Calvin on Romans 6:1-8:14: The Function of Law and Grace in Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification through Union with Christ and its Implication for the Wesleyan Theology of Sanctification

by

Axel Kazadi

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College and the Graduate Centre for Theological Studies of the Toronto School of Theology. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology awarded by Wycliffe College and the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Axel Kazadi 2018
Abstract

The thesis argues that sanctification in Calvin’s thought is driven by the dialectic of freedom and obedience, which is linked with our mortification and vivification within our union with Christ.

The thesis uses Calvin as a resource for reframing the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification. It is argued that the Wesleyan doctrine is driven by moral perfectionism because (1) it conceptualizes the Christian life as a state of perfection in which all sins (including original sin) are eradicated, and (2) it does not explicitly address our sanctification within our union with Christ. Calvin noted correctly that sanctification is continuous in this life, and it should be conceived as our participation in Christ, in whom we are daily being mortified and vivified by Him. Calvin can help steer the Wesleyan doctrine away from moral perfectionism by challenging it to reframe sanctification as a continual participation in Christ in this life.
Acknowledgments

While I was writing this thesis, I was blessed to receive encouragements and support from family members and friends. I am thankful for my supervisor Dr. Ephraim Radner’s feedback, support, and criticisms. Under his guidance, I was challenged to think thoroughly. I also want to express my gratitude to Dr. John Vissers and Dr. David Demson for their insightful comments, questions, and guidance. Finally, I am grateful for my editor and friend Gilbert Tong for his comments and questions.
## Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................... iii

List of Abbreviations .......................................................................................................................... v

Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Previous Interpretations of Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification in Calvin and Wesleyan Studies ............................................................... 8

1. Context of Calvin Studies Regarding Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification ........ 8
2. Context of Wesleyan Studies Regarding Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification .... 11

Chapter 2: The Function of Law and Grace in Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification .... 14

1. Union with Christ as the Central Principle in Calvin’s Soteriology ................. 14
2. The Function of Law and Grace .............................................................................. 19
   2.1. Mortification and Freedom ............................................................................. 20
   2.2. Vivification and Obedience ........................................................................... 23

Chapter 3: The Implications of Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification for Wesleyan Theology of Sanctification ................................................................. 28

1. From Wesley to the 19th Century Holiness Movement: The Modification of Christian Perfection ................................................................. 28
2. Calvin’s Theology as a Resource to Reframe the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification ...................................................................................... 34

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 40

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................. 41
List of Abbreviations

NPC

New Perspective on Calvin
Introduction

John Wesley developed his doctrine of sanctification (or Christian perfection) extensively in his book *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.¹ Two basic ideas, which are fundamental to Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification, are the gradual and instantaneous aspects. Concerning the two aspects, Wesley wrote,

…there is a gradual work of God in the soul, or that, generally speaking, it is a long time, even many years, before sin is destroyed…But we know likewise, that God may, with man’s good leave, ‘cut short his work,’ in whatever degree he pleases, and do the usual work of many years in a moment. He does so in many instances; and yet there is a gradual work, both before and after that moment: So that one may affirm the work is gradual, another, it is instantaneous, without any manner of contradiction.²

Wesley, however, emphasized the instantaneous aspect of sanctification, specifically that one can be instantly cleansed from all sins through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit before death.³ He referred to this as Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Wesley thought such an affirmation of entire sanctification was lacking in Luther and the Lutherans of his day. He asserted that Luther was confused in his understanding of sanctification and commented thus:

It has been frequently observed, that very few were clear in their judgment both with regard to justification and sanctification. Many who have spoken and written admirably well concerning justification, had no clear conception, nay, were totally ignorant, of the doctrine of sanctification. Who has written more ably than Martin Luther on justification by faith alone? And who was more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification, or more confused in his conceptions of it? In order to be thoroughly convinced of this, of his total ignorance with regard to sanctification, there needs no more than to read over, without prejudice, his celebrated comment on the Epistle to the Galatians.⁴

Although Luther did not affirm the possibility of Christian perfection in this life, he was not confused about sanctification. Luther’s understanding of sanctification cannot be understood apart from his concept of justification by faith. For Luther, we are justified by faith when we

---

¹ John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966). Wesley was convinced his doctrine of sanctification was the “grand deposit” which was entrusted to the Methodist people by God. He developed his doctrine extensively in his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. The *Plain Account* had multiple editions, and the final fourth edition of 1777 contained mature ideas of Wesley concerning sanctification. Wesley wrote *A Plain Account* to demonstrate he preached Christian perfection consistently throughout his ministerial career. Wesley often used several words synonymous with Christian perfection such as perfect love, pure love, and entire sanctification.
² Ibid., 90.
³ Ibid., 19.
embrace Christ through exercising our faith in Him, and thereafter Christ’s righteousness renders us righteous. After justification, one is gradually sanctified by Christ throughout his whole life. The believer remains righteous and concurrently a sinner throughout his life.

Luther discussed two kinds of righteousness: alien righteousness and proper righteousness. Though distinguishable, these two are inseparably linked together. Alien righteousness is the righteousness of God by which Christ justifies the sinner, and Christ imputes his righteousness to the sinner who is justified (justification). This righteousness is alien in the sense that the believer did not actively generate it within himself because Christ imputed it to him. It is rather a passive righteousness which “he can only ‘suffer’ and receive [through faith].” Proper righteousness, on the other hand, is the righteousness which the believer experiences in himself by mortifying the flesh (sanctification). This proper righteousness is a continuous sanctifying work God does in the life of the believer by grace. The works of love the believer performs are a direct result of one’s justification.

---

5 Martin Luther, *Romans Lecture* (1515/1516), vol. 25, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 32-34; cf. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 258–61; cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 226–31. Althaus explained that our justification depends on faith in Christ, and it is the “only form of faith in Christ.” However, it is important to stress that this faith is not viewed as a work, nor is this faith an invention by a human being. Faith is a gift of God. An individual embraces Christ through this gratuitous faith, and the righteousness of Christ renders the individual righteous.

6 Victor A Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (Vancouver: Regent College Pub., 2008), 148 & 160–61. Explaining Luther’s understanding of a Christian as *simul peccator et iustus*, Victor Shepherd wrote, “The Christian continues to live under two determinations, that of Christ and his righteousness and that of the old creature of sin which still clings to us, but these are not weighted equally so as to leave us on a teeter-totter with the outcome of our identity utterly at risk. Our determination in Christ is always greater, for the simple reason that Christ rules in his people. The old creature resides, but Christ alone presides.” Whereas, for Wesley, there is no two determinations in the moment of entire sanctification because inbred sin or Adamic depravity within the individual is eradicated. There is only one determination which involves living according to the Spirit, and one acquires a pure nature. I will expound more on this in chapter 3, in which I will address the implications of Calvin’s theology of sanctification for Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification.

7 Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther*, 146.


9 Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 228;

10 Ibid., 235–36; Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther*, 146; Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 262–64.

Wesley defined justification by faith as “pardon,” while alien righteousness – which Christ imputes to the believer in justification – is not espoused by Wesley. Wesley was suspicious of the doctrine of imputed righteousness because it gave rise to antinomianism in Lutheran circles of his day. However, the problem with the extreme emphasis on sanctification in Wesley and his followers is the neglect of the association of imputed righteousness with union with Christ in the doctrine of justification, which – for Luther and Calvin – is linked with the doctrine of sanctification. Wesley regarded the doctrine of imputed righteousness of Christ as unscriptural and a blow to the root, the root of all holiness, all true religion…Hereby Christ is stabbed in the house of his friends, of those who make the largest professions of loving Him; the whole design of His death, namely, to destroy the work of the devil, being overthrown at a stake. For wherever this doctrine is cordially received, it leaves no place for holiness.

The doctrine of imputed righteousness, however, addresses the union we have with Christ by virtue of Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us. The justified sinner is righteous in Christ, and Christ is his sanctification. The Reformers grounded sanctification in Christ, and it was linked with our union with Him. Believers are not sanctified outside Christ because they cannot sanctify themselves through their own good works. Though Wesleyan theology would not object to the idea of Christ as our sanctification, it characteristically does not acknowledge explicitly the relation between union with Christ and sanctification in its doctrine of sanctification. Christology and sanctification are brought together only when Christ’s distant work at the cross is posited as

---

12 John Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” in Sermons I, vol. 1, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 187-89. Concerning justification as “pardon,” Wesley wrote, “The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he ‘showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past.” He repudiated the notion that justification consisted of Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us and rendering us righteous. He wrote justification “is not the being made actually just and righteous. This is sanctification; which is indeed in some degree the immediate fruit of justification, but nevertheless is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature.” For Wesley, justification is something which “God does for us” insofar as he pardons our sins, and sanctification is “what he does in us” by the Holy Spirit. When we are justified by God, Wesley stated that we are not yet righteous nor does God regard us as such. He argued that God never thinks us to be what in fact we are not. God “never esteems us better than we really are, or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous.” Wesley differed with Luther and Calvin on his understanding of justification. For the Magisterial Reformers, justification is not simply a pardon, but also consists of Christ’s righteousness rendering us righteous, thereby God justifies us by faith.

13 See Shepherd, Interpreting Martin Luther, 146; cf. Lohse, Martin Luther’s Theology, 261. Shepherd and Lohse recognize the crucial link between imputed righteousness and sanctification. The doctrine of imputed righteousness, which addresses our alien righteousness in Christ, is discussed by Shepherd and Lohse as the basis of our sanctification.

the basis which guarantees the possibility of attaining Christian perfection. However, Wesleyan theology never answers sufficiently Calvin’s profound question at the beginning of Book III of the *Institutes*: “Comment les biens que Dieu le Père a mis en son Fils parviennent à nous, veu que le Fils ne les a pas receu pour son utilité privée, mais pour en subvenir aux povres et indigens?”

Since imputed righteousness is repudiated, Wesley believed the justified believer remains unrighteous and only ceases in the crisis moment of entire sanctification. Unless one is entirely sanctified, God never pretends the sinner is what he is not. The Wesleyan language of sanctification suggests that sanctification is the promise of God, guaranteed by Christ’s work at the cross, for the individual to embrace by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. However, since there is no explicit affirmation of imputed righteousness, the reformed emphasis on the relation between union with Christ and sanctification is lacking in Wesleyan theology. Though one receives the gift of sanctification by grace, it is as though one must maintain the quality of his sanctity with his own resources by being obedient to God, and the Holy Spirit is invoked as the aid for believers who are pursuing holiness.

The doctrine of union with Christ is a significant heritage of the Reformation associated with the doctrine of justification and sanctification. John Calvin, a second-generation Reformer, expounded on the doctrine extensively. Justification and sanctification are succinctly related to the doctrine of union with Christ in Calvin’s theology in a systematic fashion. According to Calvin, union with Christ simply expresses the scriptural truth of being engrafted to Christ through faith. The nature of this union is not substantial, but a union of fellowship with Christ. Our nature does not substantially unite with the person of Christ. Calvin’s ideas of sanctification initially begin with the doctrine of imputed righteousness, and sanctification is the outworking of the righteousness of Christ we embrace in our union with Him. Calvin described the doctrine of imputed righteousness in the context of our justification. While the doctrine of sanctification is grounded upon Calvin’s ideas of imputed righteousness, he never confused justification with sanctification. Highlighting this, Thomas C. Oden, a Methodist theologian and minister, admitted,

---

There is a profound doctrine of sanctification in the Calvinist teaching of our sharing in the righteousness of Christ, assuming that our sanctification is already embedded in the justifying act of God. This idea of sanctification Wesley strongly affirmed, yet with the warning that it might drift toward antinomian license. The only way he was refashioning it was by speaking steadily of the possibility and necessity of a full and unreserved consecration of the whole of one’s redeemed powers for the remainder of one’s life.\textsuperscript{16}

Though Oden noted that Wesley affirmed imputed righteousness, Wesley explicitly did not address it positively in his writings. He refuted imputed righteousness because of its antinomian implications, which were evident within Lutheran communities of his time. As aforementioned, Wesley instead stressed proper righteousness, and deemphasized alien righteousness. However, Oden stated correctly that Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification is unique and profound in regard to its particular teaching of “our sharing in the righteousness of Christ” and our sanctification being “embedded in the justifying act of God.”

In Calvin’s writings, unlike Wesley, justification and sanctification are explicitly emphasized together as the benefits of our union with Christ. Wesley mentioned briefly the sanctifying character of our union with Christ in his explanatory notes on the book of Romans, but it is never a major theme in his theological writings on sanctification. Wesley and the holiness proponents of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century shared the same problem in regard to the lack of emphasis on the relation between union with Christ and sanctification.\textsuperscript{17} The 19\textsuperscript{th} century holiness movement overstressed entire sanctification as a second blessing of grace, and the gradual aspect of sanctification was often overlooked by them in their writings. Wesley and his followers mostly concerned themselves with what Luther called “proper righteousness.” In chapter three, it will be argued further that the Wesleyan theology follows a moral perfectionist trajectory: (1) by emphasizing sanctification as a continuous state of perfection in which all sins (including original sin) are eradicated, and (2) without explicitly framing sanctification within our union with Christ. This study seeks to use Calvin as a resource to enrich and sharpen the Wesleyan doctrine of entire


\textsuperscript{17} T. A. Noble, \textit{Holy Trinity: Holy People: The Historic Doctrine of Christian Perfecting} (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013). In modern Methodist scholarship, there has been an attempt made by a Nazarene Scholar named T. A. Noble to relate sanctification with the Person of Christ in his book \textit{Holy Trinity, Holy People}. Noble’s approach to the question of Christology and sanctification is not the same as Calvin’s. Noble used the Chalcedonian definition of Christology to draw the connection between Christology and sanctification, and argued that Christ sanctified us by assuming our flesh through the incarnation and crucifying it at the cross. However, he did not articulate the ongoing reality of the sanctifying character of union with Christ in our lives. Thus, my present study aims to expand on Noble’s thinking by emphasizing the ongoing dynamic of the sanctifying character of union with Christ.
sanctification by relating it to our union with Christ while reframing sanctification as a continuous renewal in Christ.

This thesis aims to investigate Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification by elucidating his understanding of the function of law and grace in his theology of sanctification, which is discussed in his commentary on Romans 6:1-8:14. This passage deals extensively with themes of law and grace, and Paul explained how our mortification and vivification occurs within our life in Christ. Calvin defined mortification as dying to the old self, and vivification as being renewed by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Previous works have discussed these ideas broadly, but do not specifically concern themselves with how law and grace are integral to how they work. This study will clarify the connection.

Though Calvin discussed sanctification as consisting of mortification and vivification, he did not address the dialectic of law and grace in his discussion of mortification and vivification in III.3.8 of his Institutes. However, in Romans 6:1-8:14, the apostle Paul addressed the function of law and grace in his discussion of our mortification and vivification in Christ. Paul argued that we are enslaved to Sin under the law, but we are liberated by the Spirit from the law under grace. Calvin agreed with Paul that the law condemns us and never liberates us from a life of sin, but Christ liberates us from our bondage to Sin and the curse of the law by grace. While we are under grace, Calvin stressed that unbridled lasciviousness does not characterize our life in Christ.

On Romans 6:1-8:14, Calvin commented on the freedom from the curse of the law through the Spirit of Christ and the observance of the law in our obedience to Christ as crucial components of our sanctification in Christ. Without the Spirit of Christ freeing us from the curse of the law, the flesh cannot be mortified through our obedience to Christ. Without the Spirit, the law continues to accuse us of our sins, and we remain in bondage to Sin. Sanctification is impossible without freedom from the law and obedience to Christ. Essentially, this paper demonstrates that

---

18 Calvin, Institutes of the Christian religion, 597.
20 I will be using the term “Sin” to refer to original sin or the Adamic depravity under which we are enslaved, and the term “sins” will be referred to committed sins.
sanctification in Calvin’s thought is driven by the dialectic of freedom and obedience, which is inseparably linked with our mortification and vivification within our union with Christ.

The thesis will be divided in the following three chapters. The first highlights previous works on Calvin’s discussion of union with Christ and sanctification in Calvin studies. It also engages with Wesleyan interpretations of Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification, and establishes a dialogue between Calvin and Wesley studies regarding the topic.

Chapter two presents Calvin’s understanding of the function of law and grace in sanctification from his commentary on Romans 6:1-8:14. It shows how union with Christ and the function of law and grace are integral to Calvin’s view of the dynamic nature of sanctification. It highlights how sanctification in Calvin is driven by the dialectic of freedom and obedience, and this dialectic requires mortification and vivification through one’s participation in Christ’s death and resurrection.

Finally, chapter three addresses the implications of Calvin’s sanctification for contemporary Wesleyan theology. It shows how the 19th century holiness movement deviated from Wesley, and how they were influenced by Wesley to unintentionally overemphasize entire sanctification. Their conception of entire sanctification as a state where original sin is totally eradicated in this life is characterized by moral perfectionism. This segment will conclude by showing how the Wesleyan temptation to moral perfectionism, despite its stress of grace in sanctification, is resolved by Calvin’s approach.

In sum, my study is a constructive account of how John Calvin’s theology of sanctification contributes to contemporary discussion of sanctification in Wesleyan circles. John Calvin can help Wesleyans understand how union with Christ relates to freedom from the curse of the law and obedience to Christ in sanctification.
Chapter 1
Previous Interpretations of Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification in Calvin and Wesleyan Studies

1. Context of Calvin Studies Regarding Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification

Calvin studies has witnessed more works on the significance of union with Christ in the last two decades than in other decades. However, before the examination of important contemporary works, Wilhelm Niesel’s classic *The Theology of John Calvin* provides crucial context. Niesel provided an overview of Calvin’s theology, as articulated in his *Institutes*. He did not present a comprehensive treatment of sanctification, and he separated the themes of law and gospel from sanctification. Niesel was not concerned with displaying a comprehensive account of sanctification which addressed the interrelatedness of law, grace, and union with Christ. Although Niesel treated these themes separately, he acknowledged that they are interrelated in Calvin.

*The Theology of John Calvin* discussed Calvin’s understanding of the law in chapter 6’s “The Law of God”, and addressed Calvin’s understanding of communion with Christ and sanctification in chapter 9’s “The Grace of Christ within us.” Niesel’s exposition of Calvin’s view of the law is relevant here because he noted the importance of the law as the law of the covenant, addressed the relationship between Christ and the law, and emphasized our freedom from the law in Christ. Niesel’s exposition provides insight into the discussion of the function of law and grace in Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification in chapter two of the thesis.

The concept of the law as the law of the covenant is important for Calvin. The law is not an isolated contract primarily imposed upon the believer. For Calvin, Niesel expounded that the law “is not simply a collection of commands about how to live well, but is included in the covenant of grace which God founded.” Simply, God bestows Himself upon persons first before He requires their obedience to Him. Obedience itself does not establish covenant between God and

---

22 Ibid., 92.
23 Ibid., 93.
humanity, but the ground of this covenant is the mercy of God by His initiative. Emphasizing the importance in Calvin’s thought of God’s claim upon us in our covenantal relationship, Niesel wrote, “The law of God is embedded in this grace and loyalty which He shows towards His people, the church; God in entering into a covenant with His people makes an absolute claim upon them. This divine demand is the meaning of the law.”24 The law serves as the seal of the covenant between God and His people, and is regarded as God’s will for His children because He has claimed them for Himself.

The covenant which God establishes with His people, is rooted in the incarnation.25 For Calvin, God has “given himself to us in Jesus Christ.”26 Since Christ is the “main content of the law and the foundation of the divine covenant”, the law was given to people to maintain their hope of salvation in Christ until His coming.27 Niesel stated that there is an undeniable symbiotic relationship between the law and Christ in Calvin’s theology, and the law cannot be a promise of redemption without Christ as its substance and center. The lives of those who dwell in a covenantal relationship with God are shaped by Christ through the law. One’s obedience to God is called forth and inspired by Christ through the law. The people of the covenant do not necessarily relate with a code of ethics, but with Christ Himself. Since obedience is not “compelled by the constraint of the law,” one obeys Christ freely without being burdened by the law’s accusations and assaults.28

Although Niesel noted that Calvin believed the law has significance among the elect, he never addressed how it is related to their participation in Christ’s death and resurrection in his discussion of sanctification. Niesel did not explore the following question: how is obedience to Christ through the law important for a vivified life in Christ? Nonetheless, he emphasized the centrality of Christ in mortification and vivification through our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. This study agrees with Niesel’s emphasis of one’s communion with Christ through participating in His death and resurrection, but slightly differs from Niesel’s specifically in showing how law and grace are related to participation in Christ’s death and resurrection.

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 95.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
A contemporary debate on the doctrine of justification spawned numerous works on the connections between union with Christ and twofold grace in Calvin’s thought. Though the resurgence of union with Christ was initiated by works interested in exploring the doctrine of justification, there were some that extended the discussion of union with Christ to sanctification. These works differ from Niesel’s, as they are specifically concerned with the relationship between union with Christ and the twofold benefit of grace than with providing an overview of Calvin’s theology. Some of these influential works include Mark A. Garcia’s *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (2008) and Marcus Peter Johnson’s *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (2013).

In *Life in Christ*, Mark A. Garcia approached the debate from a historical perspective. Garcia investigated Calvin’s response to the historical question of how justification and sanctification are connected, and how the connection works. Garcia argued that Calvin’s justification and sanctification are related and inseparable in the person of Christ Himself. We “receive them together and conjointly in Him.” Union with Christ is a framework under which one must properly understand Calvin’s theology of *duplex gratia* (twofold grace). Garcia stated that Calvin’s soteriological model is popularly referred to as the “*duplex gratia*.” However, Garcia dismissed this model because it does not account for the way *duplex gratia* relates to one’s union with Christ. While Garcia did not specify who advocates the *duplex gratia* model, he suggested Calvin’s model is properly understood as *unio Christo-duplex gratia* because it accounts for the “formal and functional importance” of union with Christ in Calvin’s soteriology. This study follows Garcia’s cue in addressing the “formal and functional importance” he highlights.

Marcus Johnson’s *One with Christ* addressed the problematic tendency in evangelical theology and churches to separate the saving work of Christ and the person of Christ. Johnson advised evangelicals to recognize “the formal and functional importance” of union with Christ for

---

29 See Billings, *Union with Christ*, 2. Billings noted that the theme of union with Christ “has become known in popular theological circles through controversies: a number of conferences and books have explored the notion of union with Christ in Calvin and Luther and in New Testament studies, often with a concern for ongoing debates about justification.” Most of these new studies focus on justification because of the recent justification debate in contemporary theology and biblical studies. Billings mentioned some of the works contributing to the debate, including Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and the Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008); N.T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009); Bruce McCormack, *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).


31 Ibid., 3.
soteriology. Regarding this flawed approach of distancing the work from the person of Christ, Johnson poignantly writes,

In far too many evangelical expressions of the gospel, the saving work of Christ has been so distanced from his person that the notion of a saving personal union with the incarnate, crucified, resurrection, living Jesus strikes us as rather outlandish. We are content, more often than not, to refer to the “atoning work of Christ” or the “work of Christ on the cross” as the basis for our salvation. Yet, as important as such expressions are for a robust evangelical soteriology, we are in dire need of the reminder that Christ’s saving work is no benefit to us unless we are joined to the living Savior whose work it is.\(^\text{32}\)

Johnson’s study refocuses the centrality of union with Christ in evangelical soteriology by appealing to Calvin’s ideas of sanctification. Union with Christ, Johnson argued, is not a speculative principle, but the scriptural truth of salvation. It is a rich Reformation heritage which Johnson exhorted evangelical theology to retrieve. Union with Christ is “deeply rooted in the biblical portrayal of salvation, as well as in the faith confession of the church fathers and sixteenth-century Reformers.”\(^\text{33}\) Johnson’s study maintained that the “primary, central, and fundamental reality of salvation is our union with Christ, because of which union all the benefits of the Savior flow to us, and through which union all these benefits are to be understood.”\(^\text{34}\) Though similar to Garcia’s, Johnson focused on soteriology in evangelical theology. In addition to justification and sanctification, Johnson also considered adoption, preservation and glorification under the comprehensive framework of union with Christ. This study draws from Johnson’s critique of evangelical churches to re-evaluate the theology of sanctification in the evangelical Wesleyan Church.

2. Context of Wesley Studies Regarding Calvin’s Understanding of Sanctification

Few Wesleyan studies examine Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification directly. These works do not seriously consider how integral union with Christ is to Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification or the implications of union with Christ for evangelical soteriology.\(^\text{35}\) These works adopt a comparative

\(^{32}\) Johnson, One with Christ, 15.
\(^{33}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 29.
approach to sanctification by juxtaposing Calvin with Wesley. One general point made is Calvin was pessimistic about believers experiencing holiness in this life, whereas Wesley was optimistic.\(^{36}\)

Paul M. Bassett’s second volume of *Exploring Christian Holiness* is one of the Wesleyan studies that explored sanctification in Early Protestantism.\(^{37}\) Bassett viewed the doctrine of sanctification of Luther and Calvin as precursors to Wesley’s Christian perfection. Bassett argued that the Protestant Reformers’ discussions of sanctification were “unwise”.\(^{38}\) He stated that they committed the gravest error for “undermining the Roman Catholic view that sanctification is principally the working out of our salvation.”\(^{39}\) Bassett’s opinion of the early Reformers in summary:

Protestants had also so emphasized the doctrine of justification by grace alone that it was difficult for many of them to think of salvation in any terms beyond the forensic – those of imputed righteousness. They could believe that the believer could be *accounted* pure, but it was difficult, if not impossible, to believe that the believer could actually be *made* pure in this life. For them, the difference between the non-believer and the believer had very much to do with the believer’s confession that he is a sinner. The nonbeliever is a sinner who will not confess that such he is.\(^{40}\)

Unfortunately, Bassett’s interpretation is riddled with unwarranted assumptions. Though he is correct about justification being emphasized by the Reformers, it is false that they were antinomians. Though Luther and Calvin espoused imputed righteousness, they balanced the doctrine with proper righteousness. The Reformers repudiated correctly sanctification as the ground of salvation, but Bassett criticized them because his Wesleyan lens of soteriology is extended to sanctification. Though the Reformers accentuated salvation on justification, they maintained believers can lead holy and exemplary lives in this life.

In his interpretation of Calvin, however, Bassett acknowledged the importance of the dialectic of law and gospel in Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification. He stated that the difference between

\(^{36}\) See Thorsen, *Calvin vs. Wesley*, 82. Don Thorsen mistook Calvin’s theology as pessimistic and detrimental to spiritual formation in this example: “Although Calvin emphasized the need for obedience, it did not occur with the hope of God using obedience to add in believer’s spiritual formation. Without that hope, Wesley thought that believers might become complacent or despair about sanctification, the prospect of spiritual formation, and obedience to the laws of God.” On the contrary, Calvin insisted obedience to Christ is central to spiritual formation. Contrary to Wesleyan interpretations, Calvin was hopeful about believers living a life of holiness through their participation in Christ’s death and resurrection.


\(^{38}\) Ibid., 151.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
Luther and Calvin is Calvin viewed the law in continuity with the gospel. Once the law reveals sin to us and directs us to the gospel, Bassett noted correctly that the gospel “forms the basis for what we are to do thereafter.”\textsuperscript{41} However, Bassett espoused that the gospel instructs us to imitate Christ, but he failed to notice, for Calvin, imitation of Christ is a form of participation in the life of Christ.\textsuperscript{42} Furthermore, one can never imitate Christ perfectly because sin remains in us as long as we exist in the flesh.\textsuperscript{43}

Though Bassett admitted that Calvin believed God imparts holiness to the believer, he concluded regarding Calvin that the transformative work God does in us is not complete in this life.\textsuperscript{44} Essentially, he criticized Calvin for not articulating Wesley’s instantaneous nature of sanctification. According to his view of Calvin, Christians are half way to holiness or are partially committed in their consecration to God. For Bassett, these Christians can only reach the complete state of holiness during entire sanctification. Bassett overemphasized entire sanctification as an actual state in which a believer can dwell till death. For him, the process of working out salvation is complete when believers possess the actual state of Christian perfection.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 167. \\
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 173. \\
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 177.
Chapter Two
The Function of Law and Grace in Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification

1. Union with Christ as the Central Principle in Calvin’s Soteriology

In the 19th century, scholars thought the central doctrine in Calvin’s theology was the sovereignty of God, along with its complementary doctrine – predestination. However, this view was untenable and falsified. In the 20th century, Calvin scholars abandoned locating a “big Idea” in Calvin’s theology from which all the other doctrines are deduced. In recent years, however, a group of Calvin scholars identified the significance of the motif of union with Christ in Calvin’s theology of soteriology in Book III of the Institutes. They insisted union with Christ is the true unifying principle in Calvin’s theology, especially in his soteriology. The thesis of this band of scholars is termed the “New Perspective on Calvin” (NPC) in Thomas Wenger’s article. Some scholars, including Richard Muller and Thomas Wenger, disagreed with the thesis that union with Christ is a central theme in Calvin.

Muller criticized modern methods of locating a central dogma in Calvin’s theology. According to Muller, Calvin’s theology is “a gathering and juxtaposition of opposites or perspectives,

---


47 Thomas L Wenger, “The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to Recent Calvin Interpretations,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 50, no. 2 (June 2007): 311–28. I will be referring to this band of scholars as NPC.

having no central principle.”

Though there is no central principle in Calvin’s theology, Muller noted that Calvin organized the *Institutes* according to the *ordo docendi* of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans. Wenger, who has rebutted the NPC on multiple occasions, supported and relied heavily upon Muller’s work. Wenger also took issue with the NPC’s agenda to divinize union with Christ as a unifying principle in soteriology. He claimed the NPC undermined the priority of justification in their attempt to realign the order of justification and sanctification in Calvin’s theology. According to Wenger, the NPC tends to regard Calvin’s *ordo docendi* in Book III, which discusses sanctification before justification, as evidence Calvin was not concerned about asserting the primacy of either justification or sanctification. Wenger cited Gaffin, whose view is representative of the NPC:

Calvin destroys Rome’s charge [of antinomianism] by showing that faith, in its Protestant understanding, entails a disposition to holiness without particular reference to justification, a concern for Godliness that is not to be understood only as a consequence of justification. Calvin proceeds as he does, and is free to do so, because for him the relative “ordo” or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically. Rather, what has controlling soteriological importance is the priority to both of (spiritual, “existential,”) faith to union with Christ.

Wenger, however, disagreed with Gaffin’s interpretation because it does not portray a historical portrait of Calvin. Wenger stated that “when one looks for Calvin’s actual arguments on the matter, he is quite explicit that when explaining these doctrines, one ought never to establish sanctification before justification, but rather that the former is always to be founded upon the latter.”

Supporting his interpretation of the primacy of justification, Wenger quoted Calvin twice, one of which is:

The theme of justification was therefore more lightly touched upon because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned. Therefore, we must now discuss these matters thoroughly. And we must so discuss them as to bear in mind that this is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his

---

49 Ibid.
judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.\textsuperscript{54}

Though the primacy of justification is evident, Marcus Johnson’s NPC views emphasized in his response to Wenger that Christ bestows justification and sanctification together to the believer who is united to Christ by faith through the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{55} For Johnson, it is a ‘misappropriation’ of Calvin’s soteriology to suggest sanctification is “founded upon justification or that sanctification ‘flows’ from justification.”\textsuperscript{56} Clarifying that justification and sanctification are inseparably connected in Christ, Johnson quoted Calvin:

Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we grasp Christ’s righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he ‘is given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption’ (I Cor. 1:30). Therefore, Christ justifies no one whom he does not sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies...\textit{Although we may distinguish them, Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself}. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces (I Cor. 1:13). Since, therefore, it is solely \textit{by expending himself} that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy. He bestows both of them \textit{at the same time}, the one never without the other.\textsuperscript{57}

According to Johnson’s interpretation, Christ does not give justification to a believer in one instance, and then sanctification in another. Both benefits flow from or are grounded in Christ.\textsuperscript{58} For Johnson’s Calvin, Christ would be torn to pieces if justification and sanctification are separated. Since Johnson gave primacy to union with Christ, neither justification or sanctification has priority. Nor does one proceed from the other. Wenger rebutted that justification must precede sanctification because sanctification “is impossible if [it is] not founded upon justification.”\textsuperscript{59} Moreover, Wenger claimed that the championing of union with Christ as a unifying principle has blindsided the NPC to neglect the priority of justification in Calvin’s theology of soteriology.\textsuperscript{60} Although Johnson conceded there is no “controlling

\textsuperscript{54} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.11.1. Wenger italicized the words in his article to indicate the primacy of justification.


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 551.

\textsuperscript{57} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.16.1. The original italicized appear in Johnson’s response article to Wenger.

\textsuperscript{58} Johnson, “New or Nuanced Perspective on Calvin?,” 555.

\textsuperscript{59} Wenger, “The New Perspective on Calvin,” 323.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 327–28.
principle” in Calvin’s *whole* theology, he argued, nonetheless, it “is difficult to overlook the distinct emphasis that Calvin places on the believer’s union with Christ in his discussion of *applied soteriology*. Union with Christ is the overriding presupposition of Calvin’s understanding of the ‘way in which we receive the grace of Christ’.”

This debate in Calvin studies between the NPC and those who support Muller is important for two reasons: (1) to emphasize that no believer has an independent experience of the twofold grace which is not marked by union with Christ and (2) to assert that God’s pardon is not founded on sanctification, but sanctification is the appropriate response which is inspired by God’s pardon. The NPC and Wenger reflect two strands of thought in Calvin which may appear to be contradictory in the debate, but Calvin held both in paradoxical harmony. According to Calvin, it is not a matter of either sanctification proceeding from justification or justification and sanctification being given to the believer at once – it is both. For Calvin, twofold grace proceeds from union with Christ and does not contradict the priority of justification in its relationship with sanctification. The NPC are correct that it is difficult to overlook the significance of union with Christ in Book III of the *Institutes* as no believer has an independent experience of justification and sanctification which is not marked by this union.

Regrettably, the NPC failed to recognize the priority Calvin ascribed to justification. Although it is accurate that the believer receives the twofold grace, the accent of salvation on justification in Calvin legitimized his understanding of the primacy of justification. One is only saved and pardoned by God judicially through the instrumentality of faith. If the NPC seek to emphasize justification and sanctification, what will be the foundation of our assurance of salvation? Without acknowledging the primacy of justification, believers lack the assurance of salvation because their sanctification is imperfect in this life. Since justification and sanctification are inseparable in NPC’s view, God’s pardon alone will not reassure us that we have been justified or saved by God. Believers are always going to expect to find comfort

---

Johnson, “New or Nuanced Perspective on Calvin?,” 555. I have italicized the terms “whole” and “applied soteriology” to reinforce the difference Johnson posited in the article between claiming union with Christ is a controlling principle in Calvin’s theology and claiming union with Christ is a unifying principle in Calvin’s applied soteriology. The NPC are not unified in their interpretations of Calvin’s theology. For example, Johnson thought union with Christ is only a unifying principle in Calvin’s doctrine of soteriology, but Charles Partee argued union with Christ is a central principle in Calvin’s *whole* theology. To view how Partee divides all Calvin’s loci in the *Institutes* according to the rubric of union with Christ, see Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin*. 
in their good works for their eternal assurance. The struggle with the residues of their flesh will threaten the security and salvation they have in Christ alone. Why else did the Reformers (including Calvin to an extent) defend militantly the doctrine of justification by faith if it were not the “hinge upon which religion turns” or the foundation of our Christian life? The priority of justification in its relationship with sanctification is not neglected by the Reformers. Nor was it met with indifference. Furthermore, Calvin grounded justification and sanctification together in Christ to convince Rome that Protestants maintained that believers are not without good works and do not independently experience justification and sanctification apart from their union with Christ.

Wenger, on the other hand, is also correct in observing the primacy of justification, but he refused to admit that union with Christ is indeed a unifying principle in Calvin’s applied soteriology. Without union with Christ, neither would justification have priority nor would there be the inseparable bond between justification and sanctification. Wenger concerned himself with addressing sanctification as a consequence of justification. However, if Christ is not regarded as one who equally bestows justification and sanctification, the believer would not have the foundation on which his salvation and piety can be established. Christ is both justification and sanctification. That said, for Calvin there is no contradiction between Wenger’s insistence that sanctification proceeds from justification and the NPC’s claim that Christ is the source of our justification and sanctification. The reason Calvin does not view a contradiction is because Christ is our justification and sanctification. For Calvin, since justification depends on Christ, he would not have an issue with Wenger’s assertion. The debate shows both positions of Wenger and Johnson are present in Calvin’s writings, and it is not a contradictory issue for Calvin himself.

These two extensive reasons are critical to what follows. The relationship of justification and sanctification here frames a proper understanding of sanctification. Sanctification must not be confused as the basis for our justification, nor should sanctification be viewed as an independent human experience not marked by union with Christ. It is against this background that we are to understand how law and grace function in Calvin’s theology of sanctification in his Romans commentary.
2. The Function of Law and Grace

Calvin dedicated his Romans commentary to Simeon Grynaeus, an eminent humanist scholar in Basle. They had numerous conversations about biblical interpretation. In the dedicatory section of his Romans commentary, Calvin reminded Grynaeus of one conversation about “the chief excellency of an expounder consisting in lucid brevity.” Skill is concise. The interpreter must “lay open the mind of the writer whom he undertakes to explain.” Calvin charged himself with the task of explaining the mind of the Apostle Paul in ‘lucid brevity’ for “no other reason than to promote the public good of the Church.” In the Romans commentary, Calvin respected and assumed the apostolic voice of Paul. Bruce Gordon explains,

In working on Romans he not only inhabited the mind of the author, but assumed his voice. The Paul of the Romans commentary is Calvin himself…He frequently pauses to tell the reader that ‘what Paul means is…’. At other moments he clarifies a point he feels Paul has not sufficiently articulated. This was a known classical device by which an author speaks with the voice of another, and Calvin employed this technique repeatedly in his commentary in order that he might speak with apostolic authority.

Calvin considered Paul “not just an example of the Christian life, he was his personal teacher and mentor.” Calvin’s engagement with Paul is “shaped by the Renaissance understanding of imitation and emulation.” When Calvin explains Paul’s sanctification in Romans 6:1-8:14, Paul’s understanding becomes Calvin’s. Thus, Calvin was convinced he was one with Paul on multiple theological loci. To argue Calvin is to argue Paul himself.

Calvin’s theology of sanctification in the Institutes is informed by his exegesis of Romans. Although Calvin described sanctification in his own terms, he borrowed concepts of

---

63 Jean Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), xxiii.
64 Ibid., xxiii.
65 Ibid., xxvi. See Gordon, Calvin. It is interesting to note that Gordon portrayed Calvin as someone who is more concerned about the public good of the Church. Calvin sensed that his mission was to unify the Protestant Churches on divisive issues, especially the Lord’s Supper. Though the mature Calvin accommodated himself to other Protestant perspectives on particular issues for the sake of unity, his vision of a united Protestant front was not realized.
66 Gordon, Calvin, 111.
67 Ibid., 109.
68 Ibid., 109-111.
69 Calvin, Institution de la Religion Chrestienne, 3.3.8.
participation, mortification, and vivification from Paul. Again, Calvin’s sanctification consists of mortification and vivification, but he never related these to a dialectic of law and grace in III.3.8 of his *Institutes*. However, in his exegesis of Romans 6:1-8:14, he drew the connection because Paul addressed the function of law and grace in his understanding of mortification and vivification in Christ. The functions of law and grace are connected to the dialectic of our freedom and obedience in Christ. This process is demonstrated in Calvin’s subsequently.

2.1. Mortification and Freedom

Calvin stressed that mortification of the flesh is an essential aspect of sanctification, which is a continuous action of grace we experience within us through union with Christ. For Calvin, depraved humans cannot attain freedom from the flesh autonomously because they are enslaved to Sin. Calvin does not regard the human as ill, but as one whose whole being is radically marked by Sin. Morality cannot release humanity out of its depravity. Sin imprisons and always leads to death. Freedom must consist of mortification of the flesh. Since humanity is enslaved to Sin, how is mortification of the flesh possible? Moreover, with respect to sanctification, how are law and grace related to the freedom from Sin?

According to Calvin, mortification of the flesh requires true knowledge of one’s depravity and participating in Christ’s death. The functionality of law and grace are linked with both. Without proper understanding of one’s depraved condition outside Christ, one may posit humans can achieve righteousness by doing good works. However, such misconception undermines the radicalness of our depravity and is ignorant that good works of humans have no life-producing properties because humans cannot redeem themselves from Sin. How do humans acquire knowledge of their depravity? Calvin emphasized that the law reveals sin. Commenting on the awareness of our depravity through the law, Calvin wrote, “…sin dwells in us, and not in the law; for the cause of it is the depraved lust of our flesh, and we come to know it by the knowledge of God’s righteousness, which is revealed to us in the law.”

---

70 See Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne*, 2.1., for Calvin’s detailed account of how Sin radically corrupted the whole being of the human. It would require the regeneration of the whole human to be liberated from the enslaving power of Sin.

Though the law was originally given to order lives, humanity could not fulfill the righteousness which the law demanded. It is God’s righteousness in the law which shatters the illusion that one is perfectly righteous before God. For Calvin, the ignorance of our sin prevails where there is no law. Once God’s righteousness was revealed in the law, people became aware of their depravity. For example, Calvin – describing the subject’s recognition of coveting as sinful through the law in Romans 7:7 – wrote the following:

He [subject] does not indeed boast that he was free from it; but he so flattered himself, that he did not think that this sin was lurking in his heart. For though for a time he was deceived, and believed not that righteousness would be violated by coveting, he yet, at length, understood that he was a sinner, when he saw that coveting, from which no one is free, was prohibited by the law.

For Calvin, the ignorance of sin is bliss until the reality of its bondage is unveiled by the law. Not only does the law reveal one’s depravity, it also excites our lustful emotions inside us. He wrote,

The law excited in us evil emotions, which exerted their influence through all our faculties; for there is no part which is not subject to these depraved passions. What the law does, in the absence of the inward teacher, the Spirit, is increasingly to inflame our hearts, so that they boil up with lusts…the law is connected with the vicious nature of man, the perversity of which, and its lusts, break forth with greater fury, the more they are checked by the restraints of righteousness.

However, Calvin noted this does not imply the law is sinful. He objected to the corruptibility of the law by drawing a distinction between the character of the law and the depravity of humanity. The proper twofold function of the law was (1) to show a way of life in the

---

Wesley also agreed that the function of the law, which is to reveal the knowledge of our sin to us, does not render it sinful. He stated that sin “did not appear, till it was stirred up the prohibition.”

Cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 34. It would have been interesting if Calvin had an opinion on whether those in remote places without the law possessed a true knowledge of their depravity, and whether God’s grace was able to direct them to have visions of Christ, through whom they are saved. Neither does Wesley wrestle with this, but he believes the subject of Rom. 7 is ignorance of the law.

Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 252.

Ibid., 250. Explicating Rom. 7:5, Calvin argued the law excites the lustful emotions within us in the absence of the “inward teacher, the Spirit.” However, Wesley did not mention this at all. Does he agree with Calvin’s statement?

Ibid., 256; cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 34. Calvin distinguished between the character of the law and the depravity of humanity in his commentary on Rom. 7:10. Calvin defended repeatedly that the law is not sinful with this distinction. Wesley did not express the distinction in the manner which Calvin did, but he, nonetheless, did not regard the law as sinful. For Wesley, the law is God’s “grand means of preserving and increasing spiritual life, and leading to life everlasting.” Conversely, Sin in us destroys all virtue and strength, and leads us to eternal death.
righteousness of God, and (2) grant eternal life by the keeping of it.\textsuperscript{76} Since one’s corruption inhibits the law from functioning properly, it “provokes and draws” the law’s curse upon us.\textsuperscript{77} It is “incidental that the law inflicts on us a deadly wound.”\textsuperscript{78}

One may ask the following: If one possesses knowledge of one’s depravity, how can the flesh be mortified while one is under Sin? Calvin correctly stressed that the flesh is not mortified under the law, but on account of grace. It is only by grace that the law, incapable of redeeming humans, instead directs them to Christ, who mortifies and restrains their flesh. If one’s nature were pure, “the law would not have brought death on us.”\textsuperscript{79} The law is not “adverse to the man who is endued with a sound and right mind and abhors sin.”\textsuperscript{80} For Calvin, since individuals are enslaved to Sin under the law, it is the grace of Christ alone which can abolish the life of sin in one’s union with Christ. The grace of Christ is the “repairer of our righteousness.”\textsuperscript{81} Flesh is mortified by Christ in being engrafted to Him through our participation in His death.\textsuperscript{82} Participating in Christ’s death is integral to the occurrence of one’s mortification. Describing the relationship between one’s union with Christ through baptism in His death and the mortification of the flesh in his explication of Romans 6:3, Calvin wrote,

…for it is beyond any question, that we put on Christ in baptism, and that we are baptized for this end – that we may be one with him. But Paul takes up another principle – that we are then really united to the body of Christ, when his death brings forth in us its fruit; yea, he teaches us, that this fellowship as to death is what is to be mainly regarded in baptism; for not washing alone is set forth in it, but also the putting to death and the dying of the old man. It is hence evident, that when we become partakers of the grace of Christ, immediately the efficacy of his death appears.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{76} Calvin, \textit{Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans}, 256. Wesley agreed with Calvin on this score, as in the previous footnote which addressed their comments on Rom. 7:10.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. Wesley was brief in his notes on Romans. For each verse, he shared one to three sentences. He did not share Calvin’s verbosity. Wesley did not express what Calvin did regarding the incidental wound which the law inflicts upon us.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 218.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 220.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid. Cf. Wesley, \textit{“Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,”} 34. This is one of the rarest instances where Wesley affirmed and recognized the significance of union with Christ for the new life. Unfortunately, he never expanded this thought to express his doctrine of entire sanctification within the framework of union with Christ. This is explained fully in the following section. In regard to his notes on Rom. 6:3, Wesley wrote, “In baptism we, through faith, are \textit{engrafted into Christ}; and we draw new spiritual life from this new root, through his Spirit, who fashions us like unto him, and particularly with regard to his death and resurrection.”
It is clear for Calvin that putting on Christ in baptism implies mortification of the flesh because Christ destroys the power of Sin in our union with Him. Though the flesh does not die in a moment, Calvin warns us we should not be “retrograde in the work of crucifying the flesh.” While under the law, people had no freedom from Sin. One procured freedom from the curse of the law and Sin through union with His body because the death of his body, which was made Sin for humanity at the cross, brought about freedom. Nonetheless, the bond of the law, under which persons were alive to Sin, was not destroyed for individuals to do things according to their will, but for them to be bound to Christ. Christ becomes the defender of one’s freedom. According to Calvin, the gift of freedom which people procure through the grace of Christ leads to obedience, rather than disobedience.

2.2. Vivification and Obedience

Participation in Christ’s death is coupled with participation in His resurrection, which seals one’s freedom from the bondage of Sin. Participation in both is only guaranteed through the Holy Spirit. It is only by grace one can partake in Christ’s death and resurrection to be one with Him. While humanity was bound to the law, they cultivated a life of sin. However, they are now bound to Christ via participation in His death and resurrection through the Holy Spirit. Mortification and vivification are connected in the person of Christ. In other words, union with Christ is freedom and obedience. Since one is freed from the law to cease sinning, one is vivified or ‘renovated’ by Christ through the Spirit to obey Christ because one is now engrafted to Him. Commenting on Rom. 6:4 which addresses regeneration in Christ through participation in His death and resurrection, Calvin wrote,

He [Paul] now begins to indicate the object of our having been baptized into the death of Christ, though he does not yet completely unfold it; and the object is – that we, being dead to ourselves, may become new creatures. He rightly makes a transition from a fellowship in death to a fellowship in life; for these two things are connected together by an indissoluble

---

84 Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 227. Cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 34. Calvin comments on Rom. 6:8 that we should daily mortify the flesh, and we should never be lax in this task. Wesley simply remarked we should conform to his death by dying to sin.

85 Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 247. Cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 34. According to his comments on Rom. 7:4, Calvin argued our bond of the law, which made us more aware of our own sins, had to be destroyed so that we can be bound to Christ through whom we are liberated from sin. Whereas Wesley stated something similar about how the law expires in the wake of Christ.

86 Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 233.

87 Ibid., 220. Cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 34. In both of their explanations of Rom. 6:3, they agreed that we unite with Christ through our participation in his death and resurrection.

88 Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 247.
knot – that the old man is destroyed by the death of Christ, and that his resurrection brings righteousness, and renders us new creatures. And surely, since Christ has been given to us for life, to what purpose is it that we die with him except that we may rise to a better life? And hence for no other reason does he slay what is mortal in us, but that he may give us life again.89

Mortification and vivification would be impossible without participation in Christ’s death and resurrection through the Holy Spirit. Newness of life in Christ, however, is guaranteed by Christ’s resurrection. Regeneration is impossible without Christ’s resurrection. His resurrection renders believers new creatures, so they may have life in Him. Those who were dead in their trespasses under the law were slaves of unrighteousness. They were “so entirely controlled by the power of sin, that the whole mind, the whole heart, and all our actions [were] under its influence.”90 Our consent to Sin was not forced service, but voluntary.91 However, the Spirit vivifies believers through union with Christ, and renders them servants of righteousness.

The righteousness which was revealed in the law was not abrogated, but the curse of the law was. Since Christ fulfilled and embodies that righteousness, Christ becomes humanity’s righteousness through their union with Him, and they are engrafted to Him to obey Him alone. People are not united to Christ, to act according to their own will. They are no longer their own because they belong to Christ now.92 Christ bestows Himself upon His people

89 Ibid., 221. Cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 34. Wesley remarked Rom. 6:4 is emphasizing that one should walk in new life as Christ rose from the dead in order to live a new life. He averred that Christ’s death and resurrection symbolizes one’s death to sin and our new life.
90 Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 261.
91 Ibid. Cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 35. Commenting also on Rom. 7:14, Wesley agreed with Calvin that people were in bondage to Sin, but Calvin is the only one who explicitly stated that people’s actions under sin were voluntary. People voluntarily sinned against God. Wesley briefly noted humans are at the disposal of sin in the same manner as slaves, who are bought with money, are at their master’s disposal. Wesley’s language may suggest sin dictates human actions, and exempts the individual from claiming any responsibility for his actions. It is true that sin exercises power, but Wesley should have stated explicitly that individuals are responsible for the actions committed under the control of sin. That being said, though he never clarified that sins are voluntary, Wesley regarded sins as voluntary actions. This is discussed in chapter three.
92 Calvin, Institution de la Religion Chrestienne, 3.7.1. In the Institutes, Calvin expressed that the sum of our Christian life is chiefly the denial of ourselves because we belong to God through our union with Christ. Emphasizing the serious implications of God’s claim upon us, Calvin wrote poignantly, « Nous ne sommes point nostras: pourtant que nostre raison et volonté ne dominant point en noz conseils, et en ce que nous avons à faire. Nous ne sommes point nostras: ne nous establissons donc point ceste fin, de chercher ce qui nous est expédié selon la chair. Nous ne sommes point nostras: oublions-nous donc nous-memes tant qu’il sera possible, et tout ce qui est à l’entour de nous. Derechef, nous sommes au Seigneur: vivons et mourons à luy. Nous sommes au Seigneur: que sa volonté donc et sagesse préside à toutes noz actions. Nous sommes au Seigneur: que toutes les parties de nostre vie soient référées à luy, comme à leur fin unique. O combien a profité l’homme, lequel se coignonnant n’estre pas sien, a osté la seigneurie et régime de soy-mesme à sa propre raison, pour le résigner à
before He requires obedience. Union with Christ becomes the basis for obedience to Christ, but it is not initiated by a person’s obedience.

Vivification in Christ is characterized by obedience to Him. Persons continue to be vivified by the Spirit insofar as they exist in obedience to Christ, who embodies the law. The law, which reveals the will of God for holy living, functions properly with the Spirit of Christ. Since one’s will is renovated by the Spirit of Christ, one now lives according to the will of God or Spirit of Christ because he belongs to Christ. Addressing newness of life characterized by allegiance to Christ in his exposition of Romans 6:19, Calvin wrote, “…now then ye ought to be equally prompt and ready to execute the commands of God; let not your activity in doing good be now less than it was formerly in doing evil.” For Calvin, we are freed to obey and serve Christ with all our faculties, as we were committed to a life of sin formerly. The law acquires a third use with the Spirit of Christ in that it guides new life in Christ, and directs vivification in Christ.

However, Calvin also acknowledged sanctification is continual in this life, and one never reach a state in this life which precludes the need for continual mortification of the flesh and vivification through the Spirit of Christ. The Christian life is shaped by the conflict between the flesh and the spirit within because individuals still possess the relics of the flesh. For Calvin, Christian life consists of mortifying the flesh daily because the flesh does not die in a

Dieu! Car comme c’est la pire peste qu’ayent les hommes pour se perdre et ruiner, que de complaire à eux-mêmes, aussi le port unique de salut est de n’estre point sage en soy-mesme, ne vouloir rien de soy, mais suyvre seulement le Seigneur. » For Calvin, the nature of our sanctification through union with Christ is evidently cruciform.

93 Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 239-40. Cf. Wesley, “Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” 34. In Rom. 6:19, Paul urged the Romans to offer themselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. Calvin warned that believers should not be weary in doing good. He exhorted them to “be equally prompt and ready to execute the commands of God.” Believers are redeemed by Christ “to render obedience to righteousness with so much more diligence.” Wesley also commented that believers should be servants of righteousness. However, he drew a distinction between righteousness and holiness. He wrote “righteousness here is a conformity to the divine will; holiness, to the divine nature. Observe, they who are servants of righteousness go on to holiness; but they who are servants to iniquity get no farther.” Calvin, on the other hand, did not explicitly regard holiness and righteousness as distinct in what they consisted of. Instead of clarifying his understanding of righteousness and holiness, Calvin only provided his definition of righteousness in the following: “By righteousness I understand the law or the rule of a holy life, the design of which is sanctification, as the case is when the faithful devote themselves to serve God in purity.”
moment.\textsuperscript{94} Sanctification in Christ is always marked by the dialectic of freedom and obedience in this life because of the continual struggle between the flesh and Spirit within.

Paul described the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit in Romans 7, but he never explicitly specified whether the subject of Romans 7 is an unregenerate or a regenerate person. However, Calvin, following Augustine, argued extensively that such struggle exemplifies the experience of regenerate believers, “in whom the remnants of the flesh are wholly contrary to the law of the Lord, while the spirit would gladly obey it.”\textsuperscript{95} Before discussing Calvin’s reason as to why he thinks the subject is a regenerate person, it is important to understand what “flesh” and “spirit” mean for Calvin, and how they are both related to our personhood. Defining what Paul means by “flesh” and spirit”, Calvin wrote,

> Under the term \textit{flesh}, he ever includes all that human nature is, everything in man, except the sanctification of the Spirit. In the same manner, by the term \textit{spirit}, which is commonly opposed to the flesh, he means that part of the soul which the Spirit of God has so reformed, and purified from corruption, that God’s image shines forth in it.\textsuperscript{96}

Calvin stressed the faithful are divided into the relics of the flesh and grace and this division creates conflict between the flesh and spirit in regenerate people.\textsuperscript{97} The flesh and spirit are part of the soul of the faithful.\textsuperscript{98} For Calvin, it would be incorrect to suggest the unregenerate also possess part of the soul which is renovated by the Spirit. Since the faithful also have a renovated part, they must mortify tirelessly the flesh in their obedience to Christ. This division is related to Calvin’s reason for thinking the subject of Romans 7 is a regenerate person. Calvin’s main reason for insisting it cannot be the unregenerate is that the unregenerate, “left to his own nature, is wholly borne along by his lusts without any resistance,” and it cannot be

\textsuperscript{94} Calvin, \textit{Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans}, 227. Calvin’s comments on Rom. 6:8 explain “newness of life is to be pursued by Christians as long as they live.” The mortification of the flesh in this life is not instant for Calvin. Calvin admitted the flesh cannot die in one moment in this life. Wesley did not comment on this verse if the mortification of the flesh is instant, but when he discusses his theology of entire sanctification, clearly it is instant in this life.

\textsuperscript{95} Calvin, \textit{Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans}, 259. Wesley, “\textit{Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans},” 35. This is where Calvin and Wesley disagree on Rom. 7:14. For Wesley, the character Paul assumes in Rom. 7 is a non-believer who “is first ignorant of the law, then under it and sincerely, but ineffectually, striving to serve God. To have spoken this of himself [Paul], or any true believer, would have been foreign to the whole scope of his discourse; nay, utterly contrary thereto, as well as to what is expressly asserted, Rom. VIII. 2.” Cf. Charles W. Carter, \textit{Romans}, vol. 5, in \textit{The Wesleyan Bible Commentary} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 48. The Wesleyan Commentary explicitly stated that the experience which Paul described in Rom. 7 is not of a Christian or a regenerate man.

\textsuperscript{96} Calvin, \textit{Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans}, 267.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
said “either that evil is hated, or that good is loved by them.” Where the godly, whom Calvin believes Romans 7 addresses,

in whom the regeneration of God is begun, are so divided, that with the chief desire of the heart they aspire to God, seek celestial righteousness, hate sin, and yet they are drawn down to the earth by the relics of their flesh: and thus, while pulled in two ways, they fight against their own nature, and nature fights against them; and they condemn their sins, and not only as being constrained by the judgment of reason, but because they really in their hearts abominate them, and on their account loathe themselves. This is the Christian conflict between the flesh and spirit, of which Paul [also] speaks in Gal. v. 17.

Though the faithful have defects of the flesh, they are beyond condemnation insofar as they abide in Christ, and live according to the Spirit. They mortify that part of the flesh which they discern through the law of God because they obey Christ. Moreover, vivification within union with Christ, consists of the Holy Spirit purifying with the blood of Christ and raising persons up “to the meditation of righteousness: for whenever the Spirit reigns, it is an evidence of the saving grace of God.”

99 Ibid., 262.
100 Ibid., 263.
101 Ibid., 285. In Rom. 8:5, Paul explained to the Romans that “those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.” In his explanation of Rom. 8:5, Calvin argued that to be in the flesh or after the flesh is “the same thing as to be without the gift of regeneration.” He noted that those who “apply their minds and study to depraved lusts” are excluded from being the children of God. However, Calvin did not think faithful believers are without the flesh. They are bound to the flesh, but they should give themselves to the Spirit not to give “loose reins to their lusts.” The Spirit gives the faithful “seasonable consolation,” lest they despair at the thought of their many infirmities. Cf. Wesley, "Notes on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans," 35. Wesley juxtaposed those who live according to the flesh with those who live according to the Spirit. Wesley did not indicate whether the regenerates are also bound to the flesh. As far as he is concerned, Christians live according to the Spirit.
Chapter Three
The Implications of Calvin’s Doctrine of Sanctification for Wesleyan Theology of Sanctification

This chapter demonstrates the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification is currently determined by moral perfectionism because of: (1) its belief that the Christian can continuously exist in a state in which the Adamic depravity is entirely eradicated, and (2) its lack of emphasis on sanctification due to one’s daily participation in Christ. I will first show how the Wesleyan tradition inherited these two problematic features from Wesley through the 19th century holiness movement. Finally, I will explain how Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification can help reframe the Wesleyan discourse of sanctification in a manner liberated from moral perfectionism.

1. From Wesley to the 19th Century Holiness Movement: The Modification of Christian Perfection

John and Charles Wesley disagreed on the questions of Christian perfection.102 John espoused a dialectic of gradual and instantaneous aspect of sanctification to avoid divisions between him and his brother. However, Charles was not persuaded by John because John stressed the instantaneous aspect over the gradual.103 For Charles, sanctification is gradual in this life.104 The state of the instantaneous aspect of sanctification, which Wesley mostly referred to as ‘Christian perfection,’ is also known as ‘entire sanctification,’ whereby God’s love purifies the hearts of believers from all sin (inbred sin or original sin) and carnal inclinations in people through the Holy Spirit.105 The entirely sanctified possess moral perfection insofar as they do

---

103 Ibid., 138. John pleaded with Charles, but there is no record of them agreeing that instantaneous entire sanctification is possible in this life. For instance, John wrote a letter to his brother in which he stated the following: “O insist everywhere on full redemption, receivable now by faith alone...Press the instantaneous blessing; then I shall have more time for my peculiar calling, enforcing the gradual work.” Charles never endorsed the instantaneous blessing.
104 Ibid., 137.
105 Victor A. Shepherd, Mercy Immense and Free: Essays on Wesley and the Wesleyan Tradition (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2010), 106 & 107. I use “entire sanctification” to refer to the instantaneous aspect of Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification. Many often equate sanctification with entire sanctification with entire sanctification because I believe Wesley’s emphasis of instantaneous aspect is in part responsible. Nonetheless, he qualified it by stating Christian perfection cannot be absolute perfection because we have physical and mental limitations. Wesley referred to these physical and mental limitations as infirmities. An entirely sanctified person is not exempt from making wrong judgements, mistakes, temptations, forgetfulness, diseases, etc.
not voluntarily sin. According to Wesley, it is not the character of the entirely sanctified to commit sin because God’s love has purged the inner depravity from the human heart and delivered him from outward sins. Elaborating on this state of moral perfection that awaits all Christians, Wesley wrote,

A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin. This is the glorious privilege of every Christian, yea, though he be but a babe in Christ. But it is only of a grown Christians it can be affirmed, they are in such a sense perfect, as, Secondly, to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers. First from evil or sinful thoughts. Indeed, whence should they spring? ‘Out of the heart of man’, if at all, ‘proceed evil thoughts’. If, therefore, the heart be no longer evil, then evil thoughts no longer proceed out of it: for ‘a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit’.

The puzzling question one should ask is how did Wesley envisage this state of the Christian life in which the Christian cannot commit sin? How did Wesley define sin? It is difficult to comprehend his notion of a ‘sin-free’ state of Christian perfection without understanding his definition. Wesley views sin as a voluntary (as in conscious, not understood per se as pertaining to the will) transgression of a known law. Wesley’s definition of sin is problematic based on his understanding of what is “voluntary” and with respect to his emphasis of a “known” law.

In regards to sin as voluntary transgression, Victor Shepherd argued that Wesley understood the term “voluntary” as “conscious”, “deliberate,” and “premeditated.” However, for

---

106 Wesley’s understanding of entire sanctification as a state never regards the act of sinning as a feature of entire sanctification.
107 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 19. Wesley noted that a perfected Christian, whose heart is cleansed from all inward sin (envy, malice, wrath, pride, and every unkind temper), necessarily has no “possible ground for contention”; Shepherd, *Mercy Immense and Free*, 105. Noting Wesley’s understanding of our deliverance from outward and inward sins in entire sanctification, Shepherd wrote, “The sin from which sanctification delivers us is both ‘inward’ and ‘outward’. Outward sin is manifestly behavioural; inward is the attitudes and proclivities of the depraved heart.” However, since Wesley affirmed that one can fall from this grace, how does it become possible for one who is inwardly perfected to actually fall? In other words, how is it possible for an entirely sanctified person to sin if the carnal nature of his heart is eradicated?
109 To describe Wesley’s understanding of the state of the sanctified life, I used the term “sin-free” in a qualified sense as not being able to commit sin insofar as one’s will cooperates constantly with God’s will through the power of the Holy Spirit. Though Wesley argued that the entirely sanctified person does not characteristically sin, he was careful not to espouse an extreme doctrine of sinlessness, which other Methodists (such as Thomas Maxwell and George Bell) taught. Maxwell and Bell stretched Wesley’s doctrine of perfection to its logical conclusion, and argued that it was impossible for one to sin and fall away from this grace of perfection. Though Wesley was careful against sinlessness, he nonetheless believed a life of a sanctified believer is fundamentally sin-free, which Bell and Maxwell also maintained. The difference is Wesley insisted that one could fall from the state of perfection.
111 Ibid., 112.
112 Ibid., 113.
Continental and English Reformers, Shepherd noted that “voluntary meant ‘pertaining to the will’ (voluntas), and ‘will’ referred to one’s capacity to act; voluntary never meant conscious, deliberate, premeditated – as Wesley means here. To transgress, according to the Reformers, is to transgress ‘voluntarily’, since transgression presupposes will.”

The problem with Wesley’s narrow understanding of sin as voluntary is “too much remains unsaid for that corruption which is nonetheless culpable for its being involuntary.” Furthermore, Wesley trivialized the severity of “residual sins” in believers by referring to them as mistakes because they are unintentional sins. But what exactly are unintentional sins? As Shepherd stated, sins are intentional.

Shepherd also noted that the expression of a “known law” in Wesley’s understanding of sin raises problems “when the human heart has limitless capacity to ‘forget’ what it does not want to ‘remember’ or know, when Scripture characteristically insists ignorance of God is culpable, and when the force of general revelation (e.g. Romans 1) is to render human kind “without excuse.” Shepherd is correct in his assessment that Wesley’s definition of sin does not take into account the radicalness of our human depravity and the limitless capacity of our minds or hearts to suppress and not remember our offenses against God. In view of the problems pertaining to Wesley’s understanding of “voluntary” and “known”, it is presumptuous of Wesley to assume a Christian can exist in a state of entire sanctification in which he or she cannot commit sin.

It is fair to note that Wesley, however, combatted views of people – such as Thomas Maxwell, George Bell, Count Zinzendorf – who argued that believers were incapable of sinning. Wesley was very careful to qualify his discourse of Christian perfection by addressing the reality of sin in believers in his treatise On Sin in Believers. Wesley, regarding a believer as a new creature and an old creature, wrote:

\[\text{\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{113} Ibid., 112–13.
\bibitem{114} Ibid., 113.
\bibitem{115} Ibid.
\bibitem{116} Ibid. Commenting on the absurdity of excusing one’s sin as unintentional, Shepherd wrote, “Pleading that one did not intend to do what one has done nor to sin in what one has done underestimates sin, presupposing as it does an undervaluing of the biblical witness to the complexity, subtlety and scope of the heart.”
\bibitem{117} Ibid., 112.
\bibitem{118} Ibid.
\bibitem{119} Ibid., 104.
There are in every person, even after he is justified, two contrary principles, nature and grace, termed by St. Paul ‘flesh’ and the ‘spirit’. Hence although even babes in Christ are sanctified, yet it is only in part. In a degree, according to the measure of their faith, they are spiritual; yet in a degree they are carnal. Accordingly, believers are continually exhorted to watch against the flesh, as well as the world and the devil. And to this agrees the constant experience of the children of God. While they feel this witness in themselves they feel a will not wholly resigned to the will of God. They know they are in Him, and yet find a heart ready to depart from him, a proneness to evil in many instances, and a backwardness to that which is good.\textsuperscript{121}

Though Wesley affirmed that a believer is a new creature and an old nature, he is not speaking of an entirely sanctified believer, in whom the old nature is totally eradicated. Wesley affirmed that the tension between these two principles (the flesh and the spirit) is present in justified believers, who are sanctified in part, as indicated above. For Wesley, however, the entirely sanctified person is not cleansed in part, but completely. According to his exegesis of Romans 7, he expressed that the ‘struggle’ exemplifies the experience of unregenerate persons. According to the logic of entire sanctification, the cleansing of the heart from all sins obliterates this internal struggle between the flesh and the spirit. The entirely sanctified person always acts according to the spirit.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 332-33.

Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection was modified significantly during the 19th century holiness movement.\(^\text{123}\) Melvin E. Dieter remarked that transcendentalism and American idealism, which were dominant during this period, influenced holiness proponents to emphasize the ideal of instantaneous perfection, and imagine a new society “free [entirely] from the evils that had been left behind when immigrants set out for the new world.”\(^\text{124}\) Commenting on the connection between American optimism and perfectionism in the Methodist’s vision of a new world under a new dispensation of the Holy Spirit, Melvin E. Dieter wrote,

> The conviction of the New England pioneers that their colony was ‘the place where the Lord…[would] create a new Heaven and a new Earth in new Churches and a new commonwealth together’ had fixed itself generally within the American mind. In their new land they were part of a new Israel; this vision infused both politics and, later, technology. The inherent optimism in this American dream was assimilated with the optimism of perfectionism in the holiness movement; the two were to be traveling companions throughout the nineteenth century – each undoubtedly helping the other along the way. For the holiness advocate it was all part of a grand, divine plan to usher in “the most glorious and last dispensation” – the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{125}\)

The baptism of the Holy Spirit had a central role in their vision of a new society. Asa Mahan and Charles Finney, whose theology had a Calvinistic orientation, exercised enormous influence over this period by stressing “entire sanctification is accomplished by a personal baptism with the Holy Spirit similar to that received by the apostles on the Day of Pentecost.”\(^\text{126}\) The exclusive pneumatological determination of entire sanctification was a

---


deviation from Wesley. Methodist ministers began to associate exclusively the baptism of the Holy Spirit with entire sanctification.

Aside from emphasizing the pneumatological determination of entire sanctification, Mahan and Finney also conceived entire sanctification as a state in which the sanctified enjoyed a permanent sanctified life that precluded the struggle of Romans 7 between the flesh and Spirit. Phoebe Palmer, who was an influential woman in the Holiness movement, developed an “altar theology, using Paul’s figure of placing oneself as a ‘living sacrifice’ on God’s altar to represent consecration.” Her altar theology depicted Christ as the altar upon which believers offer ourselves as “living sacrifices,” and thereafter Christ sanctifies them entirely. She argued that a believer, “who is consciously ‘all on the altar,’” can claim entire sanctification at that moment. Palmer referred to her altar theology as a short cut to entire sanctification. Explaining Palmer’s deviation from Wesley, Greathouse wrote,

The explicit emphasis upon consecration as a prerequisite is a patent departure from Wesley who stressed instead a “repentance of believers” (the conviction of inbred sin and the believer’s utter inability to sanctify himself) as the ordinary precondition of sanctifying faith. For Wesley, entire sanctification is by faith alone, faith understood as “a divine evidence and conviction” produced by the Holy Spirit through the promises of Scripture...

Despite the modification of entire sanctification, Wesley’s 19th century holiness followers adopted his understanding of entire sanctification as a state and his definition of sin, but Wesley’s dialectic of the gradual and instantaneous disappeared in their discussions of sanctification. Sanctification was narrowly regarded as entire sanctification. Entire

---

127 Greathouse, “Christian Perfection in the Holiness Movement,” 302-307. Greathouse noted that Wesley posited “a threefold reception of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing process of salvation – in prevenient grace, in the new birth, and in entire sanctification.” However, Mahan, Finney and other Methodists limited the baptism of the Holy Spirit to entire sanctification during the holiness movement. They argued that the Holy Spirit was with believers from their new birth, but the Holy Spirit only dwells within the individual when he experiences Spirit-baptism, which simultaneously confers the benefit of entire sanctification upon the individual.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid., 306 & 310.


133 Ibid.

134 Ibid., 300.

135 Truesdale, “Reification of the Experience of Entire Sanctification in the American Holiness Movement,” 116. Truesdale argued explicitly that discussions of sanctification were void of “any sense of growth in sanctification
sanctification was overemphasized as a state of perfection which immediately followed justification, and it was understood that the believer could be perfectly cleansed from all sins in a moment through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, during the holiness movement, the doctrinal articulation of residual sins in entirely sanctified believers is wanting.

2. Calvin’s Theology as a Resource to Reframe the Wesleyan Doctrine of Sanctification

Though the Wesleyan Church claims to espouse Wesley’s view of sanctification, its teaching of sanctification also roots from the 19th Holiness movement. With respect to its allegiance to Wesley, the Wesleyan Church reiterated Wesley’s dialectic of the gradual and instantaneous aspects of sanctification in efforts of recovering the dynamic nature of his doctrine. It also blended its traditional articulation of sanctification with sacrificial images of altar theology and the Spirit-baptism theology of Mahan and Finney. Furthermore, it never challenged Wesley’s definition of sin, but adopted it. Although the gradual and instantaneous aspects of sanctification are discussed, the Wesleyan Church re-emphasized the significance of the instantaneous aspect over the gradual. Though it is noted that one can fall away from this grace, it is puzzling that entire sanctification is imagined as a state which precludes momentary relapses into sin or conflict between the flesh and the spirit. One’s fall from this grace is not regarded as a continuation or part of the process within this state of entire sanctification. The imagination of entire sanctification as an actual state of complete freedom leading up to entire sanctification.” Whereas Wesley discussed that there was a gradual growth in sanctification which led to the crisis moment of entire sanctification.

---

138 Ibid., 21. Wesley traditionally described entire sanctification as that which is wrought in us by faith through the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. However, expressing the mixture of Wesley, Palmer, Mahan, and Finney in its own articulation of entire sanctification, the Wesleyan church describes entire sanctification in the following manner: “This [gradual aspect] prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, being effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin.”
141 Grider, 412–16. Also see William M. Greathouse and George Lyons, Romans 1-8 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2008), 222–24. It is argued that the conflict of Rom. 7 does not exemplify the experience of a regenerate person because he is liberated from this tug of war between the flesh and the spirit.
from committed sins and original sin is envisaged by the Wesleyan Church as fundamental to our redemption in this life.\[^{142}\]

The Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification stresses that the entirely sanctified are morally perfect insofar as they possess a “pure human nature – a human nature no longer infected by carnality.”\[^{143}\] The concern for a perfect state of substantial transformation, in which the human nature of the believer is completely free of original sin in this life, is driven by moral perfectionism because no one in this life can be without sin.\[^{144}\] Though it is argued that each believer has an internal witness of the Holy Spirit, it is difficult for the individual to be absolutely certain he possesses entire sanctification.\[^{145}\] The community has no role in this process of discernment. The entirely sanctified are recognized as those who do not willfully commit sin. However, they may err, which is understood as unwilful or unintentional sins.\[^{146}\] The Wesleyan doctrine underlines residual sins as mistakes. As discussed earlier, sins pertain to the exercise of an individual’s will. There is no such thing as an unintentional sin.

According to classic Wesleyan theology, the entirely sanctified is not determined by the struggle with sin. However, in regards to Calvin’s doctrine of sanctification, a struggle with sin is expected of someone who is continuously being mortified by Christ because the war

\[^{142}\] Grider, 376 & 415. Grider expressed that “since entire sanctification is a noun, calling this work of grace ‘entire sanctification’ also allows us to indicate that it is a state….Entire sanctification is a sanctification, a cleansing, that is entire. No carnality, or original sin, remains to deprave our faculties, to incline us to acts of sin. Carnality has infected, as a fever does, our entire nature, including the body and the reason and the will and the emotions, and carnality is entirely extirpated.”

\[^{143}\] Ibid., 389.

\[^{144}\] See Augustine, "The Spirit and the Letter," in Augustine: Later Works, ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 182–250. The question of whether a believer can be without sin or not was explored by St. Augustine in his treatise entitled “The Spirit and the Letter.” St. Augustine explained to Marcellinus that perfect righteousness is possible through the grace of God, “although there be no example, past, present, or future, of such perfect righteousness in this life.” St. Augustine did not dismiss the possibility for God to grant perfect righteousness, but he strongly believed God sanctifies the individual gradually through the grace of Christ. Also see St. Augustine, “Concerning Man’s Perfection in Righteousness,” in Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings, vol. 5, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 159-76. In this treatise, St. Augustine stated that believers are cleansed day by day through the grace of Christ, rather than being cleansed entirely and instantaneously. Christian perfection is impossible in this life. Commenting in section 17 on perfection as that which is instead bestowed upon believers after this life, St. Augustine wrote, “It is after this life, indeed, that the reward of perfection is bestowed, but only upon those by whom in their present life has been acquired the merit of such a recompense. For no one, after going hence, shall arrive at fullness of righteousness, unless, while here, he shall have run his course by hungering and thirsting after it.”

\[^{145}\] Thomas C. Oden, John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 230. Addressing the problem with discerning the witnessing work of the Spirit within us, Oden wrote, “the central problem is how one discerns the Spirit of God working within one’s own spirit without denying either the finitude of one’s own perception or the transcendence of God’s own Spirit.”

\[^{146}\] Shepherd, Mercy Immense and Free, 113.
between the flesh and spirit is not totally eradicated, but ongoing. Such a defeating experience increases one’s humility, and deepens one’s daily dependence on Christ. Calvin does not affirm spiritual resignation in his support of continual sanctification. Though one gradually grows in holiness, each slow step forward is valued as progress in one’s process of mortification. For Calvin, since none are without sin, the daily renewal in Christ through participation in Him becomes significant for Christian living. This understanding of sanctification prevents us from teetering on the brink of moral perfectionism.

If Wesleyan theology insists original sin is eradicated completely in this life, then it is impossible for a pure human nature to cause one to commit “unintentional sins”. I believe one either deludes himself into thinking he is morally perfect (i.e. entirely free from all sin) or undervalues the seriousness of those sins as “mistakes.” Furthermore, when the individual examines the self under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to ascertain whether they possess entire sanctification, they are preoccupied with their interior nature and good works. The self becomes the reference point. One is obliged to search inwardly and outwardly to ascertain whether one is holy or not. However, for Calvin, one does not search within to determine if one has the benefits of justification and sanctification. Rather, the individual is a sinner without being engrafted to Christ. The only knowledge one can acquire from examining the

---

147 John Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit I,” in *Sermon I*, vol. 1, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 270-75; cf. Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 408–10. Wesley preached on Romans 8:16 which notes God’s Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God. For Wesley, the way in which the Holy Spirit testifies to one’s spirit is like how one’s spirit mediates to his consciousness that he is alive. Such testimony of the Holy Spirit is immediate. When one is entirely sanctified, the witness immediately follows. He expressed that testimony of the Spirit is an “inward impression on the soul” or our consciousness. For Wesley, there are two witnesses, which are fundamentally significant for Christian assurance. One of the witnesses is the direct witness of the Holy Spirit, and the other, the indirect witness of our good works. The task of appealing to the inward impression made by the Holy Spirit on consciousness and to the indirect witness of good works, renders the self and its interiority as the reference point for examining whether one is entirely sanctified or not. The task of discerning exactly how the Spirit of God works within our spirit without confusing it at times as psychologism can be challenging and difficult. As Oden stated, such discerning process is generally difficult. Regardless, the self remains the reference point. There is no mention of how significant union with Christ is to the assurance of sanctification in Wesleyan theology. Whereas, for Calvin, Christ is the reference point for all contemplations of justification and sanctification. As far as Calvin is concerned, good works cannot possibly be the point of reference because they are full of uncleanliness (*Institution* 3.15.3). See Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 299–301. According to Calvin’s exegesis of Rom. 8:16, he had no notion of an indirect witness of good works, as Wesley did. He simply expressed the significance of the sole testimony of the Spirit to humanity in the following: “…the Spirit of God gives us such a testimony, that when he is our guide and teacher, our spirit made assured of the adoption of God: for our mind of its own self, without the preceding testimony of the Spirit, could not convey to us this assurance.” Believers are assured of sanctification in Christ once He mortifies and vivifies them in their union with Christ, and thereafter the Spirit testifies they are indeed being sanctified. The assurance of sanctification, which the Spirit gives, is Christologically determined.
self is that humans are sinners and do not merit salvation. For Calvin, a believer contemplates himself in Christ, in whom he has justification and sanctification. Believers become sanctified as Christ mortifies them gradually insofar as they daily participate in Him. They never contemplate themselves as justified and sanctified outside their union with Christ. To their credit, Wesleyans emphasize holiness is an important feature of the Christian life. However, without anchoring sanctification as that which is effected in believers daily through participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, the discourse veers dangerously toward moral perfectionism. Christ should be the focus of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification.

Calvin’s theology of sanctification is a crucial resource for Wesleyans to re-examine their heritage of entire sanctification. Though Wesleyan theology addresses Wesley’s dialectic of the gradual and instantaneous aspects, the dialectic never renders the doctrine sufficiently dynamic because of the expectation of the total eradication of original sin. The image of a fixed state of moral perfection arises, and one needs to constantly live out their discipleship in this state with a pure human nature. The doctrine is ultimately static as it expects the believer to exist in a state which supposedly precludes further mortification of the flesh. However, Calvin’s sanctification through union with Christ restores fluidity, as one is mortified and vivified by Christ daily.

Calvin helps root Wesleyan theology in a dynamic manner which takes seriously the mortal impossibility of a total eradication of original sin. The affirmation of a continual sanctification through union with Christ benefits the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification with a realistic and practical alternative to moral perfectionism and its overwhelming burden of seeking the assurance through introspection. Such introspection can either reinforce perfectionist attitudes toward moral actions or expose the depravity of the human heart. Calvin’s challenge for Wesleyan theology is to contemplate the self in Christ, and embrace the continuous war between the flesh and the spirit. Such a conflict cannot permanently be abolished, but we can be freed from it gradually through our mortification and vivification in Christ.

148 Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne*, 3.1.1. Addressing how integral union with Christ is to the receiving of Christ’s benefits (i.e justification and sanctification), Calvin famously began Book III of his *Institution* with the statement « cependant que nous sommes hors du Christ et séparez d’avec luy, que tout ce qu’il a fait ou souffert pour le salut du genre humain nous est inutile et de nulle importance. Il faut donques, pour nous communiquer les biens desquels le Père l’a enrichi et rempli, qu’il soit fait nostre et habite en nous. » To enjoy what Christ possesses, one cannot simply initiate the movement towards Christ, and embrace Christ prior to His embrace of him. The Holy Spirit is the bond with which Christ effectually unites believers to himself. Faith, as the principal work of the Spirit, is given to people gratuitously to embrace Christ and obtain all that he possesses.
Nonetheless, Wesley correctly understood Scripture contains promises that point to the reality that Christians can “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” He noted rightly that commandments in Scripture challenge God’s children to be holy as God is holy. However, Wesley lacked a framework of union with Christ which can safeguard his thoughts of experiencing the fullness of sanctification from being determined by moral perfectionism. Wesleyan theology can still express Wesley’s concern for holiness by addressing sanctification as that which we entirely have in our union with Christ via imputation, and yet Christ imparts it to us gradually in this life. Moreover, the notion of sanctification as continual should not be considered uncharacteristic of the Wesleyan or Methodist tradition because Charles Wesley supported it. Charles’ thoughts on sanctification are neglected, but he played a significant role in the spreading of Methodism through hymn writing. His hymns blazed the congregational life in Methodism. John was not the only Wesley who espoused a doctrine of sanctification, and yet his thoughts dominate the discussions on sanctification within the Wesleyan Church. It gives the false impression that all Methodists in John’s lifetime agreed with his interpretation. If the Wesleyan Church continues to ascribe to

149 Wesley, A Plain Account, 45
150 Ibid. Wesley quoted often Matthew 5:48 which exhorted believers to be “perfect” as God is “perfect” (or to be holy as God is holy). Wesley regarded Matthew 5:48 as a biblical mandate for all Christians to be entirely sanctified. He argued that God has given such commandments to the living to fulfill them in this life. There are many Scriptural passages that urge Christians to be holy in this life such as 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Lev. 11:44; Lev. 19:2; Lev. 11:45; Heb. 12:14; Matt. 5:48 & Matt. 22:37.
151 See Coleman, 136. Coleman noted that John Wesley knew there were some within the Methodist fold who viewed sanctification as continual in this life. She wrote, “John acknowledged that there were some who believed that ‘everyone must be entirely sanctified in the article of death…and a believer daily grows in grace, comes nearer and nearer to perfection.’ John, however, states that Scripture does promise salvation from all sin before death. Charles was clearly one of those who believed the former way.” Considering this, one may wonder why one needs Calvin if there are others within the tradition who regarded sanctification as continual. The issue of union with Christ would be one major reason because Charles never related explicitly his understanding of sanctification with it. In Calvin, one can find a profound articulation of sanctification which explicitly acknowledges Christ as central to our sanctification. This understanding will help Wesleyans to contemplate themselves in Christ, rather than have the self as the reference point for all analysis of sanctification.
152 Ibid., 130 & 135.
153 See Monica A. Coleman, “The World at Its Best: A Process Construction of a Wesleyan Understanding of Entire Sanctification,” Wesleyan Theological Journal 37, no. 2 (September 2002) 130-152. Using a process model, Coleman brilliantly attempted to construct a process “Wesleyan” doctrine of sanctification by holding John’s and Charles’ positions in tension. She argued that “a process construction of entire sanctification highlights the ways in which the Wesleyan understanding is eschatological. Entire sanctification is already here, but not yet. It is realized only after death, and yet it is continually given to us as an attainable ideal in this life.”
John’s thoughts exclusively, it should at least give credence to Charles’ critiques within its own tradition. Such an expression of thought will nuance Wesleyan discussions away from moral perfectionism. Though Charles did not articulate sanctification within the framework of union with Christ, Calvin again would prove to be a foundation to render the doctrine robust by explicitly relating it with our life in Christ.
Conclusion

In his exegesis of Romans 6:1-8:16, Calvin’s understanding of sanctification addresses how integral the functions of law and grace are to mortification and vivification in Christ. The law accuses anyone who attempts to justify himself or establish his personal righteousness without Christ. In fact, it is impossible to establish righteousness because of humanity’s depravity. For Calvin, one can only enjoy freedom from the law’s curse through union with Christ because of grace. However, the new life with Christ consists of obedience, which is essential because believers now serve Christ. In union, Christ mortifies the flesh and renews believers daily.

According to Calvin, sanctification is continuous in this life, and it has serious implications for Wesleyans’ theology of entire sanctification. The distinctive teaching of Wesleyans on entire sanctification is that the believer can be entirely liberated from the acts of sin and original sin in this life. Furthermore, with an explicit repudiation of the doctrine of imputed righteousness, Wesleyan doctrine has neglected the motif of union with Christ which is crucially associated with sanctification. The Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification is determined by moral perfectionism because of (1) its conception of sanctification as an actual state which is free of original sin and (2) its lack of emphasis of union with Christ. Calvin noted correctly that sanctification is continuous, and it should be conceived as a daily participation in Christ, in whom Christians are mortified and vivified. Calvin’s views can rescue the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification by challenging it to re-imagine sanctification as a continuous, gradual participation in Christ, and regard Christ as its reference point. Wesleyan theology can still express Wesley’s concern for holiness by addressing sanctification as that which we already have in our union with Christ, and yet Christ imparts it to us gradually throughout our mortal lives.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


Secondary Sources:

Books


Theses


Journal Articles


———. “New or Nuanced Perspective on Calvin?: A Reply to Thomas Wenger.” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 51, no. 3 (September 2008): 543–58


