

The Core of the Christian Faith

March 30, 2026

Lesson 10: Sanctification and Christian Perfection

A crucial reminder of the foundation of our reflection:

- 1) Please recall the Purpose of This Teaching
 - The catechism exists not merely to inform, but to form disciples—to give the Church a shared language for faith that is scriptural, historic, and lived. In a season of awakening and renewal, doctrinal clarity is not a distraction from mission; it is the soil from which faithful mission grows.¹
 - As the catechism reminds us, we do not begin with ourselves, our questions, or our preferences. We begin with God—who God is, how God acts, and how we are to live in response.²
 - As David A. deSilva notes in the *Annotated Catechism*, catechesis is not about mastering religious ideas, but about being *shaped* by the Church’s faithful witness to the living God—a conviction shared deeply by the early Church.³
- 2) By way of deliberate emphasis: “In the Global Methodist Church, we believe that faith does not begin with ourselves—our opinions, preferences, or experiences. We begin with God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The catechism reminds us that doctrine is not meant to divide or distract us, but to form disciples and ground the Church in biblical truth and historic Christian faith. ***Doctrinal clarity fuels faithful mission.***”

“For from him and through him and to him are all things.” Romans 11:36

At the essentials and distinctives: 1) “We are made into the image of Him who is our head, that is Christ Jesus.” [Put differently: “He became like us that we might be like him.” (variously attributed to Irenaeus, Bishop of Lugdunum/Lyon and Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria)] 2) “God’s sanctifying grace perfects us in love for God and neighbor.”

- I. Holiness of Heart and Life -- Sanctification
 - a. The goal and crown of the Christian life! And the grand contribution of Methodism to the larger Christian community
 - b. The ordination question: “Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?” Are you earnestly striving after it.”

- c. The crucial understanding of grace: (1) prevenient grace = the porch, (2) justifying grace = the door, (3) sanctifying grace = the living room
 - d. Going on to perfection ... the fullness of salvation (Matthew 22:37-39)
 - e. Don't miss the essence here... this doctrine is ultimately about human thriving (listen to "We Were Made to Thrive," by Casting Crowns)
 - f. Note the connection of obedience to faith – Matthew 28:16-20)
- II. The connection between Faith and Good Works
- a. Wesley's genius is to connect the two – "The Holy Spirit joins us to Christ in a way that changes us from the inside out." (Barnett & Vickers, p. 182)
 - b. "We do not do good works to be saved. Rather, we do good works because we have been saved." (Barnett & Vickers, p. 182)
 - i. "Good works are the necessary fruits of faith and follow regeneration." (DeSilva, *Annotated Catechism for the Global Methodist Church*, #66, p.161) James 2:14 -26
 - ii. A synergistic relationship -- #67 "God's sanctifying grace cleanses us from sin in our thoughts, words, and acts, and enables us to live in accordance with God's will." (Jack Nicholson in *As Good As It Gets*, "You make me want to be a better man." (The difference is that through the Holy Spirit sanctifying grace acts enables us to be better women and men.)
 - iii. "Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not." Augustine
- III. The Living Out of Holiness of Heart and Life (or moving on to perfection)
- a. Maturation in holiness both internal (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing) and external (Luke 10:27, Matthew 25:40)
 - i. Acts of piety (love of God)
 - ii. Acts of mercy (love of neighbor)
 - b. A mixing of: (1) love of God and neighbor, (2) trust in Christ and his merits alone, (3) joy from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (see Albert Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, p.72)
 - c. "The Spirit increases our desire for God and God's righteousness." (Barnett & Vickers, p. 185)
- IV. Sin and Sanctification
- a. This doctrine never meant sinless ... sins of omission, pride, etc.
 - b. "The best end which any creature can pursue is happiness in God." (John Wesley)
 - c. Perfection meant "made perfect in love in this life." Usually at the end of life but possibly either gradually or suddenly
- V. The End and Goal

- a. We must wholly respond to the will of God.” (Barnett & Vickers, p. 191)
- b. Watchfulness for Christ’s return tied to the notion of radical trust in God.
(Rev. 21:4)

“I’ll praise my maker while I’ve breath
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers.
My days of praise shall n’er be past,
While life and thought and being last,
And immortality endures.”

(“I’ll Praise My Maker While I’ve Breath,” Issac Watts)

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