questions unanswered, particularly concerning his views on the two natures. It is clear that Wesley believed himself to be in line with the orthodox Christian creeds and his Protestant heritage. He affirmed the language of the Articles, the Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer, as well as the language of Charles Wesley’s hymns. However, Wesley’s own use of this language about Christ’s humanity was infrequent, at best, and included some curious omissions. There is insufficient evidence to accuse Wesley of outright heterodoxy, even with his unequal emphasis upon Christ’s divine and human natures, which leads to the conclusion that Wesley’s Christology remained within the boundaries of the Chalcedonian definition, even while leaving the door open for further inquiry into his views.

Wesley and his contemporaries viewed Christology and soteriology as two separate doctrines, and the integration of Incarnation and Atonement did not become commonplace until the twentieth century, with Barth, Torrance, and others. Therefore, when critically evaluating Wesley’s doctrine of the person and work of Christ in
relation to his understanding of Atonement, one must be careful not to read these later developments (or the recovery of Patristic insight) back into Wesley.

Wesley embraced the *solus Christus* of the Reformation, but this appeared in his thought as a focus upon Christ’s work, specifically his atoning work on the cross - both his active and passive righteousness. His inherited Christology, which encompasses his doctrine of the person of Christ, did not play a direct role in his understanding of the Atonement, except that it ensures the spotless and real humanity necessary for Christ’s sacrifice.

Chapter Two examined the event of 24 May 1738, described the influence Wesley’s Aldersgate experience had on his spiritual development, including his understanding of faith and the role it plays in his epistemology, and evaluated the effect Wesley’s experience had on his sermons after Aldersgate. We then described Wesley’s *evangelical* theology, demonstrating that a shift occurred to his doctrine of God and especially to his Christology.

The most significant change that occurred in Wesley’s doctrine of God after 24 May 1738 was not his understanding of God’s nature and attributes, but rather his perspective about the character and work of God, and particularly the work of Christ. Wesley’s perspective changed with regard to his understanding of the merits of Christ, and upon whom the work of salvation depends.

Secondly, Wesley’s perspective was changed with regard to his status before God. He moved from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son. He received an assurance of the Spirit that he was a child of God and found strength in the Spirit to seek all inward and outward holiness. The result of this was a refocusing of his theology upon the grace of God, and salvation by faith alone, with the expectation
that this will result in works of the Spirit, even the ‘love of God shed abroad in the hearts of men’. The real change for Wesley was a move away from an anthropocentric view of salvation, where humans were the main actors shouldering the responsibility for holiness, to a view of salvation, which understood Christ’s sacrifice, and faith in him alone, as sufficient for salvation.

Wesley viewed the work of Christ as divided primarily into non-mediatorial activity in creation and mediatorial activity in redemption. He was careful to describe Christ’s role in creation and providence, along with the Father and Spirit. This emphasis indicates Wesley’s view that all of the work of God is fully Triune. This Triune emphasis carried through every aspect of his Christology, and so one is never left with the impression from Wesley’s theology that Christ ever acts independently of Father and Spirit. When explaining the mediatorial work of Christ, Wesley utilized the typical offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. In Christ’s prophetic work, Wesley makes a somewhat unusual effort to demonstrate the continuity of the Law and Christ’s relationship to it. By doing so, he was able to combat antinomianism, without slipping into a salvation based on works-righteousness. Wesley’s views of the priestly office of Christ emphasized the wrath of God and Christ’s passive and active righteousness. His atonement theology tended toward the language and imagery of penal substitution, though he utilized a wide variety of language. Wesley’s atonement theology is concerned both with objective (what Christ does for us) and subjective (what Christ does in us) aspects. In the kingly office we find a clear link between the work of Christ for us as justification and the work of Christ in us as sanctifying the individual. Christ the king recapitulates the law of love; he restores believers to the image of God, thereby securing for them freedom from the power of sin, as well as guilt; and works in the life of the believer, through faith, to bring about righteousness
and obedience to the law. While Wesley tends toward language of penal substitution, the atonement is also a great victory won over the enemies of God: Satan, sin, and death. God’s victory is decided, though the effects are still working their way throughout Creation as his kingdom comes in its fullness. Though believers do not yet possess the kingdom of God in its fullness, it has been established through Christ’s work and with him as its head.

The second goal of this study was to evaluate to what degree John Wesley’s broader theology arose out of, or was shaped by, his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ, and how this changed after 1738. We approached this task by focusing on the theological concepts that are most closely tied to what Wesley identified as the core doctrines of Methodism in his ‘Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained’, that is, 1) repentance, 2) faith, and 3) holiness.674

Chapter Three examined Wesley’s doctrine of humanity, which underscores the need for Wesley’s first core doctrine of repentance. We found a surprising continuity between Wesley’s early and late thought. Wesley’s doctrine of humanity pivots on his theology of the three-fold divine image imparted to Adam and Eve at creation. The fall is described foremost as a loss of this image, as a penalty for wilful disobedience. His doctrine of original sin describes the consequences of the fall for humanity, while also expressing his understanding of how the sinful nature passed from Adam to his descendants. Christ’s atoning work, while offering a complete answer to the fall, is always presented as subsequent to the problem of sin. Given this, one could argue that Wesley’s approach is not centred on Christ, because it predicates God’s response upon Adam’s lawless actions. In one sense Wesley began with the problem in creation and moved toward the divine solution, rather than starting with

the attributes of a holy and just God and moving toward the rebellion of Adam against his holiness and justice.

However, Wesley also emphasized the blessings of God in Christ, which could only be found through the curse. Wesley considered this idea ‘a truth of the deepest importance’ and expressed his surprise that so little had been written concerning it. Wesley believed that God’s greatest desires for humanity, ‘being more holy and happy on earth’ and ‘being more happy in heaven’ could not have been realized, had Adam never sinned. Though Wesley was careful to ascribe the authorship of sin and evil to the devil, this idea of a greater blessing shifted the focus of Wesley’s doctrine of humanity back around toward Christ and his work. By doing so, the central character and action of Wesley’s doctrine ceased to be Adam and sin, and instead became Christ and his atonement. The result is that Wesley’s doctrine of humanity can be understood more fully in the light of his Christology, even though his Christology does not significantly alter the content of his doctrine of humanity.

Chapter Four examined the areas of Wesley’s theology most closely associated with justification as an orienting concern, as representative of Wesley’s second core doctrine of faith. We referred to this as Christ working for us. This chapter described the relationship between Wesley’s Christology and his understanding of grace, faith, repentance, fruits meet for repentance, and adoption.

Wesley spoke of grace in general terms as the favour of God given to undeserving humanity. However, he also particularized his definition at times by referring to grace as the favour of the Lord Jesus Christ. For Wesley grace was understood as both free and co-operant. With regard to the co-operant nature of grace, Christ is both foundation and exemplar; his sacrifice provided the grounds for grace.

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675 Wesley, ‘God’s Love to Fallen Man’ (BE), 424.
and also stands as the ultimate example of co-operant grace fully embraced. And it is Christ himself who compels humanity to respond in faith. God’s grace is bestowed according to Christ’s merit alone, and it is Christ himself who enacts his will in the lives of those who respond to God in faith. Wesley viewed faith as operating in distinct stages, where every step of faith is a co-operative response to the free grace of God, empowered by the Spirit, and directed toward Christ. The faith of a son, which both results in and flows out of justification, is truly focused upon Christ. It is faith in Christ alone for salvation.

Wesley’s doctrine of repentance had an implied, but not always explicit, emphasis upon Christ. Evangelical repentance, which follows justification, is grounded upon faith in Christ alone to bring about the fruit of repentance. For Wesley, the first repentance is grounded upon the prevenient grace of God at work through the Holy Spirit prior to justification. The second repentance is grounded upon the person and work of Christ as appropriated by the believer through faith.

With regard to Wesley’s concept of ‘fruits meet for repentance’ we discovered that Wesley only intended these to apply to that repentance, which precedes justification, and they are, therefore, not inherently linked to his Christology. On the contrary, Wesley thought the doctrine of imputation was best applied to justification itself, and was, therefore, inherently tied to his Christology, because the focus is on the application of the work of Christ to the believer.

Wesley understood adoption to be both a result of faith in Christ’s sacrifice and also a distinct work of Christ in the believer’s life. This doctrine is inherently Christological, but it did not hold a significant place in Wesley’s soteriology.

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676 See the earlier discussion about grace as both co-operant and free.
These themes in Wesley’s soteriology overwhelmingly point back to Christ as both the source and goal. There are some aspects, which tend more toward a general Trinitarian emphasis, but it is safe to say that the majority was shaped by his understanding of the person and work of Christ and his post-1738 conviction that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Chapter Five examined the areas of Wesley’s theology most closely associated with sanctification as an orienting concern, as representative of Wesley’s third core doctrine of holiness. We referred to this as Christ working in us. This chapter described the relationship between Wesley’s Christology and his understanding of new birth, assurance, and Christian perfection.

For Wesley the new birth is the real change that God works in the human soul when he raises it from death to life, and entails regeneration. The fruits of regeneration are manifest as liberty: freedom from the power and presence of sin and the freedom to love as God loves. His understanding that children of God receive freedom from the power of sin grew out of his conviction that the power granted through faith in Christ must be sufficient to cancel all sin, or it is not sufficient for any. His view that this freedom from the power of sin should eventually result in freedom from the presence of sin grew out of his understanding that all justified believers have truly been ‘made new’ in Christ. Wesley believed that all justified and regenerated believers are free to love as God loves, and when they do so their actions confirm that they are indeed children of God, through faith in Christ, and have been filled with Christ’s love.

Though Wesley connects the content of the Spirit’s testimony back to the work of Christ and adoption, his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ only
loosely informs his doctrine of assurance. It is Triune in the sense that Wesley was careful to indicate that the Spirit gives testimony to the believer based on his or her justification by faith in Christ and adoption as a child of God. However, Wesley’s doctrine of assurance is much more pneumatological in nature. However, Wesley did appeal to the work of Christ with regard to the content of the testimony given by the Spirit. The content of the Spirit’s testimony and the grounds of our own spirit’s witness is the saving work of Jesus Christ, by which one is adopted as a child of God.

Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection was founded upon his conviction that Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient to utterly destroy both the power and the presence of sin in the believer’s life and also produce the true love of God in the believer’s soul. Justification is made available to all those who trust fully in Christ and his atonement to remove the guilt of sin and its power. Likewise, entire sanctification and perfection in love are made available to all those who trust in Christ to finish the work he began by liberating the soul from sin. Wesley’s theology of sanctification was not always explicitly linked to his doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ. However, there is an implicit Christological undergirding to Wesley’s theology, which he made explicit at some points along the way. His doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ may not have been the most prominent feature of these doctrines, but he endeavoured to tie each of them back to the sufficiency of Christ and salvation by faith in him alone.

It is clear that Wesley’s doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ did change following his 1738 ‘evangelical conversion’. His inherited theology became evangelical as it took on a new role and meaning for him personally. Aspects of his broader theology were shaped by his newfound focus upon salvation in Christ alone to greater or lesser degrees, and while not every doctrine proves to be fully
Christological, Wesley’s thought shows a repeated effort after 1738 to connect everything back to Christ and the message of full salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone.
Appendix A: Christ in ‘A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists’

Introduction

In his preface to the 1780 Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists, John Wesley reflected on his printing of yet another hymnbook among the many volumes he and his brother Charles had already produced in more than forty years of ministry to the American colonies and Methodist Societies in England. 677 Wesley initially resisted such an endeavour, considering it unnecessary in the light of the abundant hymnody already available to the Methodists saying, ‘it may be doubted whether any religious community in the world has a greater variety of them.’ 678

Indeed, the hymnic legacy of the Wesleys began even before John’s conversion in 1738, as Oliver A. Beckerlegge has noted in his introduction to the 1780 Collection in the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley’s Works. 679

Already in Georgia in 1737—before his conversion, and when ‘Methodist’ still had its original Oxford meaning of one who was methodical in his observance of the rites and statutes of the Church—he had published A Collection of Hymns and Psalms for the use of the infant colony. This volume, perhaps the first hymn-book published in America, and the first Anglican hymn-book as it is the first Methodist hymn-book, contained seventy hymns from various sources, predominantly Isaac Watts. 680

Wesley drew from many sources for this early work, but one should not overlook his own substantial contributions. He made careful work of compiling this first

677 Wesley, Collection.
678 Wesley, ‘The Preface’ in Collection, 73.
679 Beckerlegge, Oliver A. ‘Introduction,’ §2, Collection, 22-30.
hymnbook, testing its use in worship and discussing its content with friends, as well as translating hymns from other languages to English, adding his own creativity to the task of ensuring the poetic quality and message remained intact. Evidence from Wesley’s Georgia diaries suggests the earliest Methodist hymns for which we have a record were translated from the German by John Wesley in 1736. In the Standard Edition of Wesley’s journals Nehemiah Curnock lists four German hymns as some of the earliest of Wesley’s known translations, and a fifth early hymn written in 1736 is mentioned by Wesley in his A Plain Account of Christian Perfection:

[W]e embarked for America, in the latter end of 1735. It was the next year, while I was at Savannah, that I wrote the following lines: --

Is there a thing beneath the sun,  
That strives with thee my heart to share?  
Ah! Tear it thence, and reign alone,  
The Lord of every motion there!

Nor did Wesley rely upon his own command of the German language for this task. In at least one instance, on January 25, 1740, he submitted for critique a copy of

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682 See Mary Champness, Half-Hours with the Methodist Hymn Book. (London: Charles H. Kelly, unknown date), 78-95 for a discussion concerning John Wesley’s contributions to hymnody by way of his translations.
683 Henry Bett, Hymns of Methodism in their Literary Relations. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1913), 6-14. Bett demonstrated that the earliest hymns of Methodism came from the pen of John Wesley during his trip to the American colonies, though much of his earliest contributions to hymnody came by way of translation, particularly of German hymns, into English.
684 Bett, Hymns of Methodism in their Literary Relations, 7.
685 John Wesley, The Journal of John Wesley: Standard Edition. Vol. 1. Ed. Nehemiah Curnock. (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 299. It should be noted that much of Wesley’s record of his translating activity in his Diaries is limited in detail, often restricted to one or two words, such as ‘Translated’, ‘Translated German’ or ‘Translated verse’. Further evidence as the precise nature of such translation activity has been supplied by Curnock in the form of facsimiles from Wesley’s diaries on pp. 215-16 for example.
686 Wesley, John. ‘A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, and Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, from the Year 1725, to the Year 1777.’ (Jackson), 369.
his translation of Johan Andreas Rothe’s hymn *Ich habe nun den Grund gefunden* (‘I have now found the ground) to P.H. Molther, who was a German Moravian living in London at that time, and upon Mr. Molther’s recommendation Wesley adopted an alteration of one verse.687 Wesley continued this pattern of compiling, editing, and testing hymnbooks throughout his years of ministry, publishing many volumes of hymns and poems for the use of the Methodist societies. Some of these volumes contained hymns translated or written entirely by John, some pulled from other English writers, such as Isaac Watts, and most written and jointly published by his brother Charles.

That the Methodist Societies were a people of song cannot be in doubt, given the vigour with which the Wesley’s put forth hymns for their consumption. Yet, with the ample offerings of John and Charles already available in print, the ongoing call to produce another collection might seem surprising, and John’s ultimate willingness to produce such a work even more so, were it not for his great concern that the hymns be made accessible to as large a group of people as possible, regardless of social standing.

But it has been answered, such a publication is highly needful upon this very account; for the greater part of the people, being poor, are no able to purchase so many books. And those that have purchased them are as it were bewildered in the immense variety. There is therefore still wanting a proper collection of hymns for general use, carefully made out of all these books; and one comprised in so moderate a compass as neither to be cumbersome nor expensive.688

John Wesley’s concern for the accessibility and cost of such a work was clear. This concern for the poor among the societies along with his recognition of the importance

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of the hymns as doctrinal statements finally drove him to overcome his own objections to organize and produce the 1780 Collection.

Such a hymn-book you have now before you. It is not so large as to be either cumbersome or expensive. And it is large enough to contain such a variety of hymns as will not soon be worn threadbare. It is large enough to contain all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason . . . [T]his book is in effect a little body of experimental and practical divinity.689

Though John Wesley would go on to produce several additional hymn publications, such as supplements to the collection and smaller hymnbooks for specific groups or uses, the 1780 Collection stands as the crowning achievement of Methodist hymnody in his lifetime.690 As Oliver Beckerlegge has stated, ‘[T]he publication of the Collection was the result of no sudden brainstorm, but had been pondered in Wesley’s mind, and even prepared for by his pen, over not only a decade, but a generation.’691

With the background of the Wesley brothers’ hymns, and particularly the 1780 Collection, firmly in mind, let us turn now to the purposes for this paper. There are two goals toward which this research is directed. The first is to lay groundwork for understanding the unique place of the 1780 Collection in the greater Wesleyan theological corpus and to introduce and defend the rationale for utilizing the Collection as primary source material in the study of John Wesley’s theology.

The second goal of this paper is to offer an introduction to one key area in which the Collection may be utilized by the student of Wesley as a primary source to more fully understand his theology. To this end, I will briefly introduce some

characteristics of Christology in the *Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*.

**Joint-Authorship of the Hymns**

When discussing the place of the hymns in the context of John Wesley’s theology, the question of authorship becomes an immediate and primary concern. As J. Ernest Rattenbury noted in *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns*, ‘[O]f the hymns published during the first ten years of the Methodist revival, not more than 50 can at present be shown to be by John, and it is likely that the total number did not reach 100.’\(^692\) Whether or not this statement is wholly accurate, such a small estimation of John’s contributions to the writing of early Methodist hymns compared with the contribution of his brother Charles is staggering. Charles is credited with the bulk of the approximately 6,500 hymns produced by the Wesleys, and rightly so.\(^693\) Frank Baker estimated Charles’ total output of verse to nearly 9,000 poems, his tremendous gift allowing him to write, on average, ‘ten lines of verse every day for 50 years, completing an extant poem every other day.’\(^694\)

Despite the vast difference in the brothers’ volume of output, early attempts to identify precisely which hymns were written by John and which by Charles were considerably difficult. Henry Bett commented that ‘there are many hymns written by the Wesleys of which it has been impossible to say, hitherto, whether they were the


work of John or Charles . . .’ The difficulty arises, at least in part, from the publishing habits of the Wesley brothers. Though Charles occasionally published hymns on his own, and these sometimes against John’s wishes, the hymns that made it into the collections for the Methodist societies were jointly published by the brothers, and usually without mention of authorship. Frank Baker described this practice well with his comments on the period between 1739 and 1745 when,

. . . the brothers published five volumes as joint authors, with no indication of the extent of their respective contributions. These five volumes, together with John Wesley’s ‘Moral and Sacred Poems of 1744 . . . between them present some 700 poems which are either original or are adaptations from earlier poets. These 700 pieces include many of the best known Methodist hymns. 696

As we have seen, John’s contributions to Methodist hymnody included translation, particularly, and to a lesser degree his own original hymns. But arguably his greatest contributions came from his meticulous care as compiler and editor. Wesley naturally took great care with the editing of his own writings, such as his letters, sermons, journals, and the like. What may be surprising is the great deal of care he put into the oversight of other Methodist publications. Wesley made it a rule that none of his preachers were permitted to publish anything without his express consent, and though he relaxed this rule briefly in 1780 the resulting publications gave him such pause that he quickly reinstituted the ban on such unedited material. 697

Wesley exercised this same level of oversight in the publishing of his Christian Library, stating that his purpose in producing the extracts was ‘to select whatever I had seen most valuable in the English language and either abridge or take the whole tracts, only a little corrected or explained, as occasion should require.’ 698 This he accomplished to varying degrees of success. While his editor’s pen was

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696 Baker, Representative Verse of Charles Wesley, lviii.
698 Telford, 2:152.
visible throughout each volume, he at times allowed material into the Library that directly contrasted with what he was teaching elsewhere. In one such instance, when an error was pointed out by opponents, Wesley refuted their accusations by explaining that he was not the author of the extracts, merely their editor, and was not, therefore, in agreement with everything they contained. However, as Thomas Herbert has duly noted, Wesley still carried the burden of transmitting uncorrected texts:

He [Wesley] may have protested that the writings were not his own and that the questionable passages would be counterbalanced by the force of his own writings. But the fact remained that he had undertaken to purge the works of error and had failed to do so. By setting his hand to the task of abridging he inevitably entailed responsibility for the result; and people had a perfectly sound right to father him with it.

Such editorial oversight was not common for Wesley, and his concern for the ramifications of such errors stand as testimony to the seriousness with which he approached the editorial task.

Charles Wesley was perhaps the only person whose judgment John trusted in matters of editorial import, and this only so far as it concerned material of a poetic nature. In a letter to Walter Churcheay dated October 18, 1777 Wesley described his plans for the Arminian Magazine saying, ‘We agree that no politics shall have a place in the Arminian Magazine. But poetry will; only my brother and I are judges to what pieces shall be admitted.’ Yet while John respected his brother’s abilities and judgment as a poet, he by no means withheld his editor’s pen from Charles’ hymns, nor relinquished to Charles the responsibility of selecting the hymns that would come to comprise the 1780 Collection. His praise for Charles’ work in the preface to the Collection is generous, indeed, but as Beckerlegge has demonstrated so effectively, there is more at work in the Collection than the words it contains:

The hands might be—indeed they were—the hands of Charles, but the voice was the voice of John. It was John who conceived the whole Collection; it was John who chose the hymns to be included, without consulting his brother, though using his material; it was John who worked through the hymns, deciding which verses to include and which to omit; it was John who took the

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699 Herbert, John Wesley as editor and author, 26-7.
700 Herbert, John Wesley as editor and author, 27.
701 Herbert, John Wesley as editor and author, 61
702 Telford, 6:283.
liberty at times of altering and revising his brother’s verses; it was John who arranged them so as to be a little body of divinity.\textsuperscript{703}

And so it is that the 1780 \textit{Collection} became the joint work of two incredible minds; Charles the poet and hymn writer, and John the organizer and editor. As George H. Findlay has said, ‘the famous hymn book . . . was the joint work of two religious geniuses, complementary and apparently indispensable to one another.’\textsuperscript{704}

We could go on, but the point has been sufficiently made; so far as the joint publications of John and Charles Wesley are concerned, unless otherwise explicitly stated\textsuperscript{705}, the content is considered by the brothers to be the work of both. This is particularly true of the 1780 \textit{Collection}, which stands as the pinnacle of the Wesleys’ collaborative efforts. Though perhaps overstated, Findlay’s remarks paint a vivid picture of the cooperative nature of the Wesley brothers’ partnership,

Thus there is one work, but two very different minds behind it. It is impossible to say whether more is owed to Charles’ exuberance or to his older brother’s sober cautious judgment. Where did the driving force lie? Which was the master spirit? Here this joint work of theirs stands, an intriguing and baffling illustration of what can be done by two minds working as one.\textsuperscript{706}

\textbf{Theology in Hymns?}

After the question of authorship has been raised about the hymns and addressed, the next matter of importance is this: what do the hymns have to offer to

\textsuperscript{705} One notable exception to this rule for jointly published works appears in John Wesley’s ‘A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,’ 391, wherein he states, ‘In the year 1749, my brother printed two volumes of “Hymns and Sacred Poems.” As I did not see these before they were published, there were some things in them which I did not approve of.’
\textsuperscript{706} Findlay, \textit{Christ’s Standard Bearer}, 13.
the student of John Wesley’s theology? What can be gained by studying the hymns as a theological, or in this case a doxological, text? Teresa Berger has defined doxology simply as ‘the language of praise to God’. Hymns, insofar as they glorify God, should be viewed as doxological speech, though they are by no means the only sorts of texts that do so. In other words not all hymns are doxological in nature, and not all doxological speech is to be found in the form of hymns. However, in her analysis of the Wesley’s hymns, Berger has found something rather surprising in that,

[W]hen it comes to Wesleyan hymnody, particularly as represented in ‘A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists,’ we are dealing almost exclusively with doxological hymn texts. This is a result, on the one hand, of the particular experience of faith at the heart of this collection and, on the other hand, of the selection process used for this hymnbook.  

What makes hymns particularly useful as doxological speech is that they tend to transcend theological differences, where other forms of theological exposition may be peculiar to a particular confessing group. Though diverse groups may not be able to overcome theological differences easily, they are very often able to worship and sing hymns together, even though the hymns may be of a theological nature. This is partly because hymnody transcends theological traditions and partly because the nature of hymnody is more fluid, in the sense that it is less resistant than some other traditions to change over time. As Berger has said,

Nearly all Christian traditions, whether liturgical or aliturgical, utilize hymns as ‘doxological speech’ . . . moreover, it [hymnody] is nowhere nearly as static in most traditions as, for example, the Eucharistic prayer. Thus, it demonstrates more clearly the imprint and interaction of a particular period


and its theology.  

For the student of theology, then, doxological hymns demonstrate theology that is representative of particular groups and at particular times, and may stand with or against more static theological traditions to offer a window into the theological worldview of each group. In other words, doxological hymns are useful on their own merit for understanding a particular group’s theology, and should be utilized as more than illustrative material in support of a theological point.

That the 1780 Collection communicates the full spectrum of Charles Wesley’s theology cannot be in doubt. As Oliver A. Beckerlegge has stated, ‘A summary list of key texts recurring throughout the Collection would serve as a basis for the summa of Charles Wesley’s theology . . . Let no one cry ‘fundamentalism’; the prime source of Wesley’s theology lies here, and all other antecedents or influences are secondary.’

But what of John Wesley’s theology? Can one say that the hymns convey the true sense of this? We have our answer in Wesley’s own words from the preface to the Collection, ‘all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason . . .’ Beckerlegge put these words in context with the opening lines of his introduction to the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley’s works when he said, ‘where other traditions refer to Articles and Confessions of Faith, Methodists (while accepting the historic creeds) find their doctrines expressed in three sets of biblical expositions: Sermons,

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709 Berger, Theology in Hymns, 20-1.
710 Berger, Theology in Hymns, 16.
The 1780 *Collection* as a Primary Source for John Wesley Studies

The 1780 *Collection* of hymns stands as the greatest joint publishing achievement of the Wesley’s careers. Conceived of as a definitive answer to the needs of the Methodist societies, John Wesley offered this hymnbook up as a melodic body of his theology to be used equally for the training of Christians and the worship and adoration of God. John’s meticulous care in collecting, editing, and organizing the hymns lends his express approval to their content. The nature of the hymns as doxological speech marks them as a valuable resource for the theology of the Methodists in the late eighteenth century. John wielded extraordinary influence and control over the Methodist societies and all of the publications those associated with them produced. In doing so, he took upon himself the burden for what they contained. Thomas Herbert perhaps says it best:

> [Wesley] maintained an arbitrary power, a power exercised, as he said, 'singly, without any colleagues therein' over the three hundred and seventy-one publications of which he was definitely the personal editor . . . Absolute power inescapably bears with it absolute responsibility. Of whatever occurs, therefore, in any work which he wrote, abridged, or edited in any way, we may safely say, 'John Wesley is responsible for this.'

All of these things together lend credence to the argument that the 1780 *Collection* be utilized as a primary source for the study of John Wesley’s theology.

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714 Herbert, *John Wesley as editor and author*, 2.
A Brief Introduction to Christology in the 1780 Collection

With this justification firmly behind us, I would now like to offer up a brief introduction to Christology in the 1780 Collection in order to illustrate the benefits of a theological reading of the hymns. This work is of a preliminary nature only, and should serve as an example of the range of theological themes found within the Collection. Further in-depth work will need to be done in order to fully flesh out the Wesley’s vision of Christ in the hymns, and to avoid the charge of ‘proof-texting’. While there are many theological themes present in the hymns, Craig B. Gallaway has noted that one finds there is a particular interest in the Person and Work of Christ.

[A]n essential objective in the hymns themselves was to deepen insight into the totality of Christ’s person and work by continuing though time to contemplate the reality of his presence with the community in history, in the light of all that can be remembered and hoped in him.715

Likewise, Oliver Beckerlegge has said, ‘The Person and Work of Christ in Wesley’s hymns would need a book to themselves,’ but this is compounded by the fact that ‘some of the most important [hymns] “on the incarnation, sufferings, glory” are omitted from the 1780 Collection.’716 Yet students of Wesley should not despair. As Beckerlegge has encouraged us, ‘many examples remain even here to illustrate John Wesley’s succinct summary of “preaching Christ”.’717

In an effort to remain within the scope of this paper, I have selected one or two representative hymns for each of the following sections and provided some basic exposition. While this approach is not enough to exhaustively support claims to the

content of Wesley’s Christology, it will allow us to gain a general understanding of the Christological themes covered in the *Collection*. Unless otherwise noted, all hymns are quoted from the *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*.

**The Incarnation of Christ**

‘Jesus, thou art the mighty God,  
The Child and Son on us bestowed.  
Jehova born on earth, in thee  
The everlasting Son we see;  
And all thy Church triumphant sings  
The Prince of peace, the King of kings.’\(^{718}\)

With the opening stanza of this hymn Christ’s identity is confirmed and the Incarnation described. Wesley declared that the Son of God, who is himself a person of the Godhead has been born a child on earth, and Jesus is his name. By invoking the divine name Jehova and the title King of kings, he emphasized that God himself has come to earth as the eternal Son. And what is the result of this condescension? His people, the Church, can now rejoice at his coming. He is Emmanuel, God with us.

‘Thou art the co-eternal Son,  
In substance with thy Father one,  
In person differing we proclaim,  
In power and majesty the same;  
For him in thee we magnify,  
And thee in him, the Lord most high.’

‘No vain distinction we confess  
Betwixt a greater God and less;  
No inequality there is,  
But his are thine, and thine are his;  
And thee we on thy Father’s seat  
One glorious God for ever greet.’\(^{719}\)

Though the introductory verses lay claim to Jesus’ origin as the Son of God, any doubt that may remain concerning his divinity is removed as the hymn continues with

\(^{718}\) Wesley, *Collection*, 386-7.  
the confession that Jesus is also Lord, equal with the Father in power and majesty, and unified with him as ‘One glorious God’. In this short hymn, Wesley communicated both the reality of the Incarnation and the unique person of Jesus as both God and man.

**The Person of Christ: Totus Christus**

‘O for a thousand tongues to sing
My dear redeemer’s praise!
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace!’

The first hymn in the *Collection* appropriately begins with a call for the faithful to cry out in praise of the glorious work of God. With this opening battle cry, Wesley set the stage for what follows in the remainder of the hymnbook. It is a song of praise and adoration that recounts the person and work of Christ and the efficacy of his sacrifice for human persons. In this hymn, Wesley revealed Christ as Redeemer. He is ‘Master’ and ‘God’, yes, but he is also ‘Jesus, the [human] name that charms our fears’. Wesley offered in the hymns a robust and multifaceted image of the person of Christ, and he did so at nearly every turn, with barely a stanza going by without reference to Christ as redeemer, mediator, and deliverer.

Craig B. Gallaway described Wesley’s approach to Christology in the hymns as a *totus Christus* or ‘whole Christ’ approach. By this concept he meant to convey,

[T]he fact that the Wesley’s gave a place of critical importance to the acknowledgment of Christ’s total person and work, an emphasis which exceeds the limits of any single christological title or model and, indeed, is an inexhaustible norm based on faith in the living reality of Christ’s continuing

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720 Wesley, *Collection*, 79.
presence and power in history. To preach ‘all the offices of Christ,’ then, and to rejoice in ‘all the names’ by which Jesus is known, is more than a correlative feature in the christology of the Wesley hymns, it is the very norm by which all the other feature are governed, and toward which they are directed.\textsuperscript{722}

For Wesley, then, expressions about the person and work of Christ in the hymns are not simply window dressing. Rather, they are the normative influence under which all of the hymns operate and by which they are formed. Taken together as a collection, the hymns seek to describe ‘as one’ the totality of who Christ is and what he has done.

\textit{Christ’s Humanity}

John Deschner, in his pivotal work on \textit{Wesley’s Christology} written in the early 1960’s, concluded that Wesley’s thought lacked an emphasis on Christ’s humanity; an observation which he notes other scholars had mentioned prior to him. He wrote,

Rattenbury reports that the English hymnbook committee of 1932 could find only two of Charles Wesley’s more than six thousand hymns to illustrate the earthly life of Christ, and one of these was an allegory on the healing of the sick. This fact may serve as a signal for one of the problems of Wesleyan Christology: the lack of emphasis on the human nature of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{723}

Proceeding from this statement, Deschner evaluated Wesley’s understanding of Christ’s humanity without any reference to the hymns, whatsoever. His conclusion was that Wesley’s Christology does contain clear teaching about the human nature,

remaining within Chalcedonian boundaries and avoiding the trap of Docetism, but just barely so, as ‘the accent lies elsewhere’.  

What Deschner failed to account for, however, is the dynamic, interweaving nature of the Christology in Wesley’s hymns when taken together as a collection. It is true, if one goes looking for hymns under the heading of ‘the humanity of Christ’ one will come up short. However, as we have seen already, what Wesley provided instead was an entire hymnbook, which ‘as a whole’ tells the reader about the entire person and work of Christ, arranged according to the soteriological experience of normal Christians. The hymns, taken in this light, refute Deschner’s insistence that they are almost wholly focused on Christ’s divinity, and instead offer a corrective to his claim that Wesley’s Christology is imbalanced. Hymns #24 and #174 illustrate Wesley’s interweaving totus Christus, approach to Christology.

‘Ye that pass by, behold the Man, 
The Man of griefs condemned for you! 
The Lamb of God, for sinners slain, 
Weeping to Calvary pursue!

See how his back the scourges tear, 
While to the bloody pillar bound! 
The ploughers make long furrows there, 
Till all his body is one wound.’

While this first hymn is clearly a retelling of Christ’s Passion, it is filled with imagery concerning his humanity. Wesley’s language portrays the physical torment that Jesus bore at the Crucifixion, emphasizing that he suffered as a man.

‘Thou Man of griefs, remember me, 
Who never canst thyself forget!

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724 Deschner, WC, 28. 
725 Wesley, Collection, 109-11.
Thy last, mysterious agony,
Thy fainting pangs, and bloody sweat!

When, wrestling in the strength of prayer,
Thy spirit sunk beneath its load,
Thy feeble flesh abhorred to bear
The wrath of an Almighty God.\textsuperscript{726}

One does not need to seek out hymns with the descriptive word ‘Man’ in order to find descriptions of Christ’s humanity. The hymns are rife with imagery and titles pointing to Christ’s human nature. The examples given above were chosen, not for the title ascribed to Christ, the ‘Man of griefs’, but because they wrestle with the vivid imagery of the weight of Christ’s humanity as he struggled under the burden of his soteriological mission. It is in hymnic descriptions like the two above of Christ’s Passion and his meditation in the Garden at Gethsemani that we find Wesley’s insistence in a fully human Jesus.

\textit{Christ’s Divinity}

Just as the hymns are full of imagery associated with Christ’s human nature, so also are they packed with imagery of his divine nature. As we recall the text from hymn #245 quoted previously in this paper, we see Wesley’s emphasis that Jesus and the Father are co-eternal, equal to one another in their nature and relationship, yet distinct in their person:

\begin{quote}
‘Thou art the co-eternal Son,
In substance with thy Father one,
In person differing we proclaim,
In power and majesty the same;’
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{726} Wesley, \textit{Collection}, 297-8.
The language here is explicit, leaving no doubt as to who this Jesus from the first stanza is. He is the eternal Son of God, ‘of one being with the Father’, distinct person of the Trinity. In the same way that Christ’s humanity is made evident in Wesley’s hymns, Christ’s divinity is announced through imagery describing Jesus’ equality with God the Father, and his sharing of the divine attributes.

**The Offices / Work of Christ**

In Wesley’s hymns the offices of Christ and his work are integrally tied together. The hymns do not speak of Christ’s roles as prophet, priest, king, or Son apart from his work in creation, salvation, restoration, mediation, and judgment. As we have already seen in hymns #24 and #174, Wesley wedded together themes of Christ’s work with declarations of his person and his roles as priest and mediator, though he did not always use such titles, often preferring to use imagery to describe Christ’s offices. The examples of such a blending of Christ’s roles and his work in saving humanity are too numerous to count, as they appear in the bulk of the hymns in the *Collection*. Let us offer up one such example as an illustration, since a full analysis of these themes falls outside the scope of this paper.

‘Jesus, my King, to thee I bow,  
Enlisted under thy command;  
Captain of my salvation, thou  
Shalt lead me to the promised land.  

Thou hast a great deliverance wrought,  
The staff from off my shoulder broke,  
Out of the house of bondage brought,  
And freed me from the Egyptian yoke.’

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The Reign of Christ

As Wesley described the Incarnation, person, offices, and work of Christ in the hymns he was doing more than simply describing a scene to an unattached audience. With each hymn, the reader is made a participant in the collective remembrance of who Christ was, and is, and will be. As Christ is co-eternal with the Father and Spirit, he has reigned over all creation, and through him all things were made. In conquering sin and death through the cross and Resurrection, Christ was exalted to sit at the right hand of the Father. When he returns, he will reign in judgment over all. Wesley filled the hymns with the language of Christ’s lordship, emphasizing that Jesus was not only successful in his work, but that his work was effective and continues to be so for the lives of those who claim him as Lord.

‘Jesus, the conqu’ror, reigns,
In glorious strength arrayed,
His kingdom over all maintains,
And bids the earth be glad.
Ye sons of men, rejoice
In Jesu’s mighty love,
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice
To him who rules above.

Extol his kingly power,
Kiss the exalted Son,
Who died, and lives, to die no more,
High on his Father’s throne;
Our Advocate with God,
He undertakes our cause,
And spreads through all the earth abroad
The vict’ry of his cross.’⁷²⁸

Just as the whole 1780 Collection of hymns testifies to the person and work of Christ, so it also testifies to his reign as the Son of God.

⁷²⁸ Wesley, Collection, 412-13.
Conclusion

While this short paper cannot hope to offer a full treatment of Wesley’s Christology it stands as evidence to the sufficiency of the 1780 *Collection* as a doxological apologetic for Wesley’s lifelong mission of ‘preaching Christ’ to a world in desperate need of his matchless grace and mercy; embodied in the Incarnation, poured out on the Cross, made effective in the Resurrection, and witnessed in the life of his sanctified, Spirit filled Church until he comes again in glory. In the words of John Wesley,

‘God loves you; therefore love and obey him. Christ died for you; therefore die to sin. Christ is risen; therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore; therefore live to God, till you live with him in glory.’ So we preached; and so you believed. This is the scriptural way, the Methodist way, the true way. God grant we may never turn therefrom, to the right hand or to the left. 729

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