

**ARMINIAN-WESLEYAN UNDERSTANDING OF HOLINESS**  
**IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

*(Reaction to the paper by Jerry Rice)*

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When we refer to our Arminian-Wesleyan theological heritage it appears that of this heritage we only know about the Wesleyan aspects and very little or almost nothing about the Arminian aspects. It is true that Jacobus Arminius contributed in a very valuable way in the theological thinking we now do. He had a key role in the history of the church and especially in Holland.

As a theologian, Arminius clearly expounded God's intention in regard to free salvation of the human being through Jesus Christ and man's responsibility to accept or reject this grace, when facing very strong propaganda and the condemning teaching of predestination. This affirmation brought other implications to the understanding of the dynamic relationship between God and man, the action of divine grace in the world, in the spiritual growth of the person and the human response to these actions of God's love. These were the foundations for the development of doctrines that would make a difference in the lives of the believers and that gave impulse to the evangelistic enterprise of the Wesleys a century later. The corrections proposed by Arminius to Calvinist teaching are the distinctives of his theology and are presented in a clear, brief and concise manner in Jerry Rice's paper. However, the differences between Arminius's concepts of perfection and sanctification with those of Wesley are not discussed according to what the author shows. It appears to me that Arminius did not refer to sanctification.

In regard to the teaching of perfection, although Arminius had not developed it amply, neither discussing nor denying it, he did contemplate the idea that the believer could be perfect in this life, with the help of divine grace and never without grace. This theme of perfection in the believer has been one of the concerns that have been present in the minds of thinkers down through the years, but it has not always meant the same thing. As historian Paul Bassett says: "The history of the idea of Christian perfection and history of the doctrine of sanctification are not the same... The two doctrines belong together, but they have not always been kept connected" (Bassett 1994:18).

Epsicopus and Limborch, followers of Arminius, later added to his ideas other aspects emphasizing that perfection is possible due to divine grace, but with the participation of human effort in excluding sinful habits, correcting faults, resisting temptation and the intention to grow more and more in the spiritual life. But for Arminius and for his successors, God's grace was the unique and vital element that helped the human being to love as He requires, and this was not something impossible or difficult to fulfill on this earth because God demands only what can be done. We do not have any record that Arminius discussed or wrote about the experience of sanctification as John Wesley taught it. His valuable contribution to our theological tradition is mostly related to free grace and other aspects of his position that he debated against Calvinist

*Reaction: Arminian-Wesleyan Comprehension... (Ruthie Córdova)*

teachings. Arminian theology, enriched by the contributions by the followers of Jacobus Arminius, passed through the years and influenced the thinking of religious groups, among these, English Anglicanism, by means of their thirty-nine Articles of Faith.

However, independently of Anglican theology, John Wesley drank from other devotional fountains that contributed to the discernment of theological concepts that later would be developed in important doctrines within his theological system. John Wesley, like Arminius, affirmed that salvation was by divine grace and by faith alone, that it was for all but that not all would be saved, involving liberty and human responsibility; thus he rejected the Calvinist doctrine of individual predestination. Wesley also believed that there was growth in grace in the life of the believer, but that there existed the possibility of losing the salvation or to fall from grace if one was not careful, and that Christian perfection was the fullness of God in the heart and the entire being to love him and to do his will completely. In addition, Wesley taught about prevenient grace (that is explained very well in the paper), the nature of the Trinity, the nature of the Church and the sacraments, eschatological aspects and about obtaining the assurance of salvation by means of the Holy Spirit's witness.

In regard to Christian perfection, Wesley appears to be in agreement with Arminius when he also affirmed that perfection is only possible by means of God's grace (and added) that the same is received through the means of grace. Wesley developed further the doctrine explaining how this experience is reached, affirming that it is possible to obtain it in this life, warning that it is necessary to totally surrender oneself to God, explaining what occurs in the believer, placing in his soteriological system, calling it in different ways, defining it from the relational point of view, and differentiating it from the other internal works of grace, etc. This doctrine is known as entire sanctification. Wesley defined a type of profile of the perfect believer:

One in whom is 'the mind which was of Christ' (I Corinthians 2:16); 'walketh as Christ also walked' (I John 2:6); a man 'that hath clean hands and a pure heart' (Psalm 24:4); or that is 'cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit' (II Corinthians 7:1); one in whom is 'no occasion of stumbling' and who, accordingly, 'does not commit sin'; one in who God hath fulfilled His faithful word (Ezequiel 36:25, 29); one whom God hath 'sanctified throughout' (I Thessalonians 5:23); one who 'walketh in the light' (I John 1:7). This man can now testify to all mankind, that "Christ liveth in me; (Galations 2:20). He is 'holy as God who called' him 'is holy', both in heart and 'in all manner of conversation' (I Peter 1:5), he 'loveth the Lord his God with all his heart', and serveth him 'with all his strength'. He 'loveth his neighbor,' every man, 'as himself'...in particular, that 'despitefully use him and persecute him, his soul is all love, filled with...mercies, kindness, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering (Colossians 3:12). And his life is agreeth thereto, full of 'the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labor of love' 'And whatsoever' he 'doeth either in word or deed' he 'doeth it all in the name,' in the love and power, 'of the Lord Jesus.' In a word, he doeth 'the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven.' 'to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God', 'as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ' (Wesley 1966: 36-37).

The contribution of John Wesley to our theological heritage is precisely his ideas about Christian perfection and entire sanctification. A perfect Christian is one who “Loving God with all our heart, and mind, and soul’ (Deut. 6:5) and being sanctified is “To be renewed in the image of God, “in righteousness and true holiness’ (Ephesians 4:24) (Wesley 1966:41). That is to say, the perfect believer is one who is “called to some sort of perfection of spirit or attitude or motive or even action in this life; ...dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit...the ideal is Christlikeness... usually cast in terms of perfect love” (Bassett 1985:19). “The entirely sanctified person recognizes that in his or her life “there comes a moment actually does love God with all of the heart and soul, mind and strength, and neighbor as self... sees the believer perfected; it is also the beginning of a process of perfecting in love... in all ways dependent upon the grace of God in Christ; that integral to this moment and to the ensuing process is cleansing from sin” (Bassett 1985:19-20).

And of course, as was discussed in Jerry Rice’s paper, Wesley gave Christian perfection a present and future dimension, what is known as radical optimism, when the believer or the community made up of all perfected Christians, or those truly sanctified, influence or impact others, social structures, systems that affect lives, and everything they have relationship with, procuring the transformation and common well-being and even more, contributing to the divine purposes of the restoration of all things and of the world.

Jacobus Arminius as well as John Wesley discovered the Biblical truth that perfect life is a life of grace. But so that the human being can have relationship with the God of grace, he must become a child of grace, live in grace and die in this grace that continues for eternity.

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