

## Chapter 5: Wesley's Doctrine of Perfection

In the journey to the discovery of the identity of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, an evaluation of John Wesley's teaching on perfection will be undertaken. The reason for this is: John Wesley in his teaching on perfection writes about the highest state that a Christian can attain in this life. It is this state that is to be investigated; as it is the opinion of this study that Wesley's teaching on perfection very closely resembles the teaching of the experience of the emphatic “I” as seen in Rom 7.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley was concerned that Christians should become “all” that God would have them be.<sup>2</sup> It was Wesley's opinion that Christians were not “all” that God intended them to be, apart from full sanctification. He also believed that the reason God raised up the people called Methodists was to propagate the doctrine of full sanctification.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Salvation an Introduction

Salvation, in the Wesleyan view, had “two cardinal factors.” These factors were

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<sup>1</sup> As it has been stated in chapter 1 of this study that the direct dependence of Wesley on Paul will be limited to the *commonality of experiences* described by Wesley and Paul. *The examination of the experiences being described by Wesley, Paul and the Mystics is the main point of this study and not the discovering of Wesley's and the Mystics dependence on Pauline statements.* To repeat the point made in chapter 1, the emphasis to be examined is on the commonality of the experiences being described. However there is a connection between Wesley and Paul. This connection is stated by R.E. Cushman, *John Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 59.

<sup>2</sup> A. Outler's understanding is that holiness leads to happiness. *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1975), 84. If this understanding is disagreed with, then, the only other understanding is that immorality will lead to happiness.

<sup>3</sup> J. Wesley wrote in a letter to Robert Carr Brackenbury, September 15, 1790, Vol. 13, 9.

forgiveness and sanctification.<sup>4</sup> Forgiveness was the foundation of salvation for Wesley. However, sanctification dominates his whole theology. This is what will be seen as John Wesley's view of salvation; perfection and Christian experience are evaluated in light of Rom 7 and the emphatic "I".

John Wesley understood salvation as more than "simply not going to hell" and "going to heaven." Although, Wesley did indeed believe that the believer was saved from eternal damnation and had a place in heaven with God. Salvation for Wesley was a present experience. Wesley wanted for himself and for the people called Methodists a present experience and assurance that they were children of God. The idea that one had to "wait" until after death to be sure of one's salvation, for Wesley, was totally unscriptural.

Salvation, for Wesley meant a "present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its principle of health."<sup>5</sup> Salvation was more than forgiveness. Salvation was more than simply not going to hell and going to heaven, someday, in the sweet bye and bye.<sup>6</sup> Wesley believed that God intended all people to be restored to purity of soul, in this life.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> H. Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1980), 217.

<sup>5</sup> J. Wesley's sermon *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Vol. 8, 47. See also Wesley's sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 18. All Wesley quotes are taken from *The Works of John Wesley*, on compact disc, Providence House Publishers. Page numbers and volume refer to the numbering system contained on the compact disc itself. See also R.E. Cushman who puts forth this opinion: "Wesley believes with the Apostle (that is Paul) that through repentance, pardon and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, the regenerate mind is becoming conformed to the Holy Other. It is becoming restored and recreated in the image of God. This is Wesley's understanding of the Apostle's assurance for the justified sinner. This doctrine of the knowledge of faith—resting upon the Pauline teaching of the work of the Holy Spirit in and with forgiveness of sins and entailing the transformation of the mind and spirit of the believer—is a fundamental principle of the 'Scripture way of salvation' and therewith, of Wesley's experimental divinity" (*John Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 58). See also J. Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1987), 67; A. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 253.

<sup>6</sup> R. Cushman, *John Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 143. He writes: "Wesley makes holiness as 'renewal of our souls in the image of God' and 'recovery of the divine nature' to be 'synonymous with salvation.'" And Cushman clearly states that "By salvation, Wesley means holiness of heart and life," (144).

<sup>7</sup> A. Outler, (*Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 87, 88); Also A. Outler: "Wesley was adamant on the point that if perfection is a human possibility at all, it must at least be possible *in the span of human life* and consequently, correlated with the whole process of Christian maturation and hope," (*John Wesley* (New

It was Wesley's conviction that God not only intended people to be restored to purity of soul, in this life, but that salvation itself was that restoration.

It is in the investigation of Wesley's conviction concerning salvation, that his understanding of the experience of perfection will be seen. It is this understanding that will then be compared to the experience of the emphatic "I" in Rom7. However, before this comparison can be made, Wesley's understanding of salvation and perfection must be understood and evaluated.

## **2. Beginning of Salvation**

### **2.1. Justification**

Salvation for Wesley began at the moment a believing sinner is justified.<sup>8</sup> In Wesley's description of what occurs at the moment of justification, he writes that sin is only suspended, not destroyed and that the justified believer has two opposing principles within them.<sup>9</sup>

As has already been stated, salvation for John Wesley was a present experience of the soul being restored to health and purity. Present salvation, as Wesley emphasized, had two basic components. These components consisted of being saved from the guilt of all past sin and a being saved from the power of present sin.<sup>10</sup> Wesley said that the being

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York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 253). R.E. Cushman, agrees with this position, R. Cushman, (*John Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 54).

<sup>8</sup> Salvation, in all its elements is God-initiated. See P. Washburn, *United Methodist Primer* (Nashville; Tidings, 1969), 54.

<sup>9</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, Vol. 6, 45.

<sup>10</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Salvation By Faith*, Vol. 5, 10.

saved from the guilt of and the consequences of past sin were called justification.<sup>11</sup> He also said that justification is another word for pardon. It also means the forgiveness of all our sins and our being accepted by God.<sup>12</sup> Justification for Wesley was not all of salvation, nor did justification contain all of salvation. Justification for Wesley was the beginning of salvation.

Justification for Wesley was the declaration by God that the believing sinner was forgiven and was then accepted by God as His child. Justification was that work which God did “for” the believer.<sup>13</sup> In justification there was a relative change in the believer.<sup>14</sup> By relative change, Wesley meant, primarily, that the believer's status was changed from an enemy to a child of God. This does not mean that Wesley believed that justification was only a declaration by God.<sup>15</sup> However, his emphasis in justification was of a legal declaration by God of a “changed” status for the believer. For Wesley then, justification was the imputation of righteousness to the believing sinner. Wesley, in his *Notes on the New Testament* says, in reference to Rom 4:9 that righteousness is imputed to the believer.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 New Birth

Another aspect of salvation that Wesley emphasized was the new birth. He

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Scripture Way of Salvation*, Vol. 6, 44. See also R.E. Cushman who summarizes his understanding of Wesley's teaching on justification in these words: “Justification—God's acceptance of the sinner, for Christ's sake, in forgiveness of sins—is also reconciliation, because it is a reunion which replaces willful self-alienation from God,” (*Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 62).

<sup>13</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The New Birth*, Vol. 6, 66.

<sup>14</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Sin in Believer*, Vol. 5, 146.

<sup>15</sup> *Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, Vol. II*, see his comment on Rom 5:18. He writes that “justification to life means that the sentence of God, by which a sinner under sentence of death is adjudged to life.”

<sup>16</sup> J. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, Romans 4:9.

believed that the new birth occurred at the same time as justification.<sup>17</sup> His conviction was that, at the same moment a believing sinner was justified, he was also born of God. The new birth and justification, although occurring at the same time, according to Wesley, were not the same.<sup>18</sup> Wesley did not make a temporal distinction between justification and the new birth. The person that was justified, was also, at the same moment, born again. He stated that justification was a relative change in the life of the believer, while the new birth was an actual change.<sup>19</sup> This change is where the soul of the believer is restored to the image of God.

It is also to be noted that Wesley believed that the new birth was a part of sanctification. The new birth was not sanctification; the new birth was only a part of sanctification. Wesley called the new birth “the gate” to sanctification.<sup>20</sup> This was done, because Wesley believed that in the new birth, the believer was only beginning the road to sanctification. It is here that the gradual aspect of sanctification, according to Wesley, can be seen. He says that at the new birth, a believer's inward and outward conformity to the holiness of Christ begins.

When a person was born again, that person experienced an actual change in their soul. This change in the believer was the creation of the soul in the image of Christ. The soul, in the experience of the new birth, was renewed after the image of God.<sup>21</sup>

The change produced in the soul at the experience of the new birth was a change

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<sup>17</sup> J. Wesley's journal, July 3, 1759, Vol. 2, 492.

<sup>18</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of Those Born of God*, Vol. 5, 19.

<sup>19</sup> R. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The New Birth* Vol. 6, 74.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 71. See also R.E. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 78.

that affected the whole “manner of our existence.”<sup>22</sup> He is of the opinion that the new birth is a change from “inward wickedness to inward goodness, an entire change of our inmost nature from the image of the devil (wherein we are born), to the image of God.”<sup>23</sup> This change produced in the soul by the Holy Spirit at the new birth is an actual change to righteousness and holiness. By actual change, Wesley meant that the soul was changed experientially/existentially. The change that occurred at the new birth was not simply a theoretical change; but was a real change.

The new birth to Wesley was the beginning of sanctification.<sup>24</sup> This means that the change that is called the new birth was, for Wesley, a monumental change in the life of the human being. In the new birth the person's whole inner nature changed. Wesley said that the soul was given a new principle at the new birth. This principle was the seed of holiness, which the believer was to grow into. The new birth, the giving of a new principle to the soul was a principle of life, of true love to God and to one's fellow human beings. This principle was also a principle of willing obedience to God.<sup>25</sup>

It can be seen in Wesley's understanding of the new birth, that the new birth was truly a monumental change in the soul of the believer. To use the word monumental is not an overstatement. This can be seen from two perspectives. The first perspective in defense of the word monumental for the new birth is the Scriptures. The Scriptures<sup>26</sup> present the new birth as the work of God (John 3:3). The phrase in Greek that is

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<sup>22</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God*, Vol. 5, 224.

<sup>23</sup> J. Wesley's journal, Thursday, September 31, 1739, Vol. I, 225.

<sup>24</sup> J. Wesley's journal, July 3, 1759, Vol.2, 492. See also R.E. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part V*, Vol. 9, 405. See also R.E. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 48.

<sup>26</sup> See chapter 1 of this study for definition of these terms.

translated “born again” is γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν– which literally means born from above.<sup>27</sup> This means that the new birth is the work of God and only the work of God.

The second perspective in defense of the word monumental for the new birth is John Wesley's description of the new birth.<sup>28</sup> John Wesley calls the new birth a “great change” which affects the whole soul of the believer. The change of the new birth is not simply an external change. The change is an inner change; it is a change of the principle of the soul from wickedness to holiness. The new birth, according to Wesley, is the life of God in the soul. The new birth was the human being's participation in the divine nature. This means that the heart of the human being has been renewed after the image of God.<sup>29</sup>

The moment a person was born again, that person was justified. At the same moment that a person was justified, sanctification began.<sup>30</sup> At this moment, a person experiences a real as well as a relative change. The relative change was the change of the person's relationship with God. The person was once an enemy of God and at the moment of justification, the person became a child of God. This, according to John Wesley is the relative change that occurs in the life of a person at the moment of the new birth.

Wesley also said that, at the moment that sanctification began, a real change occurred in the life of the believer.<sup>31</sup> This moment, the moment that sanctification began, was also the moment that the person was justified, which was also the moment that the

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<sup>27</sup> W. Arndt & W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The New Birth*, Vol. 6, 71, Wesley describes the new birth in this manner: “The new birth is the great change which God works in the soul when he brings it to life. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the Almighty Spirit of God when it is created anew in Christ Jesus, when it is renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness.”

<sup>29</sup> J. Wesley's journal, Thursday, September 13, 1739, Vol. I, 161.

<sup>30</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, Vol. 6, 45; See E. Brunner who also sees justification and sanctification as a unity, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation*, Vol. III, 293.

<sup>31</sup> R. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 62.

person was born again. In other words, Wesley believed that at the moment a person was born again, justification occurred and was completed and sanctification began.

At the moment of the new birth, Wesley stated that a new principle was given to the soul. This principle was the creation of a new heart. Wesley taught that a newly born again person was not perfect. This person, although justified, born again and having begun the journey of sanctification, was still subject to the old nature.

There can be no question that pride; self-will, anger and unbelief are part of the old nature. If these “revive”,<sup>32</sup> to use Wesley's term, in the newly born again person, this must mean that they still remain within the newly born again person. The “revival of sin” within the newly born again person, which means, according to Wesley, that sin was only “stunned” when the new birth occurred, means that sin also remains within the newly born again person.

However, John Wesley also said that those who are born-again “cannot sin.”<sup>33</sup> In this context, Wesley means by sin, a voluntary transgression of a known law.<sup>34</sup> He states that, “as long as the heart is set on God, he cannot voluntarily transgress any command of God, either by speaking or acting what he knows God has forbidden.”<sup>35</sup> What Wesley means is that if a believer's heart is continually set on God, and it must be remembered that, for Wesley, one of the marks of the new birth is “willing obedience” to God, then the believer whose earnest desire and passion is to obey God, and whose heart is

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<sup>32</sup> J. Wesley said that sin can “revive” in those who are born again, (J. Wesley's sermon, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, 405).

<sup>33</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God*, Vol. 5, 227.

<sup>34</sup> J. Wesley defines sin as: “sin is an actual, voluntary transgression of a known law, of the revealed, written law of God, of any commandment of God, acknowledged to be such at the time of the transgression” (J. Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of Those Born of God*, Vol. 5, 227).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



continually set on obeying God, that believer cannot sin because he or she will not, choose to violate a known law of God.

Wesley believed that the new birth was “a great change” in that the very life of God was given or it can be said, imparted, to the soul.<sup>36</sup> The life of God in the human soul, for Wesley is the new birth. When the life of God was in the human soul, John Wesley could not perceive how that soul would willingly choose to disobey God, by breaking one of God's known laws.

John Wesley said that a person who has been born again, born of God, couldn't sin.<sup>37</sup> John Wesley thus believed that those born of God couldn't sin. He clarifies this when he puts forth the statement that those born of God do not sin by any habitual sin, by any willful sin or by any sinful desire. He does say that those born of God do sin by “infirmities.”<sup>38</sup>

In his sermon, “The Great Privilege of Those Born of God,” Wesley says that a born again person is subject to temptations and the revival of sin.<sup>39</sup> In another sermon, “Salvation by Faith”,<sup>40</sup> he claims that a born again person cannot sin. He writes that the born again person has power over both outward sin and internal sin. Wesley also is of the opinion that in a born again person, sin revives and the person is subject to temptations and even to sin, that is there is found within the person pride, self-will, anger and unbelief. This point is a major point of discussion in the discovery of the identity of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7. John Wesley believed that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 was not a

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<sup>36</sup> R. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Marks of The New Birth*, Vol. 5, 214. See also R. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 81.

<sup>38</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Salvation By Faith*, Vol. 5, 11.

<sup>39</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of Those Born of God*, Vol. 5, 231.

<sup>40</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Salvation by Faith*, Vol. 5, 11.

Christian but a person under the law, which is an unregenerate person. Part of the process of discovering the identity of the emphatic “I” is answering John Wesley's claim that a person who has been born again cannot sin, because they will not choose to violate one of God's laws.

Can a born again Christian sin? This is a very important question to answer in the journey to discover the identity of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7. It can be easily seen that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 not only can sin, but, does sin. One of the questions that will be asked at this point, but answered later in this study is: Does the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, when he or she does sin, do they sin willingly?

Before answering the question of whether John Wesley is correct in his understanding that a person born of God can not sin, it is important to understand John Wesley's view of sin.

In understanding John Wesley's view of sin, it must be understood that John Wesley believed in the total depravity of the human being before the new birth.<sup>41</sup> John Wesley's understanding of total depravity is in line with the Reformation's teaching on total depravity.<sup>42</sup> To understand Wesley's view of sin, one must begin with the fact that he held a view of total depravity that was in agreement with the Reformation. When it is understood that Wesley held a view of total depravity that is in line with the Reformation's understanding, then, it also will be understood that Wesley's different definition of sin does not come from a poor or unstable foundation. The foundation that Wesley had of the human being apart from the grace of God was the same foundation that

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<sup>41</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Of The Church*, Vol. 6, 398.

<sup>42</sup> For a comparison and contrast of Wesley's understanding of total depravity with a Reformed understanding of total depravity, see Excursus A.

the Reformation had.

Sin for John Wesley was a willful transgression of a known law.<sup>43</sup> Wesley also says that all sin is a transgression of the law, but not all transgressions of the law are sin.<sup>44</sup> The distinction that Wesley is trying to make is that sin is a conscious, willful choice of the person. There are times when a person violates God's law, unknowingly and unintentionally. This, for Wesley was not a sin.

Sin, according to Wesley cannot be found in the body. Only the soul, Wesley said can be the seat of sin.<sup>45</sup> His position is that the phrase “sinful body” is never found in Scripture, it is totally unscriptural. He did not believe that a body or matter of any kind could be sinful. According to Wesley, only spirits are capable of sin.<sup>46</sup>

Is the phrase “sinful body” found in Scripture? Rom 6:6 uses the phrase τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας. The translation of this phrase is the “body of sin”. Τῆς ἁμαρτίας is in the genitive case. Dana and Mantey say that the basal function of the genitive is to define.<sup>47</sup> They go on to say that a genitive defines by attributing a quality or relationship to the noun that it modifies.<sup>48</sup> In the phrase τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας the genitive τῆς ἁμαρτίας modifies τὸ σῶμα which is an articular noun. In following Dana and Mantey's explanation of the genitive, it can be seen that the genitive, τῆς ἁμαρτίας, attributes a quality to the noun, τὸ σῶμα. The quality that the genitive is attributing to the noun in this phrase must be a quality of sinfulness. In other words, the phrase maybe understood as: a body that has the quality of sinfulness. It is possible that a shorter way to say this

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<sup>43</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Perfection*, Vol. 5, 414.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> H. Dana & J.E. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 73.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

phrase is: a sinful body.

There are other places in the New Testament, which state that the body is dead because of sin, or that sin is located within the body.<sup>49</sup> However, there is no need to look at the remaining verses that talk of the body, either being the location of sin or in some way being sinful. The reason for this is, John Wesley said, that the phrase “sinful body” is not found in the Scripture, that the phrase is unscriptural. Therefore, if there is only one instance in the New Testament where the phrase “sinful body” is used, then Wesley's statement must be seen as inaccurate. It has just been shown that Romans 6:6 uses the phrase “body of sin” or “sinful body”. The conclusion must then be that the phrase “sinful body” is indeed found in the New Testament.

However, it must be stated that the phrase “body of sin” in Rom 6:6 does not mean that the human body, being matter or physical is sinful because it is matter or physical. In one instance, John Wesley was correct in his statement concerning the phrase “sinful body”. The Bible does not teach dualism. By dualism is meant that the spiritual realm is good and the physical realm is sinful. When John Wesley said that the phrase “sinful body” is unscriptural, one of his meanings is that the body, created by God, is not intrinsically sinful. This means that sin is not found in the body, i.e. the flesh, bones or muscles of the body, but in the spirit or soul. Sin according to Wesley is not a physical substance; it is a willful choice.<sup>50</sup>

It can be seen, therefore, that in one perspective, John Wesley is correct in his opinion regarding the phrase “sinful body.” Yet, he is incorrect in another perspective, in regards to the phrase “sinful body.” He is correct in that the body is not sinful because it

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<sup>49</sup> Rom 7:24; 8:10, 23, to name a few.

<sup>50</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part V*, 408.

is flesh. He is correct in that sin is not found in the physical aspects of the human being. This means that sin is not a substance that clings to the bones, flesh or muscles. Wesley is correct in that sin is a spiritual problem. By this is meant that sin is located within the “non-physical” aspects of the human being and is not in the physical body itself, that is, sin is not a substance within the muscles, bones or flesh.

In discussing Wesley’s view of sin there is another phrase that is closely related to sinful body. This phrase is body of sin. John Wesley understood the phrase “the body of sin” to be equivalent to the old man.<sup>51</sup> He said the “old man” was more than outward evil and sinful behavior. The “old man” was an evil heart, a heart of unbelief. In John Wesley's understanding, the “old man” was a corrupt heart.<sup>52</sup> He further states that the “old man” was our old corrupt nature.<sup>53</sup> By this it can be seen that John Wesley identified the “old man” with “the body of sin”. It can be further understood that, John Wesley believed that the “old man” was the corrupt sinful nature of the unregenerate person. This can be seen in Wesley calling the “old man”, “a heart of unbelief.” A person who had a heart of unbelief, according to Wesley, is not a believer; this person is unregenerate.

In John Wesley's understanding of the new birth, which occurs at the moment of justification, a person is born of God. The new birth is the “great change wrought” in the human soul by God, when God creates the soul anew in Christ, after the image of God, in righteousness and holiness.<sup>54</sup> This means that the heart has been re-created in the image of God. This can only mean that the heart is righteous and holy. He lists these characteristics of the new birth: the soul is now sensible to God by experience, while

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>52</sup> J. Wesley's journal, Tuesday, July 31, 1738, Vol. 1, 214.

<sup>53</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Dress*, Vol. 7, 26.

<sup>54</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The New Birth*, Vol. 6, 71.

before the new birth the soul was dead to God by experience. The eyes of understanding are now open and see that God is merciful to him/her a sinner and that he/she is reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Wesley also said that one of the marks of the new birth is a heart of willing obedience to God. John Wesley said that in regeneration the Holy Spirit “mortifies” the old man; the old corrupt nature. When the Holy Spirit “mortifies” the old man, the Holy Spirit also “breathes” a new life into the believer. In Wesley's words, “the one who was dead in sin is now dead to sin, and alive to God through Jesus Christ. God has created in him a clean heart.”<sup>56</sup>

Wesley's clarifies his opinion when it is seen that the “new man,” according to Wesley is a good heart that is created in righteousness and true holiness.<sup>57</sup> The change from the old man to the new man, that is, the change from an evil heart of unbelief to a heart created in righteousness and holiness, John Wesley called the new birth.<sup>58</sup>

In summary, John Wesley's understanding of the new birth is that the new birth “is a vast, inward change, a change wrought in the soul, a change in the whole manner of our existence, for from the moment we are born of God, we live in quite another manner than we did before, we are as it were in another world.”<sup>59</sup> Thus it can be understood that John Wesley's view of the new birth is of a tremendous change of God in the life and heart of a believing sinner. This understanding of the new birth caused Wesley to state that those born of God are totally different people than they were before. The fundamental difference is that before the new birth sinners were opposed to God and had no desire to

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<sup>55</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of those Born of God*, Vol. 5, 226.

<sup>56</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part V*, Vol. 9, 405.

<sup>57</sup> J. Wesley's journal, Tuesday, July 31, 1738, Vol. 1, 214.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, Tuesday, July 31, 1738, 214.

<sup>59</sup> J. Wesley's sermon *The Great Privilege of those Born of God*, Vol. 5, 225.

obey God. After the change called the new birth, the believing sinner now has a heart desire to obey God in Christ.<sup>60</sup>

### **2.3 Comparison of the New Birth and Justification**

John Wesley stated that the new birth and justification, while occurring at the same time, were two different experiences. He compares and contrasts the two in this manner:

Justification is a relative change while the new birth is a real change in the life of the believer. Justification changes our relation to God in that being enemies of God we become Christian. The new birth changes our souls, so that by sinners we become saints. Justification restores us to the favor of God, while the new birth restores us to the image of God. Justification takes away our guilt and the new birth takes away the power of sin.<sup>61</sup>

## **3. Sanctification**

Wesley taught that sanctification was the second component of salvation. Sanctification is the being saved from the power of sin and the root of sin.<sup>62</sup> In the “order” of salvation, Wesley then held the view that sanctification was distinct and separate from justification.<sup>63</sup> Wesley taught that sanctification was of two “types.” He said that sanctification was gradual and instantaneous.<sup>64</sup> He put as much emphasis on the gradual

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<sup>60</sup> See also R. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 143.

<sup>61</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of those Born of God*, Vol. 5, 224. See also Wesley's sermon, *The New Birth*, Vol. 6, 66, for another comparison/contrast between the new birth and justification.

<sup>62</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Working out our Own Salvation*, Vol. 6, 509.

<sup>63</sup> J. Wesley's journal, Thursday, September 13, 1739, Vol. 1, 240.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, December 5, 1762, Vol. 3, 142. See also P.S. Rees, who writes that “holiness is gift and growth,”

aspect of sanctification as he did on the instantaneous aspect of sanctification. However, the gradual aspect of sanctification seems to have gotten lost in the literature regarding Wesley and the instantaneous aspect of sanctification seems to have been emphasized.

John Wesley believed and taught that a believer could be fully or entirely sanctified in this life. To say the same thing in another way, Wesley believed that a believer could become perfect in this life. The next step in the journey to the discovery of the identity of the emphatic “I” of Romans chapter 7 is to examine John Wesley’s teaching on sanctification and perfection.

Wesley believed that at justification, the new birth occurred. He said that although they are different, yet they occur at the same time. He taught that the experiences of the justification and the new birth could not be separated. If a person was justified, that person was also born again or born of God. His teaching is that at the same moment a person is justified, that person is born again. Wesley, in his teaching on justification, also said that in a person that is “only” justified, sin and the flesh remain.

Wesley, however, was not content, either for himself or for other Christians to be “only” justified. He wanted all that he thought God intended for the believer. Wesley did not believe that God intended perfection or full salvation, only in the next life. He believed that God intended full salvation, perfection to be the normal experience of the Christian in this life. This belief was part of his teaching on sanctification.

At the moment a person was born again, the Holy Spirit changed the heart of the believer. This inner change was a change of inner wickedness to inner goodness. The person's heart was actually and really changed at the moment of justification and the

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*Triumphant in Trouble* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 38.



moment that sanctification began.

### **3.1 Instantaneous aspect of Sanctification**

The instantaneous aspect of sanctification<sup>65</sup> is where many commentators have focused their support or disagreement with Wesley.<sup>66</sup> This support and disagreement is seen today in one of the great divisions of the Church. Those who tend to disagree with Wesley's view of instantaneous sanctification are primarily in the Reformed wing of the Church. Those who tend to agree with Wesley's view of instantaneous sanctification tend to be in what is loosely called the Armenian wing of the Church. This is certainly not a hard and fast division; however, this division tends to be accurate in a very general way.

Sanctification, for Wesley began at the moment of the new birth.<sup>67</sup> The new birth was the door to sanctification. Wesley did not believe that the new birth was sanctification, but the new birth was only the door to sanctification. At the new birth, the gradual work of sanctification began. Gradual sanctification was the work of God in the life of the believer, leading the believer to the point where God cleanses the whole heart and soul. He believed that God would “speak” a second time to the believer, the first time was at justification, the second time God spoke to the believer would be the time when

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<sup>65</sup> See J. Wesley's sermon, *On Working out our Own Salvation*, Vol. 6, 509 for his position that sanctification is both instantaneous and gradual. See also R.E. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 85. In addition see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Designed To Be Like Him*, 129; C.G. Trumbull, (*Victory in Christ*, Fort Washington, Penn: Christian Literature Crusade, 1959), 84). Also M. Cavit, *The Three Ways*, 67.

<sup>66</sup> E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation*, Vol. III, 293, says that “sanctification as a matter of experience is accomplished in the individual man in a series of acts.”

<sup>67</sup> E. Brunner says that “sanctification can be used as a concept which embraces all God's action, in which also justification, regeneration and conversion are included,” (*The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consumation*, Vol.III, 290).

God would cleanse the heart and make it clean.<sup>68</sup>

When God spoke “a second time”<sup>69</sup> to the believer, this experience, Wesley called entire sanctification. Entire sanctification, for Wesley, was when the root of sin, the carnal mind and inbred sin were completely destroyed.<sup>70</sup> Wesley was convinced, it seems, that entire sanctification was an instantaneous sanctification. By this is meant that Wesley believed that entire sanctification occurred in a moment of time, as justification did.<sup>71</sup> He went on to say that if there was no second change, which occurred instantaneously, after justification, the believer would and must remain full of sin till death. He went on to say that if the believer remained full of sin till death, then the believer would also remain guilty till death. This meant, according to Wesley that the believer would continually deserve punishment till death. He claims: “It is impossible the guilt or desert of punishment, should be removed from us, as long as all this sin remains in our heart.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Repentance of Believers*, Vol. 5, 165. See also D.S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 111 - who supports the view that sanctification is instantaneous.

<sup>69</sup> T. Jennings writes that Wesley's optimism about the “immediate effects of ...regeneration was assaulted not only by his own experience but by the testimony of experienced Christians (including some of the Moravians) and by analysis of the lives of new Methodists. It became clear that most did not find entire holiness at the point of initial transformation,” (“The Meaning of Discipleship in Wesley and the New Testament,” *QR* 1 (1993): 3-18).

<sup>70</sup> D.S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 165; for an opposing view see E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation*, Vol. III, 291, who says, “Sanctification stands alongside of justification as a second thing, which is not identical with justification. And this is the specific difference, that sanctification, in contrast to justification, is not thought of as a unique event which as such brings into being the new creature, but refers to the manner in which gradually, step by step, by those processes of growth characteristic of all things, a sinful, unsanctified man grows into a sanctified man. Sanctification then corresponds to the gradual growth of the new man as it proceeds under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus the action of the divine Spirit within the temporal process in its human, temporal aspect is what is meant, in contrast with justification which declares man righteous as a totality and at one moment.”

<sup>71</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, Vol. 6, 509.

<sup>72</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Repentance of Believers*, Vol. 5, 165.

### **3.2 Gradual Aspect of Sanctification**

Wesley also taught that sanctification was not only instantaneous, but also gradual.<sup>73</sup> He taught that sanctification was indeed experienced in an instant. However, before and after that instant called sanctification, he taught that there was a gradual work of sanctification.<sup>74</sup> Sanctification for Wesley had both an instantaneous aspect and a gradual aspect. God, in an instant, cleansed the heart of the believer. However, before and after that instant of cleansing, there is a journey of growth that must occur.

### **3.3 Impartation and Imputation of Righteousness**

Within the history of the Church, another point of division has been the disagreement of whether righteousness is imputed to the believer or imparted to the believer. Wesley has been associated with the side that says righteousness is imparted to the believer. However, Wesley himself believed that righteousness was imputed to the believer in the act of justification. This is not to say that Wesley did not believe in righteousness being imparted to the believer, he did. Wesley also believed that righteousness was imputed to the believer as well. The imputation of righteousness to the believer was an aspect of justification, while the impartation of righteousness to the believer was an aspect of sanctification.

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<sup>73</sup> M.B. Wynkoop writes: "In Wesleyanism, sanctification is both imputation and an impartation. It has in it elements of crisis and process," *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1972), 306; Also R. Maddox, "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism." *AsTJ* 2 (1995): 151-172.

<sup>74</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, no page number given.

## 4. Perfection

### 4.1 What Perfection Is not

Wesley is known for his teaching on holiness or perfection.<sup>75</sup> He said that at sanctification, the heart is cleansed; the carnal mind and inbred sin are also destroyed. This experience John Wesley called perfection. It must be stated that John Wesley did not believe in sinless perfection.<sup>76</sup> He believed that the heart is cleansed and made pure or perfect, however, his understanding of perfection, was not sinless perfection. He writes that the phrase “sinless perfection” was a phrase that he never used.<sup>77</sup> He also says that the phrase “sinless perfection” is not Scriptural.<sup>78</sup>

### 4.2 What Perfection Is

In Wesley’s understanding, holiness and perfection were names for the same experience.<sup>79</sup> He defines perfection as purity of intention,<sup>80</sup> which he meant as the dedicating of all the life to God.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> There are objectors to Wesley’s doctrine of perfection. In Excursus B I have listed the objections that Wesley himself faced and his answers to them.

<sup>76</sup> L.W. Wood, *Pentecostal Grace* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Publishing Company, 1980), 155.

<sup>77</sup> J. Wesley’s writing, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, 396. See also his writing, *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, no page number given.

<sup>78</sup> J. Wesley’s letter to Mrs. Maitland, May 12, 1763, Vol. 12.

<sup>79</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 5. See also R.E. Cushman, *Wesley’s Experimental Divinity*, 48.

<sup>80</sup> “Intention is an act of the will, for to tend to something belongs to the motive power of the human act, which is the will. It is defined as the efficacious desire to attain the end through the means. Intention is concerned not only with the ultimate end but also with intermediate ends,” F. Cunningham, *The Christian Life*, 52.

<sup>81</sup> J. Wesley’s definition of perfection: He said that “in one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting not a part but all of our soul, body and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of him who created it. In yet another, it is loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Take it in which of these views you please (for there is no material difference)

Wesley also taught that perfection was the humble, patient love of God and neighbor ruling in the heart and life of the believer and thus controlling the believer's actions, words and thoughts.<sup>82</sup> For Wesley, perfection was an experience of the soul. This means that perfection was always seen and experienced in the life of the believing sinner. Wesley also taught that when one arrived at perfection, one knew experientially that they had arrived.

### 4.3 Aspects of Perfection

In Wesley's understanding of salvation, for a believer to “arrive” at perfection, that believer must first be sanctified. The reason for this is that at justification, the believer is only partially renewed, partially purified and only partially sanctified. There still remains within the believer, at justification, sin. Although the sin that remains in the believer at justification is subdued, it is not destroyed.

#### 4.3.1. Purity of intention

Perfection for Wesley centered in the will, the intention of the person and spread out

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and this is the whole and sole perfection...which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.” (Wesley's writing, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” Vol. 11, 444). See also R.E. Cushman who defines holiness according to Wesley as: “On its negative side, holiness is a sensibility of and aversion to the unholy. On its positive side it is a cleaving to the Holy. Hence it activates the first Great Commandment. It is in fact, the acknowledgement and embodiment of this commandment as a *way of life*. This is ‘experimental divinity’ in practice,” *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 36. See also D.S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 94, 228. He writes: “The essence of this state of holiness or perfection is love to God and man, purity of motivation, and cleansing from inherent sin. But because of finite qualities which still bear the scars of sin; this same believer will *not perfectly* fulfill God's law. Thus perfection in one respect, and imperfection in another, may consistently meet in the same person;” In fact, Metz titles the chapter on perfection, *Imperfect Perfection*, 221. T. Jennings gives this summary of holiness according to Wesley, (“*The Meaning of Discipleship in Wesley and the New Testament*,” 7); See also R.E. Cushman, (*Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 228).

<sup>82</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, no page number given; see also M. Cavitt, *The Three Ways*, 100-102 for his description of holiness being love.

through the whole life of the believer. One way of defining perfection, for Wesley, was purity of intention.

In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers.<sup>83</sup>

#### **4.3.2. Entire Devotion**

Wesley also understood perfection as the dedication of the entire person to God.

It is the devoting not a part but all of our soul, body and substance to God.<sup>84</sup>

#### **4.3.3. A Heart of Devotion**

Wesley also defined perfection as a heart of devotion that not only desired to live as Christ lived, but did live as Christ lived. A heart of devotion is also understood as the entire mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked.<sup>85</sup> By mind, Wesley meant the thoughts, purpose, intentions and direction of life. He also meant “to walk” as the living, moment by moment, day by day in the same manner in which Christ lived.

#### **4.3.4. A Heart Renewed to the Image of God**

Perfection for Wesley was also to be understood in a heart that has been renewed in the

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<sup>83</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, 444. See also D.S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 102; P. Nellas who writes that “The completion of the participation of the human will in Christ, the Christification of the will, is the content of the spiritual life at its highest stage; it functions as love and is called holiness,” (*Deification In Christ* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 138); C. Selecman & G. Jones, *The Methodist First Reader* (Nashville: Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1961), 58. For 2 views that are similar to Wesley's view, see K. Barth's essay, “The Gift of Freedom” in *The Humanity of God* (trans. J.N. Thomas & T. Weiser; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1976), 77; R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 68; R. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 101.

<sup>84</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, 444; See also E. Arnold & E. Arnold, *Seeking For The Kingdom of God* (Rifton, New York; Plough Publishing House, 1974), 116.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

image of God. Perfection is a heart that is freed from all inward and outward pollution and corruption from sin. The reception of this new heart occurred at the new birth and was completed at perfection. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of him who created it.<sup>86</sup>

#### **4.3.5. A Heart of Love to God and Neighbor**

Wesley understood perfection as a heart that truly loved God and truly loved one's neighbor. He never separated the love of God from the love of neighbor. Thus, in his understanding of perfection, love of neighbor was always a very vital ingredient. In yet another, it is loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves.<sup>87</sup>

#### **4.3.6. Imperfection or Not Sinless-ness**

##### **a. Mistakes**

Wesley did not teach sinless perfection. He taught that the perfect would be liable to

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* See also R. Cushman, *Wesley's Experimental Divinity*, 87, who writes: "Those suspicious of easy ecumenicity regularly overlook the point that the unanimity of the heart which Wesley applauds actually invokes Paul's definition of saving faith: 'For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved' (Rom 10:10). In Wesley's view, such a person is already the subject of saving faith and so may be presumed to have crossed the only threshold to the Christian life. Moreover, those who find in this camaraderie of 'heart-religion' a want of doctrinal sobriety easily miss the import of the rightness of heart that invites community. The relationship captured in the phrase, 'right, as my heart is with thy heart,' is, for Wesley, fulfillment of the second great commandment. And that is impossible without fulfillment of the first, the love of God, as in Mark 12:29-30. The two together signify one who is 'going on to perfection.' Thus, rightly understood, this almost proverbial Wesleyan invitation to Christian fellowship may be seen, however surprising, as doctrinally cogent by Wesley's standards. In it there is affirmation of an indissoluble complementary and union of those two pillars of Wesley's 'experimental divinity,' that is, justification by grace through faith and sanctification, i.e., Christian life going on to perfection." For a slightly different view, but one that is in agreement with Cushman, see A. Outler, "Introduction To The Report of The 1968-72 Theological Study Commission," *Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church* (ed., T. A. Langford; Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 21.

mistakes as long as they are in corruptible bodies.<sup>88</sup> By mistakes, Wesley meant transgressions, which were the result of ignorance, partial knowledge or infirmities. Wesley said that every human being, even the “perfect” have a “disordered brain.”<sup>89</sup> This disordered brain would show itself in false judgments. These false judgments would then lead the person to mistakes in the way the person relates, speaks and even treats other people. These mistakes are mistakes, if, they are not done intentionally by the person.<sup>90</sup> Mistakes which are not done intentionally, come out of the unconscious aspects of the human person. Wesley taught that the sanctified, at times, act out of the unconscious aspects of his or her being. This acting out of the unconscious aspects, in Wesley’s theology, is the same teaching that is found in Rom 7:15 where the emphatic “I” does that which they do not understand.

If a person, out of a partial or wrong knowledge of another person or situation, acts in the best understanding that is to be had at the moment, then, even if that person mistreats another person, that person has not sinned.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 3. See also D.S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 228. For an interesting comparison see M. Gorman *Apostle of The Crucified Lord*, 133, 134 for his understanding of sin and sins. He states: “Paul believes that the fundamental human problem, experienced by Jews and Gentile alike, is not merely sins (plural) but sin (singular). Sin operates as a kind of power within and upon the human race. It manifests itself in sins, or inappropriate ways of relating both to God (idolatry rather than faith) and to other humans (immorality and injustice rather than love). Being under the power of sin is like having an addiction; addicts are enslaved to their addiction as if to a master. Human beings are thus covenantally (morally and spiritually) dysfunctional.” What is interesting in Gorman’s discussion is that he, like Wesley, makes a distinction between sinful acts and the inner source causing those acts.

<sup>89</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, Vol. 7, 347.

<sup>90</sup> J.C. Cho says that Wesley was “conscious of the grave result of even the unconscious sin occasioned by the infirmities in the sanctified,” (“Adam’s Fall and God’s Grace: John Wesley’s Theological Anthropology,” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 3 (1986): 202-213.

<sup>91</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *On The Fall of Man*, Vol. 6, 219. Wesley defined mistakes as “ignorance, is in our present state, inseparable from humanity. Every child of man is in a thousand mistakes and is liable to fresh mistakes every moment. And a mistake in judgment may occasion a mistake in practice, yea naturally leads thereto. I mistake, and possibly cannot avoid mistakes, the character of this or that man. I suppose him to be what his is not, to be better or worse than he really is. Upon this wrong supposition I behave wrongly to him, that is more or less affectionately than he deserves. And by the mistake which is



J. Wesley was of the opinion that as long as Christians were in corruptible bodies believers will

be liable to mistakes.<sup>92</sup> He defines mistakes in these words:

Even those who stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, who are now really perfect in love, may still be an occasion of temptation to you; for they are still encompassed with infirmities. They may be dull of apprehension; they may have a natural heedlessness, or a treacherous memory; they may have too lively an imagination. And any of these may cause little improprieties, either in speech or behavior, which, though not sinful in themselves, may try all the grace you have; Especially if impute to perverseness of will (as it is very natural to do) what is really owing to defect of memory, or weakness of understanding---if these appear to you to be voluntary mistakes, which are really involuntary. So proper was the answer which a saint of God (now in Abraham's bosom) gave me some years ago, when I said, 'Jenny, surely now your mistress and you can neither of you be a trial to the other, as God has saved you both from sin!' 'O Sir', said she, 'if we are saved from sin, we still have infirmities enough to try all the grace that God has given us!'<sup>93</sup>

It can be seen from this that Wesley did not teach sinless perfection.

### **b. Infirmities**

In Wesley's understanding and teaching of perfection, mistakes were a part of the life of the perfect, as well as infirmities. Wesley defined infirmities as involuntary transgressions of the law.<sup>94</sup> He elaborates on his definition of infirmities as: "Involuntary transgressions or sins of infirmities as the saying a thing we believe true, though in fact it prove to be false, or the hurting our neighbor without knowing or designing it, though these are deviations from the holy, acceptable and perfect will of God, yet they are not properly

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occasioned by the defect of my bodily organs I am naturally led so to do."

<sup>92</sup> See J. Wesley's sermon, *On Perfection*, Vol. 6, 412; *On Reading the Time*, Vol. 7, 73; and his journal, July 20, 1761, Vol. 3, 69.

<sup>93</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Temptation*, Vol. 6, 479.

<sup>94</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The First Fruits of The Spirit*, Vol. 5, 92.

sins.” In his sermon, “Christian Perfection,” Wesley writes a more detailed definition of infirmities. He states:

Even Christians are not so perfect as to be free from ignorance, error or infirmities. Only let us not give that soft title to known sins, as the manner of some is. But I mean, hereby, not only those which are properly termed bodily infirmities, but all those inward and outward imperfections which are not of a moral nature. Such as the weakness of slowness of apprehension, incoherency of thought, irregular or heaviness of imagination, the want of a ready or retentive memory, slowness of speech, impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation, to which one might add a thousand other defects either in conversation or behavior. These are the infirmities which are found in the best of men and from these none can hope to be properly freed, til the Spirit returns to God that gave it.<sup>95</sup>

D.S. Metz, in agreement with Wesley posits this concerning infirmities:

1. Infirmities are failures to keep the law of *perfect obedience*, given to Adam in Eden. This law no man on earth can keep, since sin has impaired the powers of universal humanity. Sins are offenses against the law of love, the law of Christ....”
2. Infirmities are an *involuntary* outflow from our imperfect moral organization. Sin is always *voluntary*.
3. Infirmities have their ground in our *physical* nature, and they are aggravated by *intellectual* deficiencies. But sin roots itself in our *moral* nature, springing either from the habitual corruption of our hearts, or from the unresisting perversion of our tempers.
4. Infirmities entail regret and humiliation. Sin always produces guilt.
5. Infirmities in well-instructed souls do not interrupt communion with God. Sin cuts the telegraphic communication with heaven.
6. Infirmities, hidden from ourselves, are covered by the blood of Christ without a definite act of faith. Sins demand a special resort to the blood of sprinkling and an act of reliance on Christ.
7. Infirmities are *without remedy* so long as we are in the body.
8. A thousand infirmities are consistent with perfect love, but not one sin.<sup>96</sup>

Further on infirmities F. Cunningham writes: “By no means are all of our actions perfectly voluntary. Some are less voluntary, others completely voluntary. There are four impediments to voluntary: violence, fear, concupiscence (which is defined as the

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<sup>95</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 4-6.

<sup>96</sup> D.S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 232-233.

privation of rectitude in the sense of appetite as a result of original sin. In its strict sense, it is the desire of the sense appetite for a sensible good) and ignorance.”<sup>97</sup> Cunningham goes on to state that habits are also principles which cause the human to act.<sup>98</sup> He defines habit as “a quality difficult to uproot by which a man is well disposed or ill disposed regarding either his nature or his operations.”<sup>99</sup> Cunningham goes further and lists four sources of habits: “beginnings from nature, the work of man, the role of God, and environment.”<sup>100</sup>

John Wesley did not call mistakes or involuntary transgressions, sins.<sup>101</sup> Because John Wesley defined sin as a voluntary transgression of a known law and he understood infirmities as involuntary and have no concurrence with the will<sup>102</sup> then involuntary transgressions/infirmities and mistakes were not sins. The reason for this is that according to Wesley, mistakes and infirmities flow from the corruptible state of the body and do not flow from the will of the person,<sup>103</sup> and thus are in no way contrary to love and thus are not sin.<sup>104</sup>

Wesley made a distinction between voluntary and involuntary transgressions of the law. In Wesley's thinking, only the voluntary transgression was a sin. The distinction between voluntary and involuntary transgressions of the law arose out of Wesley's belief that only the soul/spirit could sin, the body could not be the seat of sin. The body was only the “instrument” of the sinful soul. Because only the soul could sin, and because in

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<sup>97</sup> F. Cunningham, *The Christian Life*, 33ff.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-121.

<sup>101</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, 396.

<sup>102</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Salvation By Faith*, Vol. 5, 11.

<sup>103</sup> For a further discussion of infirmities, see chapter 3 of this study in the discussion on acting from unconscious reasons.

<sup>104</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 14, 396.

the soul is the location of the will of the human being, then, only the soul could “choose” to act, speak, obey or disobey God. This means that when the soul intends to obey God, yet, for some reason beyond the control of the soul, the soul does something that is a deviation from God's perfect, pure and holy will, this is not properly a sin.

### **c. In the Flesh and Walking by the Flesh**

John Wesley in his teaching on perfection said that the perfect will make mistakes and will not arrive at sinless perfection in this life. In his explanation of “imperfect perfection” he made a distinction between being in the flesh and walking by the flesh. He said that at the new birth, the person is given a new heart, a heart created in righteousness and true holiness. He also is of the opinion that at the new birth the carnal mind is totally destroyed.<sup>105</sup> He finds it impossible to be reconciled to God if the carnal mind remains in the believer. Wesley's understanding of the carnal mind is “enmity towards God.”<sup>106</sup> The carnal mind is not just enmity towards God; it is direct enmity against God.<sup>107</sup> According to Wesley, the carnal mind is not just direct enmity against God; the carnal mind is “essential enmity” against God.<sup>108</sup> He further defines his understanding of the carnal mind when he says that the carnal mind is “the entire universal corruption of our nature.”<sup>109</sup> If that were not enough, Wesley adds, that the carnal mind is the “mind, the inclination, the whole bias of our evil nature, which is enmity against God.”<sup>110</sup>

According to Wesley, the carnal mind, being enmity towards God, infects the

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<sup>105</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Sin in Believers*, Vol. 5, 153.

<sup>106</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Justified by Faith*, Vol. 5, 59.

<sup>107</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Heavenly Treasures in Earthen Vessels*, Vol. 7, 344.

<sup>108</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*, Vol. 8, 473.

<sup>109</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Sermon on The Mount/Discourse I*, Vol. 5, 254.

<sup>110</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part II*, Vol. 9, 272.

whole soul of the person.<sup>111</sup> Because the carnal mind is enmity towards God, it cannot be subject to God's law. The carnal mind, being enmity towards God, is opposition to spiritual truths and is an aversion to receiving spiritual truths.<sup>112</sup> The carnal mind is equivalent to those who are in the flesh. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God, according to Wesley. This is so because those who are in the flesh, that is the carnal mind, being enmity against God, are “utterly indisposed for such an obedience, as the relation between God and man requires.”<sup>113</sup> This also true, because, the carnal mind is enmity against God, and those who are enemies of God, cannot, at the same time, be the friends of God. When Wesley said “friends of God”, what he meant is that those who are friends of God desire to obey God. When Wesley said that those who are enemies of God, that is in the flesh, what he meant is that these people do not desire to obey God.

Therefore, according to Wesley, when a person is born again, that person is reconciled to God. This means that the enmity between that person and God no longer exists. The person who has been born again is no longer an enemy of God and is now a friend of God. Another way of saying that is that at the new birth the existential desire of the person changes from a desire of not obeying God to a desire to obey God. Thus, if in a person, the carnal mind remains, that person cannot be reconciled to God. He states that it is impossible for a person to be, at the same time, an enemy of God, with no desire to obey God and a friend of God, whose existential desire is to obey God. Wesley would say that it is impossible for a person to love God and hate God at the same time.

However, Wesley's position is not as clear and as simple as it would seem. He

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>112</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part VII*, Vol. 9, 447.

<sup>113</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part V*, Vol. 9, 408.

also says that in those who are justified, a mind “which is in some measure carnal” remains.<sup>114</sup> His stating that the carnal mind still remains in them that are regenerate, although it does not reign further complicates his own position.<sup>115</sup>

In his attempts to clarify his position, Wesley taught that being in the flesh and walking after the flesh are two different concepts. He defines the flesh as: “(1) a want of original righteousness (2) a natural propensity to sin.”<sup>116</sup> By a want of original righteousness, Wesley taught that humanity was created in the image of God, which means that human beings were righteous and holy. When humanity sinned, humans lost that righteousness and holiness. When Wesley said that the flesh is a natural propensity to sin, he meant that in the human being there is an aversion to what is good and an inclination to what is evil.<sup>117</sup> Wesley also claims that the flesh signifies corrupt nature.<sup>118</sup> The flesh, according to Wesley, is also the evil nature.<sup>119</sup> The natural state of the human being, Wesley called the flesh.<sup>120</sup>

The flesh, according to Wesley, signified the fallen, sinful nature of the human being. To be in the flesh was to be an enemy of God. This meant that the one who was in the flesh, could not please God, nor did that person want to please God. Those who are in the flesh are the unregenerate persons, that is, those who are not born again.<sup>121</sup>

Wesley taught that to be in the flesh was one thing, but to walk after the flesh was another. By walking after the flesh, Wesley means not only obeying the flesh, but being

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<sup>114</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *The Repentance of Believers*, Vol. 5, 161.

<sup>115</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, Vol. 6, 50.

<sup>116</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part V*, Vol. 9, 407.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *The First Fruits of the Spirit*, Vol. 5, 88.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *The Witness of our Own Spirit*, Vol. 5, 140.

<sup>121</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part II*, Vol. 9, 272.

ruled by the flesh.<sup>122</sup>

Flesh, according to Wesley, remains in the believer after justification. Within the believer are two contrary principles, flesh and spirit.<sup>123</sup> The flesh remained in a believer after justification. Wesley taught that at justification a believer was only partially cleansed, purified and sanctified.<sup>124</sup> A believer was not completely renewed, purified and sanctified, until the moment of entire sanctification. Until the moment of entire sanctification, the flesh, the evil nature remained in a believer. Although the flesh remained in the believer, the flesh did not rule the believer. The flesh desired to rule, but, at the new birth, a new life was given to the believing sinner and this new life, also wanted to rule the believer. Within the believer was therefore a struggle between the flesh's desire to rule and the new life's desire to rule.<sup>125</sup>

## **5. Conclusion to section on Wesley's Perfection**

Perfection, according to Wesley was a pure heart, which resulted in purity of intention. This being said, it must also be said that Wesley never taught that the one who was "perfect" was free from temptations, mistakes or involuntary transgressions.<sup>126</sup> Wesley also said that perfection was love. He said: "What is implied in being a perfect Christian? He said that the perfect Christian is one who loves God with all his heart, mind, and

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<sup>122</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Sin in Believers*, Vol. 5, 154.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> J. Wesley's journal, May 17, 1740, Vol. 1, 272.

<sup>126</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, 396.

soul.”<sup>127</sup> Perfection, then for John Wesley was a person who loved God with all their heart, mind and soul. The perfect Christian would not only love God, but would love their neighbor as themselves.<sup>128</sup>

John Wesley taught that even the “perfect” could be the occasion of temptation to others. The reason being is that the “perfect” are still affected by the infirmities that remain within them.<sup>129</sup> In his understanding of perfection he writes that the perfect in love are still “encompassed with infirmities and liable to mistakes, from which words and or actions might follow, even though the heart was all love.”<sup>130</sup> He goes on to say, “although saved from sin, believers still have infirmities enough to try all the grace God has given.”<sup>131</sup>

He clearly points out that perfection does not mean perfection in knowledge, freedom neither from ignorance nor from mistakes and infirmities, but perfection is the heart that loves God and neighbor and that love is expressed in a heart of obedience.<sup>132</sup> Thus, it can be seen that John Wesley's perfection was an “imperfect perfection.” The perfect loved God with all that they are and all that they have. The perfect also love their neighbor as themselves. The perfect, however, are not perfect in the sense of attaining to God's absolute perfection. Wesley believed that no one in this life would ever attain to

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> C. Wesley's hymn *Jesus, United by Thy Grace*, expresses, not only this two-fold aspect of holiness or *perfection*, but also describes the manifold aspects of *perfection*, (“*Jesus, United by Thy Grace*,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, R.K. Feaster, publisher; Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 561; See also E.L. Cattell, *The Spirit of Holiness* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1977), 38; G.A. Turner, *Christian Holiness in Scripture, in History and in Life* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1977), 52-53.

<sup>129</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 4, 5. See also D.S. Metz who writes: “A person may have infirmities, and yet be motivated by perfect love,” (*Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 233).

<sup>130</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *A Preface to a Treatise on Justification*, Vol. 10, 327.

<sup>131</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Temptation*, Vol. 6, 479.

<sup>132</sup> J. Wesley's writing, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Vol. 11, 374.



God's absolute perfection. On the other hand, it was Wesley's belief and teaching that a believer could reach “perfection,” though not sinless perfection, in this life. He did not think that perfection was reserved for a certain few. He believed that perfection was the normal experience of the Christian. Wesley also believed that perfection was God's intention for the believer in this life.

Perfection, according to Wesley, did not mean freedom from mistakes, infirmities, temptations or ignorance. He defines perfection as purity of intention, which means desiring nothing more than God.<sup>133</sup> However, because the perfect are still in imperfect, corruptible bodies which, are at times in opposition to God's perfect and holy will and which do influence the words, thoughts and actions of the perfect this means, according to him, that the Christian life is a life of continual warfare, or outward and inward trials.<sup>134</sup>

A concluding quote from Wesley will show that what Wesley meant by both the continual struggle faced by the perfect and his understanding of perfection itself.

John Wesley wrote: “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, I largely showed that God never deserts any man, unless he first deserts God, and that from bodily disorders, on the one hand and violent temptations on the other hand, every believer may be happy as well as holy, and walk in the light all the days of his life.”<sup>135</sup>

It can be seen that for Wesley, the perfect Christian is a believer whose heart is fully God's and who desires to obey God in all things. The perfect Christian, while having a heart of willing obedience to God, also lives in imperfect bodies. Thus, it is to be

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<sup>133</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The Witness of Our Own Spirit*, Vol. 5, 141.

<sup>134</sup> J. Wesley's journal, May 17, 1740, Vol. 1, 272.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, January 31, 1767, Vol. 3, 271.

understood that for Wesley, the perfect Christian had a heart of obedience, yet, was surrounded by an imperfect body. The imperfect body of the perfect Christian does have influence on how the words, actions and thoughts of the perfect Christian. This situation results in the perfect Christian, while desiring to obey God but, at times seeing and experiencing that their actual words, actions and thoughts are not in conformity to God's will. John Wesley stated that Christians who are perfected in love will, at times, act, behave, speak, and think, not out of their "will," which has been perfected in love, but will act out of their infirmities.<sup>136</sup> By infirmities, Wesley meant those aspects of the human being's life that have been damaged by sin and conditioned by original sin, culture and upbringing. Wesley also said: "even those who are perfect in love, may still be an occasion of temptation to you, for they are still encompassed with infirmities."<sup>137</sup> Again it is to be stated that Wesley's doctrine of perfection did not mean absolute perfection that is the attaining to the standard of God's holiness. In Wesley's doctrine of perfection, he taught that those who are perfect in love will have struggles with and will act out of their infirmities. Wesley further states that the Christian who is perfect in love is still liable to mistakes.<sup>138</sup>

Wesley writes: "Sins of infirmities are involuntary failings as the saying a thing

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<sup>136</sup> J. Wesley said it this way: "Christians are not so perfect as to be free either from ignorance or error. We may thirdly add, nor from infirmities. Infirmities are (1). Bodily infirmities (2) all those inward or outward imperfections which are not of a moral nature. Such are weakness or slowness of understanding, dullness or confusedness or apprehension, incoherency of thought," (Wesley's sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 4).

<sup>137</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Temptation*, Vol. 6, 479.

<sup>138</sup> Again Wesley's words are appropriate: "While we are in the body we cannot be wholly free from mistakes. Notwithstanding, all our care, we shall still be liable to judge wrong in many instances. And a mistake in judgment will very frequently occasion a mistake in practice, nay a wrong judgment may occasion something in the temper or passions, which is not strictly right. It may occasion fear or ill-grounded hope, unreasonable love or unreasonable aversion. But all this is no way inconsistent with perfection." J. Wesley's sermon, *On Perfection*, Vol. 6, 414.

we believe true, though in fact it prove to be false, or the hurting our neighbor without knowing or desiring it.”<sup>139</sup> Within this quote by Wesley are several very important words and phrases that need to be noticed and examined. The first is Wesley's word “involuntary.” He writes that “sins” of infirmities are involuntary failings. By involuntary, he means that the failings are not voluntary, that is that the person who acts does not act voluntarily or willfully. In other words, the Christian who is perfected in love, at times will do, fail to act, think, speak, and behave the way that both they and God want. In these times of “involuntary” failings, the Christian who is perfected in love will act in ways that they do not desire to. It must be understood that when a Christian who is perfected in love fails but not voluntarily, the will of the Christian who is perfected in love, will not be in agreement with the “involuntary” failings. In other words, the times when the Christian who is perfected in love fails, “involuntarily,” at these times, the will of the Christian is not in agreement with what the Christian is doing.

The second word or phrase to be noticed is: “without knowing or desiring it.” Wesley made this comment after stating that Christians who are perfected in love will “involuntarily” fail. Christians who are perfected in love will at times “involuntarily” fail “without knowing or desiring it.” These words and phrases from Wesley himself state that the Christian who is perfect in love, may and will do things that they do not want to do. These unwanted, yet accomplished acts result in wrong judgments, wrong behaviors and even hurting of one's neighbor.<sup>140</sup> These unwanted acts are the result, not of a willful choice of the person, but are the result of the person's cultural and family upbringing and original sin and come out of the damage that sin has done in that person's life.

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<sup>139</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The First Fruits of the Spirit*, Vol. 5, 92.

<sup>140</sup> See footnote # 93 above, this chapter.

## **6. Comparison of Wesley's Perfection and the Experience of the Emphatic "I" of Rom 7**

The experience that Wesley describes for the Christian who is perfect in love is similar to the experience of the emphatic "I" of Rom 7. Both, the emphatic "I" and the Christian who is perfect in love both desire to do what is right and holy in the sight of God. The emphatic "I" desires to do the "good" (Rom 7:16, 19). The Christian who is perfect in love has a pure intention to love God and one's neighbor. Here it can be seen that the Christian who is perfect in love and the emphatic "I" of Rom 7 both desire to do what is holy and well pleasing in the sight of God.

The Christian who is perfect in love and the emphatic "I" of Rom 7 not only have the common experience of desiring to do what is holy and well-pleasing in the sight of God, which results in pleasing God in all things, but they also share another common experience. This second shared experience is the occasional failing to do what is good and loving. When they fail to do what is good, loving, and well pleasing in the sight of God, they do what fails to meet God's standard.

The emphatic "I" of Rom 7 and the Christian who is perfect in love fail at times to do what is holy and well pleasing in the sight of God. Wesley's position is that the Christian who is perfect in love will fail "involuntarily." What Wesley means is that the "will" of the Christian who is perfect in love will be set on doing what is holy and well-pleasing in the sight of God, but at times, the Christian will act out of something other than their "will." Wesley claims that at these times the Christian who is perfect in love acts out of their infirmities. Wesley claims that there are two "sources" within the Christian who is perfect in love, out of which they will act, speak, and behave. The first

of these “sources” is the “will”; the second of these “sources” are the “infirmities.”

As it has been seen in chapter 2 of this study, the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 also has two “sources” within them, out of which they act, speak, and behave. When the emphatic “I” acts not consistent with their will, their desire, the emphatic “I” is not the one acting, but the “sin that indwells in them.” Here it can be seen that there are two “sources” out of which the emphatic “I” acts. The first source is the will, the desire, and the second source is the “sin that indwells.” The emphatic “I” calls the “sin which indwells” another law which operates within the members of their body (Rom 7:23). This “second” law is a law that is in opposition to their will, their  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  - which, according to Berry, is the “moral center of a human being.”<sup>141</sup> It can be seen that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 has two sources out of which they act, speak and behave. The first source is their  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , their will. The second source is a “law” which operates within the members of their bodies.

The struggle of the emphatic “I” with another law that operates within the members of their body is not a struggle between the material and the spiritual. The law that operates within the members of the emphatic “I” which is in opposition to their will is the sin that indwells them (Rom 7:15). The emphatic “I” goes on to say that when they sin, when they act against their will, it is not they who are sinning, but the sin that indwells them (Rom 7:20). The emphatic “I” acts, at times consistent with their will and at other times, the emphatic “I” acts not consistent with their will, but in opposition to it.

Wesley said that the Christian who is perfect in love acts, at times consistent with their will and at other times acts in opposition to their will. When the Christian who is perfect in love acts in opposition to their will to please God, Wesley said that they were

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<sup>141</sup> G.R. Berry, *A Dictionary of New Testament Greek Synonyms*, 25.

acting out of their infirmities and what they did, he called mistakes. Wesley said and taught in his doctrine of *perfection* that Christians who are perfect in love act, at times out of their will and at other times the Christian who is perfect in love will act, not out of their will, but will act out of another source which is located within them. This other source cannot be the will of the Christian who is perfect in love. The reason for this is that the will of the Christian who is perfect in love is set on pleasing God in all things. This other source, though not the will, must be found within the Christian who is perfect in love. Somewhere within the Christian who is perfect in love is another “source” out of which they act, speak, and behave. Wesley called this other source “infirmities.” The infirmities of a Christian who is perfect in love are found within them, but not within their will. Because the infirmities of a Christian who is perfect in love are found within them and are not their will; the infirmities of a Christian who is perfect in love are found within their members. The infirmities of Wesley are similar to the “unconscious” factors that influence a person’s decision and out of which they act. By this it can be seen that with Wesley’s infirmities affecting the “perfect” Christian and the “unconscious factors” affecting the mature Christian, there are similar factors working within both the “perfect” Christian and the mature Christian which affect them and cause them to act, think, choose, at times, not according to their will but which are part of their experiences.

Wesley said that Christians who are perfect in love at times fail to meet God's standard. When these Christians fail to meet God's standards, they act in opposition to their will and act involuntarily. Wesley is describing an experience where a Christian who is perfect in love, one could also call this Christian a spiritually mature Christian, fails to do what is right, good and well-pleasing in the sight of God. At the same time, while

failing to meet God's standard, the Christian who is perfect in love, also acts in opposition to their will, because the perfect Christian has set their will on pleasing God.

The experience of desiring to be and do what God desires, yet, at times failing to meet God's standard of love is the same experience of the emphatic "I" of Rom 7. The emphatic "I" of Rom 7 has set their will on the good, that is on pleasing God by obeying his law. However, at times, the emphatic "I" finds that it acts in opposition to their will. In these times of acting in opposition to their will, the emphatic "I" of Rom 7 fails to do what is right, holy, and well pleasing in the sight of God. What can be seen from these common experiences of the Christian who is perfect in love and the emphatic "I" of Rom 7 is that both act against their desiring, their will, when they fail to do what is good, loving, and well-pleasing in the sight of God.

Wesley defined sin as a willful transgression of a known law.<sup>142</sup> The question that is to be asked is: Does the emphatic "I" sin willingly? The answer to that question is "no". The desire of the emphatic "I" is to do what pleases God. Rom 7:15, 18, 19, 20 all clearly state that the emphatic "I" desires, not to sin, but to please God. Rom 7:15 states: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Here it can be seen that the emphatic "I" does not do what it wants, what it desires to do. Rom 7:18-20 states: "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature; for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." These verses make it clear that the desire of the emphatic "I" is to do what is good, what

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<sup>142</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Obedience to Parents*, Vol. 7, 107.

is pleasing to God. These verses also state that the emphatic “I” does not desire to sin.

The emphatic “I” sins but sins “unwillingly” (Rom 7:16). The emphatic “I” does not desire to sin, nor does the emphatic “I” will sin. Because the emphatic “I” does not sin willingly nor will to sin, the sin of the emphatic “I” must belong to Wesley's categories of mistakes or involuntary failings. Wesley said that the Christian who is perfect in love will, as long as they are in a mortal body, make “mistakes.” He writes: “Christian perfection does not imply an exemption either from ignorance or mistakes or infirmities.”<sup>143</sup> He also states that weaknesses and infirmities will remain while this corruptible body remains.<sup>144</sup> Wesley defined “infirmities” as involuntary failings.<sup>145</sup> Thus, according to Wesley's own definitions, it must be seen that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 sins, not willingly, but unwillingly, that is involuntarily.

## 7. Concluding Statement

When the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is compared to the experience of Wesley's Christian who is perfected in love, it can be seen that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 and the Christian who is perfected in love share a similar experience. This is another way of saying that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 and Wesley's Christian who is perfected in love experience a similar experience.

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<sup>143</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 5.

<sup>144</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The End of Christ's Coming*, Vol. 6, 277.

<sup>145</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *First Fruits of The Spirit*, Vol. 6, 92.



## Chapter 6: The Teaching of Three Mystics

### 1. Introduction

The experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 will be compared to the spiritual experience which is described by three mystics. The purpose of this comparison is to help in discovering the identity of the emphatic “I” and in the constructing of the spiritual portrait of the emphatic “I”. These mystics are: St. Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich and the Cloud of Unknowing. The comparison of the mystical writings with the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 will aid in the discovery of the identity of the emphatic “I”. St. Teresa of Avila wrote the *Interior Castle* and Julian of Norwich wrote *Revelation of Love*, and the author, who wrote the *Cloud of Unknowing*,<sup>1</sup> form the very heart of Western mysticism.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in studying these three Mystics, one is also studying that which forms the very core and center of the Mystical tradition in the Western Church. This means that the teachings of Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila and the *Cloud of Unknowing* form a very important and essential part of the teaching of the Western Church. The Mystics themselves and the Catholic Church call the teaching of these Mystics, Gospel.<sup>3</sup> The reason for comparing the experience of the emphatic “I” with the mystical writings of these mystics is that the “spiritual marriage” is considered as the highest spiritual plain where a human can live in this life. Another name for this highest

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<sup>1</sup> An unknown English monk who wrote the *Cloud of Unknowing* in the fourteenth century, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, preface.

<sup>3</sup> T. Dubay, *Fire Within*, 10.

plane is “holiness”.<sup>4</sup>

Julian of Norwich was a mystic who was born May 8, 1373. The date of her death is unknown, although some think that she may have still been living in 1428;<sup>5</sup> however, this is questioned. Julian’s name is unknown.<sup>6</sup> She lived as a hermit in a two-roomed dwelling “propped against the walls of St. Julian in Conesford Street church.”<sup>7</sup>

Teresa of Avila, a mystic who died in 1579,<sup>8</sup> wrote the *Interior Castle* in 1577.<sup>9</sup> Teresa lived in various locations throughout Spain.

The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* was an English monk who wrote the *Cloud of Unknowing* in the fourteenth century. The identity of this monk is unknown.<sup>10</sup>

To draw the “spiritual portrait of a Christian believer” the experience as described by Paul in Rom 7 was studied, then is to be compared to the experience of the Church.<sup>11</sup> It is the purpose of this chapter to study the experience of the Mystics, called the “spiritual marriage” and to compare it to Wesley’s doctrine of “perfection” and the experience described by Paul in Rom 7. The purpose of this comparison is to show that Paul in Rom 7, John Wesley and the Mystics are all describing a similar experience of a mature, spiritual Christian believer.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> T. Dubay states, “A book on advanced prayer is a book on advanced joy. It is a love story, a book about being loved and loving totally. It is a book on holiness, the heights of holiness to which the Gospel invites everyone,” (*Fire Within*, 5).

<sup>5</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Love*, preface.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>8</sup> St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> W. Johnston, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 7. The biographical information for these three mystics is sparse. This is evidence that they are true mystics as their intent was to focus people’s attention on God and not on themselves, See also (St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, 14).

<sup>11</sup> As it has been stated in chapter 1 of this study that the dependence of the Mystics on Paul will be seen in the commonality of the experience that the Mystics teach with the experience that Paul teaches.

<sup>12</sup> For objections to the Mystical experience called “the spiritual marriage” see Excursus C.

The study of the mystical experience called the “spiritual marriage”<sup>13</sup> will be compared to Wesley's experience of “perfection”. These two experiences,<sup>14</sup> the “spiritual marriage” and Wesley's experience of “perfection” will then be compared to the experience that is recorded of the emphatic “I” in Rom 7. The assumption of comparing the “spiritual marriage” and Wesley's experience of “perfection” is that these two experiences are similar experiences of mature spiritual Christians.<sup>15</sup> This similar experience of the “spiritual marriage” and “perfection” will then be compared to the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7. This comparison will help in answering the question: Is the experience of the “spiritual marriage” and of “perfection” similar to the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7?

Those who support the viewpoint of a “spiritual marriage”,<sup>16</sup> have a particular understanding of what the concept means. Here follows a brief summary of the experience of “spiritual marriage”. The “spiritual marriage” is an experience of union between the believer and God. This union with God “is effected by likeness: We must be made like unto God if we are to be united to Him.”<sup>17</sup> This likeness to God is a likeness where God takes complete possession of the soul.<sup>18</sup> When a person is completely

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<sup>13</sup> This chapter will be a discussion on the Mystics teaching on the *spiritual marriage* and not on the differences between the theology of the Roman Catholic and the theology of the Protestant Church. Thus, there will be no comparison/contrast between Protestant theology and Roman Catholic theology. The core of the Mystical teaching on the *spiritual marriage* can be seen as the essential Gospel. This common essence is holiness. This common essence is the thesis of this study and will be shown throughout.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 1 of this study for a definition and understanding of the word “experience” as used in this study.

<sup>15</sup> This study will confirm this statement.

<sup>16</sup> I list only a few: T. Merton, T. Dubay, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross, the author of the Cloud of Unknowing; Mother Teresa; H.W. Smith.

<sup>17</sup> T. Dubay, *Fire Within*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 59. See also St. Ignatius, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, 103 who writes: “Love consists in a mutual interchange by the two parties, that is to say,

possessed by God, this “being possessed” is seen both in the words which a person speaks, in the deeds which they do and is seen in the resolution of the will to be God's person completely.<sup>19</sup> Another way to say this is that when a person is completely possessed by God, their words and deeds, that is their outer lives, reflect being possessed by God. Their words and deeds become words and deeds of love for the neighbor. Being possessed by God is also reflected in the will of the person to be God's person. To be God's person means that the person has set their heart, which is the will, on living for God and attempting to please God in all things.

It must be stated from the outset that in the study on the Mystical experience, called the “spiritual marriage”, that the extraordinary experiences of some of the mystics are not an integral part of the experience called the “spiritual marriage”. The Mystics taught that the extraordinary experiences, or as they were called “favors of God,” were usually given to the beginners, the immature, the weakest, and the ones who were just starting the journey towards union with God.<sup>20</sup>

The mature believers, according to the teaching of the Mystics, would no longer experience these extraordinary experiences. The reason for this is that the mature believers were living in the union of their wills with the will of God.<sup>21</sup> This union of wills, in this life, is the highest experience that a human being can have with God. The extraordinary experiences were given to encourage the believer to go forward to the “spiritual marriage”. The Mystics teach that many people, who experienced the

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that the lover give to and share with the beloved all that he has or can attain, and that the beloved act toward the lover in like manner.”

<sup>19</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> H.W. Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1952), 115.

extraordinary experiences, never, in this life, reached the “spiritual marriage”, that is the union of their wills with the will of God. It is also true, according to the Mystics, that many, who have never experienced the extraordinary experiences, reached the “spiritual marriage”, that is, the union of their wills with the will of God, in this life.

It is important to state that the extraordinary experiences are not an integral part of the “spiritual marriage” and to make it clear that the “core” experience of the “spiritual marriage”, which this study is concerned with, will not discuss further the extraordinary experiences of certain of the Mystics. It is enough to say that the extraordinary experiences are not necessarily a part of the union of the human will with the will of God. The union of the human will with the will of God can be experienced, and normally is, without the extraordinary experiences.

## 2. “Spiritual Marriage” and Teresa of Avila

Teresa of Avila calls perfection the “spiritual marriage”.<sup>22</sup> Teresa insists that perfection consists “in the love of God and of our neighbor.”<sup>23</sup> According to Teresa, love consists,

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<sup>22</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 42. St. John calls perfection “union” (St. John of the Cross, “The Dark Night,” Book 2, chapter 3, *The Collected Works of St. John of The Cross*, (trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriques; Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), 399). In the understanding of the Mystics, however, “union” and the “spiritual marriage” were synonymous terms. In addition, perfection is also understood in terms of perfect in love; Mother Teresa defines *perfection* in this manner. She writes: “In loving and serving, we prove that we have been created in the likeness of God, for God is love and when we love we are like God. This is what Jesus meant when he said, ‘Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect,’” *Jesus: the Word to be Spoken* (New York: Walker and Company, 1987), 66, 67. This understanding of perfection can be seen as being similar to Wesley’s understanding of perfection. In addition, the discussion concerning union as union of wills, the human and Divine can be seen to be synonymous with Wesley’s understanding of perfection, sin and holiness. For substantiation of this see chapter 4 of this study on Wesley and chapter 6 of this study.

<sup>23</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 42.

not in the person's own happiness, but in the determination of the will to please God in everything and to love one's neighbor.<sup>24</sup>

V. Lossky, writes that “union with God is brought about by love.”<sup>25</sup> St. John of the Cross states that perfection is perfect love.<sup>26</sup> As it has been stated above, St. Teresa calls the spiritual marriage love. Thus, it can be seen that the spiritual marriage and union with God are synonymous phrases and concepts. In addition, J. Welch writes: “Union with God in the center provides a unique view of the world. The spiritual marriage does not take a person from the world, but allows the person to find a place in the essential unity of all creation. The Union with God bears fruit in an androgynous living which realize its intrinsic relationship to all other life and existence.”<sup>27</sup> Here it can be seen that J. Welch interchanged the phrases “spiritual marriage” and “union with God,” thus, stating that the two phrases are describing the same experience.

The soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage” has all that it desires. This is so, because all that the soul in the “spiritual marriage” desires is God. By this is meant that the soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, lays no claim upon “the things of the world.” The soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, is able to function and to “use” the things of the world without being controlled by them or without having the “need” to own them. The soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, seeks and desires only God and to serve and to please Him.

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<sup>24</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 76.

<sup>25</sup> V. Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 133.

<sup>26</sup> St. John of the Cross, “The Dark Night,” *The Collected Works of St. John of The Cross*, 439.

<sup>27</sup> J. Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 184, 185.

According to Teresa, a soul progressing<sup>28</sup> towards the “spiritual marriage” is a soul that is growing in its knowledge of God and of itself. This is to say that a soul progressing towards the “spiritual marriage” is growing in the knowledge of God and of self. The reality is that a soul that is learning more about God is also learning more about itself. This is to state, very clearly, that the experience called the “spiritual marriage” is not identified with absolute perfection or the “arriving” at a final point. In some ways, the “spiritual marriage” is not “arriving at all.” The “spiritual marriage” can be seen as a “beginning” point for the soul.<sup>29</sup> There is much growth in the knowledge of God and self that occur after the experiencing the “spiritual marriage”.

The soul, progressing towards the “spiritual marriage”, and the ones that have experienced the “spiritual marriage”, learn more about God and themselves. In this knowledge the soul discovers the beauty of God and the sinfulness of itself. Teresa states it this way: “The better the soul gets to know the greatness of God, the better it comes to realize the misery of its own condition.”<sup>30</sup>

Teresa writes that the soul in the “spiritual marriage” desires to please God in all things. This desire is so overwhelming that the soul, although desiring to please God in all things, realizes that it can do very little for God, in comparison to its desires to please God.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, desires to

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<sup>28</sup> T. Dubay, in summarizing the teaching of the saints claims that the saints teach that “it is the gradual growth toward the heights of transforming *union* and nothing less that produces an accompanying heroic holiness,” (*Fire Within*, 3).

<sup>29</sup> St. John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of The Cross*, 445.

<sup>30</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 91. See also T.A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (trans. L. Sherley-Price; New York: Penguin Books, 1952), 85 who writes: “At times, God will withdraw from you; at times you will be troubled by your neighbor, and, what is more, you will often be a burden to yourself.” See also St. John of the Cross, “The Spiritual Canticle,” *The Collected Works of St. John of The Cross*, 504.

<sup>31</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 107.

please God in all things. This desire is of such a nature that, it can be called overwhelming. This means that the soul's passion, breathe and reason for existence is to please God.

The soul, which has this overwhelming desire to please God, is also aware, that, in all actuality, it can do very little for God. This realization, when compared to the overwhelming desire of the soul to please God, causes the soul “pain.” In other words, the soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, desires to please God in all things, but it also realizes that it cannot accomplish even a portion of its desire to please God.

The teaching of the *Interior Castle* is that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, while desiring to please God and growing in this desire to please God, also becomes clearer as to its own self. The soul realizes that there is still within it areas and times of self-love, or the lack of love towards others.<sup>32</sup> The soul, in seeing how far it truly is from God, although having experienced the “spiritual marriage”, realizes that in it, there is nothing good. The soul also realizes that if there is any good in it, this good is the gift of God and not from itself.<sup>33</sup> This certainly means that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, is a soul captivated by God and not a self-righteous soul. This means that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, is a soul secure in the grace of God and is not trying to earn or work its way toward heaven.

In this experience of the “spiritual marriage”, where the soul sees itself as a sinner, yet growing ever closer to God, can be seen the common experience of the Mystics.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>34</sup> A.G. Sertlanges, *Spirituality* (trans. by the Dominican nuns of Corpus Christi Monastery; New York: McMullen Books, 1954), 99; T. Merton, *Life and Holiness* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 9; G. Thils, *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1962), 137.



Teresa, whom has been recognized as one who experienced the “spiritual marriage”, calls herself a worm.<sup>35</sup> Here can be seen the “I am” and the “I am not yet” of the “spiritual marriage”. The “I am” is the experience of union of the human will with the will of God. The “I am not” is the reality that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, sees ever clearer, that there is still so much more of the soul which has not yet been transformed into the image of Christ.

In this experience of growing ever closer to God, the soul desires more and more to be completely united to God. Along with this desire of the soul to be completely united to God is a realization that, in the experience of the “spiritual marriage”, there is an uncompleted union with God. The will of the soul, in the “spiritual marriage”, has become one with the will of God. Yet, the soul is more than simply will. There are other aspects, dimensions and depths of the soul than simply “will”. It is in these other aspects, dimensions and depths of the soul that the “uncompleted” union with God is seen and experienced.

When the soul experiences the “spiritual marriage”, there is a union of the human will with the will of God. Yet, the soul is more than simply “will.” There are indeed other aspects and dimensions of the soul that, in this life, do not experience union with God. This “uncompleted” union with God is torture for the soul.<sup>36</sup> The reason for this is that the soul, in growing ever closer to God, sees its own self in a clearer and clearer way. Although the soul is being transformed into the image of Christ, there yet remain in the soul many imperfections and areas which are still broken. These imperfections and

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<sup>35</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 153; H.W. Smith, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, 115-118.

<sup>36</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 163.

broken areas cause the soul pain.<sup>37</sup> The soul's one desire is God and union with Him. Union with God, according to the teaching of the Mystics, means conformity with God. The areas of unconformity with God, the still remaining imperfections and broken areas, become increasingly painful to the soul, as the soul desires more and more to be pleasing to God and to experience complete union with God.

The desire of the soul to be completely pleasing to God by means of union and conformity to God means that the soul desires not to sin, that is to displease God. The fact that the soul is not yet perfect, in the understanding of glorification, means that the soul still stumbles and falls, although not willingly. This reality, of still falling and stumbling, although unwillingly, causes the soul to be greatly distressed. This distress comes out of the knowledge that the soul, although with an overwhelming desire to please God, still commits many sins and feels that it is unpleasing to God.<sup>38</sup>

Teresa says that the soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, which is the union of the will of the soul with the will of God,<sup>39</sup> in this life, is never free from

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<sup>37</sup> T. Merton, *Life and Holiness* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 12; G.Thils, *Christian Holiness*, 250; F.W. Faber, *Growth in Holiness* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1960), 1; R. Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 3; A.G. Sertlanges, *Spirituality*, 99.

<sup>38</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 164.

<sup>39</sup> H.W. Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, 340. She defines union of wills in this manner: “But do not let us make a mistake here. I say we must ‘give up’ our wills, but I do not mean we are to be left will-less. We are not so to give up our wills to be left like limp nerveless creatures, without any will at all. We are simply to substitute for our foolish, misdirected wills of ignorance and immaturity the higher, divine, mature will of God. If we lay the emphasis on the word ‘our,’ we shall understand it better. The will we are to give up is our will, as it is misdirected, and so parted off from God’s will, not our will when it is one with God’s will; for when our will is in harmony with His will, when it has the stamp of oneness with Him, it would be wrong for us to give it up,” (*The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, 126). She goes on to describe this union of wills in this manner: “For far more glorious than it would be to have Christ a dweller in the house or in the heart is it to be brought into such a real and actual union with Him as to be one with Him—one will, one purpose, one interest, one life,” (340).

temptation nor free from sorrow for their sins.<sup>40</sup> The freedom from temptation and from sorrow for sins, according to Teresa, occurs only in the next life that is in heaven.<sup>41</sup> Teresa goes on to say that the more a soul receives from God, the greater the soul's sorrow and distress for its sins.<sup>42</sup> Teresa states very plainly and clearly that no soul, especially the ones who have experienced the “spiritual marriage”, will ever forget “the miserable state it was once in.”<sup>43</sup>

The “spiritual marriage” is not an experience of absolute perfection, in this life. Teresa states that as long as the soul lives in a mortal body, the soul will always have failures.<sup>44</sup> This is clearly stating that the experience of the “spiritual marriage” is not talking about absolute perfection or to use the phrase, “sinless perfection.”<sup>45</sup> The union of the will of the soul with the will of God is indeed a blessed experience; however, because the soul is more than “will,” with other aspects, dimensions and depths, and these other aspects, dimensions and depths have not been completely transformed, the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, will have times of failures, temptations and falling.<sup>46</sup>

The desire of the soul in the “spiritual marriage” is to please the Lord in all things. This desire is also expressed in the soul's agony and distress over its sins, failures and lack of conformity to the image of Christ. The soul's desire to please the Lord is so great

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<sup>40</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 170. Also, T.A. Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (trans. Leo Sherley-Price; New York: Penguin Books, 1952), 86; Mother Teresa, *Jesus: the Word to be Spoken*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 170.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* See also T. Merton, *Life and Holiness*, 12; G.Thils, *Christian Holiness*, 250; F.W. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, 1; R. Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 3; A.G. Sertlanges, *Spirituality*, 99.

<sup>45</sup> See previous footnote.

<sup>46</sup> H.W. Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, 115-118; 125; 340.

that to displease the Lord, or to think that one has displeased the Lord, or even to come short of complete conformity to Christ is more painful than the torments of hell.<sup>47</sup>

When Teresa states that to displease the Lord is more painful than the torments of hell, it can be seen that the soul's desire to please the Lord is so great, that the thought of displeasing the Lord is a greater torment than hell itself. This desire, to please the Lord, as experienced in the “spiritual marriage”, with the knowledge that the soul is not absolutely perfect, is a painful experience for the soul. Teresa, in this quote, calls herself “wicked”. This quote is from a person who had experienced the “spiritual marriage”. Her view of herself was of a sinner, saved by grace, but of a sinner, who fell far short of God's glory. She called herself “wicked,” one who deserves eternal hell. This personal view of her was not just the view that Teresa held concerning herself in the beginning stages of the journey towards the “spiritual marriage”, that is in the beginning stages of her spiritual life. This view was Teresa's personal view of herself as one who had experienced the “spiritual marriage”. In other words, Teresa's view of herself, after she had experienced the “spiritual marriage” was that she was “wicked.” It must be remembered that the experience, called the “spiritual marriage”, was the experience the Mystics considered the highest spiritual experience a person could experience in this life.

Teresa states that in the “spiritual marriage”, the will is united with the will of God. Although the will of the soul is united with the will of God, the soul still stumbles and falls. The will, being united to the will of God, can be said to be perfect, yet it is not

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<sup>47</sup> St. Teresa of Avila writes these words: “I can tell you truly, that wicked as I am, I have never feared the torments of hell, for they seem nothing by comparison with the thought of the wrath which the damned will see in the Lord's eyes—those eyes so lovely and tender and benign. I do not think my heart could bear to see that; How much more will anyone fear this to whom He has revealed Himself,” (*Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 187).

absolutely perfect, that is in the state of sinless perfection or glorification. The will that is perfect is affected by other factors in the human being. These other factors, Teresa calls the faculties, which, according to Teresa, are separate from the soul.<sup>48</sup>

The will can be perfect, or one with the will of God, yet, at times is buffeted by other factors of the soul, the soul's other aspects, dimensions and depths; those areas yet transformed to the image of Christ. These other factors, although not originating in the will, have a power to influence the choices of the person.<sup>49</sup>

The soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage” is not free from the risk of backsliding. This is also to say that the soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage” is not free from temptations, stumbling and sin. If the soul, even after experiencing the “spiritual marriage” is not free from the risk of backsliding, then that must mean that the soul is still troubled by temptations and sins. If the soul can backslide, then it must also be able to sin.

The reason that the soul is not free from backsliding, temptations and sins is the other factors of the soul, the different dimensions, aspects and depths of the soul that influence the human being through the faculties. These other factors are a power and have power in the life of the human.

The “spiritual marriage” is an experience where the soul does have peace, although all around the soul that is in the “rest” of the body, there are trials, temptations, struggles and failures. Teresa says “it must not be thought that the faculties and senses and passions are always in a state of peace, though the soul itself is...it is difficult to

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

understand how the soul can have trials and afflictions and yet be in peace.”<sup>50</sup>

According to the teaching of Teresa, the soul's afflictions and pains arise from its intense desire to please God, while knowing at the same time, that it falls short of its own desires. This must be part of the truth, for Teresa states that the torments of hell are nothing compared to the thought of displeasing the Lord. There is also the truth that the will of the soul, being united to the will of God, is also affected and influenced by the other factors in the life of the human person.<sup>51</sup>

Teresa teaches concerning the “spiritual marriage” that the experience of the “spiritual marriage” is not an experience of sinless perfection or of glorification.<sup>52</sup> The “spiritual marriage” is an experience where the will of the soul is united to the will of God so that the will of the soul begins to “will” what God wills. When the soul wills what God wills, the soul also sees itself more and more clearly. It is in the seeing of itself as broken, sinful and far from coming close to accomplishing its own desires that is to be pleasing to God, that the soul experiences the greatest agony. This agony is the failure to fulfill its own desires, which is to be completely what God wants it to be.

The soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, also sees itself as a broken, sinful entity; this is seen when Teresa called herself “wicked.” This does not mean that Teresa was living a life of willful sin, for the essence of the “spiritual marriage” is a will that has started to will what God wills. However, because the human

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 226: “Do not, of course, for one moment imagine that, because these souls (in the Spiritual Marriage) have such vehement desires and are so determined not to commit a single imperfection for anything in the world, that they do not in fact commit many imperfections and even sins. Not intentionally, it is true, for the Lord will give such persons very special aid as to this. I am referring to venial sins, for from mortal sins, as far as they know, they are free, although they are not completely proof against them; and the thought that they may commit some without knowing it will cause them no small agony.”

<sup>52</sup> See above, this chapter.

being is a complex and inter-related being,<sup>53</sup> the different unconscious aspects of the human being also influence the choices of the will.

The “spiritual marriage” is not concerned with visions and other extraordinary experiences. Teresa affirms that the greatest gift from God, which is experienced in the “spiritual marriage”, is a life that is an imitation of that life which was lived by the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>54</sup> Teresa goes on to say that the purpose of prayer and the “spiritual marriage” is a life that is pleasing to God.<sup>55</sup> If one experiences visions and the other extraordinary experiences, one is to leave these behind in the pursuit of the “spiritual marriage”, where the will of the soul is united to the will of God.

## **2.1 Comparison of Teresa of Avila and the Emphatic “I” of Rom 7**

Teresa of Avila says that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, desires to please God in all things.<sup>56</sup> However, this soul has also gained a clearer understanding of God's greatness and the misery of its own condition.<sup>57</sup> When the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, which means that the desire of this soul is to please God in all things, realizes that it rarely accomplishes its own heart's desire, that is to please God in all things, this realization causes the soul “torture.”<sup>58</sup> Teresa, one who is recognized by the church as one who experienced the “spiritual marriage”, when looking at herself in the light of God's holiness and greatness, called herself “worm.”<sup>59</sup> From this

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<sup>53</sup> See chapter 4 of this study for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>54</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle of Teresa of Avila*, 227.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

it can be seen that, according to Teresa of Avila, the Christian who has experienced the “spiritual marriage” has a view of him or herself that can be described in modern psychological terms as “poor”. When one truly sees themselves in the light of God's holiness and greatness, one cannot walk away from that encounter with a view of self that in modern psychological terms would be considered a “high” self-image. However, when one truly sees oneself in the light of God's holiness and greatness and one is able to “walk” away, the self-perception that one will take with them is truly realistic.

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 desires to do what is good and pleasing to God (Rom 7:15-25). While desiring to do what is good and pleasing to God, the emphatic “I” also realizes that it does not always act the way it desires. The emphatic “I” does desire to please God and at times accomplishes its desire. The emphatic “I” says that it does serve God in the will.

However, the emphatic “I” does not always act in a way that is consistent with its desire to please God. When the emphatic “I” acts in a way that is contrary to its own desire to please God, this acting, which is not in conformity to its own desire to please God causes the emphatic “I” to cry out in anguish and pain. This cry is “O Wretched Man.”

The cry of the emphatic “I” of “O Wretched man” is a similar cry as that of Teresa when she called herself a “worm.” Teresa says that even the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, will still be troubled by temptations and failings.<sup>60</sup> The reality of failing causes the soul in the “spiritual marriage” to “sorrow” over its sins.<sup>61</sup>

Teresa says that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, desires

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.



to please God in all things. This soul, while desiring to please God in all things, also realizes that it rarely truly accomplishes its own heart's desire. This realization causes the soul in the “spiritual marriage” to cry out in pain and anguish. The soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, also sees itself very clearly in the light of God's holiness and greatness. This vision also causes the soul in the “spiritual marriage” to cry out in pain and anguish.

Teresa's description of a soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage” can be seen as the same experience that John Wesley described as the Christian who is perfect in love,<sup>62</sup> yet acts involuntarily out of their infirmities.<sup>63</sup> This is also the same experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, who desires to do what is good, yet at times fails to perfectly and fully accomplish its desire of pleasing God in all things.

### **3. The Cloud of Unknowing**

Teresa of Avila is not the only mystic who wrote on the experience of union with God. The book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, was written to help those who have been called to the life of contemplation, which is a form of prayer, to arrive at union with God. *The*

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<sup>62</sup> T. Merton, *Life and Holiness*, 24; G. Thils, *Christian Holiness*, xi; A. Royo & J. Amann, *The Theology of Christian Perfection*, 124; Sister M.E. Mason, *Active Life and Contemplative Life* (Milwaukee: The Marquette University Press, 1961), 113; E.A. Stewart, *Jesus the Holy Fool* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999), 195. See V. Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 133 who writes that “union with God is brought about by love.”

<sup>63</sup> T. Merton, *Life and Holiness*, 12; G. Thils, *Christian Holiness*, 250; F.W. Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, 1; R. Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 3; A.G. Sertlanges, *Spirituality*, 99.

*Cloud of Unknowing*<sup>64</sup> calls the experience of oneness with God, “union”; while Teresa of Avila calls the same experience, the “spiritual marriage”. The names are different; however, the experience is similar.

*The Cloud of Unknowing* is a book that describes a way of contemplation, which, is a form of prayer. Contemplation leads to an experience, which is called union with God in a communion of love and desire.<sup>65</sup> This *union* with God is experienced through desire. *The Cloud of Unknowing* also states that the access to heaven is through desire.<sup>66</sup> This desire is a desire to please God, which is also the love of God in the will.<sup>67</sup>

Here, it can be seen the similarity between the teaching of Teresa of Avila and the “spiritual marriage” with the experience that *the Cloud of Unknowing* calls “union” with God. These experiences are similar, even though the terms used to describe them, are different.

This desire to please God, which is also termed love, is indeed, the very life of the spirit, according to *the Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>68</sup> This is to say that the true life is found in a true, passionate desire of the will to live for and to please God in all things. Again, the similarity between the teaching of Teresa of Avila's “spiritual marriage” and the “union” of God as taught by *the Cloud of Unknowing* can be seen.

*The Cloud of Unknowing* states the will is the spiritual heart.<sup>69</sup> This is to say that the will is the center of the human being. This desire, which is centered in the will, the

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<sup>64</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing* was written in the fourteenth century by an unknown monk of the Church. Because the author of *the Cloud of Unknowing* is unknown, when this study refers to the teaching of *the Cloud of Unknowing*, instead of the author's name being stated, this study will state, *the Cloud of Unknowing* states.

<sup>65</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 59.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

spiritual heart, is of extreme importance to the experience of union with God. The reason for this is because the true ardent and passionate desire is the person him or herself. The *Cloud of Unknowing* says it in this manner: It is not what you are, nor what you have been, that God sees with His all-merciful eyes, but what you desire to be.<sup>70</sup>

The meaning of this is that the will's desire, the will's passionate, ardent desire, its foundational desire, is what the person is. If a person, on the foundational, primal level of their being, that is of their spiritual heart, the will, desires something, this something is, according to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, their God. In knowing what one's foundational desire is, which reflects what the person's God is, also reflects and reveals what the person him or herself truly is. The desire of a person who is united to God through a communion of love and desire is the result of the work of God in the heart.<sup>71</sup>

When the desire of a person is foundational and is passionate for God, this desire reveals that the heart, i.e. the will, is pure.<sup>72</sup> A pure will, which is the spiritual heart of the person, is seen in a foundational, passionate desire to please God in all things. This teaching does not mean that the will will not be influenced by other factors. What is being said is that the will, the spiritual heart of the person, is pure when its foundational, passionate desire is to please God in Christ in all things. The will is influenced by other factors. These other factors are “outside” of the will itself. As to the will, it is pure, when it desires nothing but God.

The desire of the person united to God leads the person to a restless state. This is

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 110. Here again, can be seen the similarity between the teaching of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and Teresa of Avila in her teaching on the “Spiritual Marriage”. This teaching can also be seen to be similar to the Protestant teaching on salvation by grace and not by works. The similarity with John Wesley’s teaching on perfection is also evident.

<sup>72</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 110.

so because the soul that is truly seeking God will never rest contentedly with anything less than God.<sup>73</sup> When a person has experienced God, then that person will never be contented with anything other than God. The book, *The Cloud of Unknowing* describes a form of prayer, called contemplation. Contemplation aids people in their journey to experience God in the fullest that is possible in this life. The experience that *the Cloud of Unknowing* is describing is the experience of being bound to God through love and desire. During the time of contemplation, the mind is centered solely on its desire for God, to the exclusion of all else. During the time of contemplation, there will be times when unwanted thoughts will enter the mind. *The Cloud of Unknowing* writes that these unwanted thoughts are not sin, but the consequences of original sin that the soul is burdened with.<sup>74</sup>

Here it can be seen that *the Cloud of Unknowing* is not teaching a state of sinless perfection. Whether one agrees with the teaching of *the Cloud of Unknowing* that “unwanted thoughts entering the mind during contemplation are the consequence of original sin” or whether this point is disagreed with, the point to be made here is that *the Cloud of Unknowing*, while teaching a form of perfection, that is the union of the soul with God through desire and the will; *the Cloud of Unknowing* is also teaching that the soul is affected by factors “outside” of the will, these factors the *Cloud of Unknowing* calls the consequences of original sin.

*The Cloud of Unknowing* goes on to say that the soul, united to God, is forgiven and cleansed; it is still burdened with the consequences of original sin. This means that although the heart, which is the will, is “pure;” the soul still finds itself in a struggle

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

against the consequences of original sin. *The Cloud of Unknowing* also states that it is impossible to avoid all faults and failings in this life.<sup>75</sup> Here again it is seen that *the Cloud of Unknowing* is not teaching an experience of sinless perfection. *The Cloud of Unknowing* is teaching that the will can be pure, while at the same time, the soul (or person) is buffeted by temptations, struggles and failings.

The work of prayer (contemplation) leads a person to a clearer realization and understanding of self. *The Cloud of Unknowing* claims that the nearer a person comes to the truth, which is Jesus Christ, the more sensitive the soul is to error.<sup>76</sup> This error that the person comes to understand more and more, the closer the soul comes to God, is primarily the error, the sinfulness, the failings of its own self.<sup>77</sup>

The teaching is that, in growing closer to God, which is seen in the use of the word “humble,”<sup>78</sup> for only a person who is close to God is truly humble, the closer a person is to God, the more a person will see their own failings, which are the result of original sin. There are two types of sins being taught here. The first is willful sin, which the soul, united to God, does not normally commit. The other type of sin can be called unintentional sin, which is the consequence of original sin that is the brokenness of the human condition due to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. The human soul, even the soul united to God through a communion of love and desire is effected and troubled by

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>77</sup> “A man is humble when he stands in the truth with a knowledge and appreciation for himself as he really is. And actually, anyone who saw and experienced himself as he really and truly is would have no difficulty being humble, for two things would become very clear to him. In the first place, he would see clearly the degradation, misery and weakness of the human condition resulting from original sin. From these effects of original sin man will never be entirely free in this life, no matter how holy he becomes. In the second place, he would recognize the transcendent goodness of God as he is in himself and his overflowing, superabundant love for man” (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, 65).

<sup>78</sup> See the previous footnote for the definition of “humble” and its context.

unintentional sin; the sins which are the result of original sin, the brokenness of the human being due to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Here it can be seen that the *Cloud of Unknowing* is teaching that the will, the spiritual heart, can be pure, while the human still struggles with temptations, failings and sins.

*The Cloud of Unknowing* defines perfection as a good will.<sup>79</sup> By this it can be seen that perfection, according to *the Cloud of Unknowing*, is volitional, that is rooted in the will. If the will is pure, if the intention is pure, then there is perfection. Perfection can and does exist, surrounded by struggles, failings, temptations and a realistic view of oneself, that is as a degraded human being, due to original sin. By this understanding, it can be seen that *perfection*, according to *the Cloud of Unknowing*, is not absolute perfection that is sinless perfection. Here, again, can be seen the similarity of *the Cloud of Unknowing*, with Teresa of Avila and with John Wesley's doctrine of *perfection*.

The will is pure, that is perfect, however, there are other faculties of the human being that are not perfect. *The Cloud of Unknowing* asserts that the soul united to God in a communion of love and desire is perfect. However, according to the teaching of *the Cloud of Unknowing*, that soul, that is the one united to God in a communion of love and desire, is still burdened with liabilities on account of original sin.<sup>80</sup>

*The Cloud of Unknowing* has a view of creation that says that the faculties of the human race were all ordered before sin entered the world. However, after the Fall in the Garden of Eden, all of the human being was distorted and broken. This, in a simplistic way, means that the human faculties work, but not the way they were created by God to work.

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<sup>79</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 111.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

The primary work of God, according to *the Cloud of Unknowing*, in this world, is to restore the will to its original purity. In the next life, which is in heaven, God will transform all of the rest of the faculties. However, in this world, God is primarily transforming the will of the believer to its original purity. This is not to say that in this primary work of God; God is not doing a work in the other faculties as well. God is indeed working in the other faculties of the human being in this life. Because the human being is a complex, yet, inter-related being, that is to say, that the human being cannot divide itself into different, unrelated sections; when one aspect of the human being is restored and transformed by God, this affects the total person.

The fact that all of the faculties of the person, in this life, are not purified completely means that the believer may misunderstand something and act from that misunderstanding. This acting from misunderstanding may lead to problems and the hurting of self or others. However, according to the teaching of *the Cloud of Unknowing*, if the will is pure, that is, if the spiritual heart of the person is set on loving and desiring God, then the person can be called perfect.

Perfection in this life, according to *the Cloud of Unknowing*, is not sinless or pain free. There is a sorrow that accompanies perfection. In the experience of the uniting of the will with God in a communion of love and desire, a union that goes beyond what one has done, there is a sorrow for one's sins. This sorrow is the sorrow that a believer, one united to God in a communion of love and desire, which is a perfect believer, has.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing* states: "The sorrow I speak of is genuine and perfect; and blessed is the man who experiences it. Every man has plenty of cause for sorrow, but he alone understands the deep universal reason for sorrow who experiences that he is. Every other motive pales beside this one. He alone feels authentic sorrow who realizes not only what he is, but that he is" (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, 103).

The sorrow that *the Cloud of Unknowing* is speaking about is the sorrow that goes beyond the sorrow for one's actions, but is the sorrow that one - united to God in a communion of love and desire - feels for oneself. This is to say that there is a sorrow that believers feel for their actions, their sins and failings. However, according to *the Cloud of Unknowing*, there is a deeper sorrow that only the spiritually mature experience. This sorrow is a sorrow that the spiritually mature believer experiences when they come to terms with the fact that not only are their actions sinful, but, in the very essence of who they are, they too are sinful.

This sorrow is not just a sorrow for one's actions, words, non-actions and lack of words. This sorrow is a sorrow that one is, that is, that one exists. The reason for this sorrow is the deep pain over one's sinful being and not just over one's sinful actions. The pain the spiritually mature believer feels over one's "being" is a far deeper and greater pain than the pain over one's sinful actions.

*The Cloud of Unknowing* teaches that the spiritually mature experiences sorrow<sup>82</sup> because the spiritually mature Christian believer has come to the point where he/she sees him/herself as a wretched lump called sin.<sup>83</sup> This wretched lump of sin is "part and parcel of the person's very being."<sup>84</sup>

The spiritually mature believer experiences a sorrow that is extremely deep and painful. At this, the believer is led to despair over their sinful condition.<sup>85</sup> Here it can be

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<sup>82</sup> See previous paragraph for the understanding of the sorrow which is being referred to.

<sup>83</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 102.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing* writes: "For as often as he would have a true knowing and feeling of God in purity of spirit (insofar as that is possible in this life), and then feels that he cannot for he constantly finds his knowing and feeling as it were occupied and filled with a foul, stinking lump of himself, which must always be hated and despised and forsaken, if he shall be God's perfect disciple, taught by Him



plainly seen that the spiritually mature believer, God's perfect disciple, taught on the mounts of perfection, is also the same person who despairs over the fact that, he or she is a sinful creature. This despair comes out of the knowledge that one is a sinner, far from God's perfection, yet, united to God in a communion of love and desire. Here, we see *the Cloud of Unknowing's* teaching that when a believer is united to God in a communion of love and desire, that is perfection, according to *the Cloud of Unknowing's* own definition, yet, this very same “perfect believer” is at the same time, at times driven to deep despair over the fact that he/she has committed and are committing sinful deeds and words, and more importantly, is experiencing a sorrow that he/she is a sinful creature.

The desire to be holy and perfect, while surrounded by brokenness, that is, by a self that is far from perfect and at times almost swallowed up by despair over one's being, one's sinful creaturely being, is called by *the Cloud of Unknowing*, “self knowledge”. In self-knowledge the person sees him or herself, as he or she truly is, “a miserable and defiled creature less than nothing without God.”<sup>86</sup> Here again is seen the teaching that the spiritually mature person has a passionate desire to please God, yet at the same time can be said to despise oneself because of their sinfulness and the remaining imperfections.

### **3.1 Comparison of the Cloud of Unknowing and the Empathic “I” of Rom 7**

The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* describes perfection as a “good will”.<sup>87</sup> A good will is a will that desires to please God in all things. However, the Christian with a

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alone on the mounts of perfection—he almost despairs for the sorrow that he feels, weeping, lamenting, writhing, cursing and blaming himself’ (*The Cloud of Unknowing*, 104).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

“good” will is not a Christian who has reached sinless perfection in this life.<sup>88</sup>

Even the holiest person, in this life, is not free from the effects of sin. This means that the holiest person will still struggle and at times fail to accomplish what it desires, and this is to please God in all things. This failure to accomplish its own desire of pleasing God causes the holiest of souls a deep sorrow. However, the deepest sorrow of a person who has arrived at the “spiritual marriage” is the sorrow that they are. This sorrow is an existential sorrow that comes from the understanding that one falls so far short of God’s glory. It is this sorrow that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 experiences when he/she cries out “O Wretched Person.”

The soul which realizes that it not only commits acts of sin, but that, in the very core of its being, it is sinful, is the soul which experiences deep authentic sorrow. The soul which is simply repentant for what it does has not yet experienced the union of God that the *Cloud of Unknowing* is attempting to describe. The soul that is simply repentant for what it does has not experienced this deep sorrow. This sorrow, which the *Cloud of Unknowing* is attempting to describe, is of a kind that causes the soul to moan and cry out in anguish over its own existence. When a soul has experienced the union of God, according to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, this soul will repent over its very existence and being. Wherever this soul goes, it is still near the “pit” of its own being. This soul can run as far and as fast and as long as it is possible to run, yet, when it stops it will realize that it

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<sup>88</sup> Here the words are appropriate: “A man is humble when he stands in the truth with a knowledge and appreciation for himself as he really is. And actually, anyone who saw and experienced himself as he really and truly is would have no difficulty being humble, for two things would become very clear to him. In the first place, he would see the degradation, misery and weakness of the human condition resulting from original sin. From these effects of original sin man will never be entirely free in this life, no matter how holy he becomes. In the second place, he would recognize the transcendent goodness of God as He is in Himself,” (*Ibid*, 65).

can not run away from itself.<sup>89</sup> This realization, that the soul is sinful in its very core, causes the soul, which has experienced union with God, deep sorrow. According to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, when the soul sees its true condition, it will have seen itself “as it really is a miserable and defiled creature less than nothing without God.”<sup>90</sup> This is what causes the soul to sorrow not only over what it does, but that it is.

The *Cloud of Unknowing* also teaches that the soul, which has experienced union with God, will, as long as it is in this life, struggle with temptation. The *Cloud of Unknowing* states that, “the remnants of original sin will plague you to the grave despite all your efforts.”<sup>91</sup> Here, it can be seen that the *Cloud of Unknowing* is not teaching sinless perfection, when it describes “union” with God. The soul, which has experienced union with God still struggles and is plagued by temptations. The teaching of the *Cloud of Unknowing* concerning union with God also states that the closer a “man comes to the truth the more sensitive he must become to error.”<sup>92</sup> This means that the closer a person comes to God; the clearer the person will see itself. When a soul is growing closer to God, this soul will also become more and more aware of the areas in its own life that are far from God. The error that the *Cloud of Unknowing* refers to is not only the error “in” the world, but more importantly the error that is in the person, which is growing closer, and closer to God. As Teresa called herself a “worm”, The *Cloud of Unknowing* also shares the same view of self. It is to be remembered that this view comes from one who

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<sup>89</sup> See Chapter 2 where the “broken-ness” of the human being as a result of sin (Rom 5) is discussed and Chapter 4 where a wider look at the Pauline Corpus was done regarding Paul’s position that the mature, Christian believer, in this life, is righteous but in experience must become what they are in Christ, i.e. righteous.

<sup>90</sup> Anonymous, *Cloud of Unknowing*, 89.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

has experienced union with God. The *Cloud of Unknowing* says this about the self: “This foul, wretched lump called sin is none other than yourself.”<sup>93</sup> By this quote, it can be seen that The *Cloud of Unknowing* and Teresa of Avila, both mystics, share the same view of themselves. This view is that they are a “worm” and “foul.” Again, it is to be stated that this view is of a mature Christian, one who has experienced union with God and in Teresa's terms, the “spiritual marriage”.

The *Cloud of Unknowing* describes perfection as a “good will”.<sup>94</sup> By a good will, the *Cloud of Unknowing* means “a will that is harmoniously attuned to God's will in an abiding contentedness and enthusiasm for all He does.”<sup>95</sup> The *Cloud of Unknowing* describes desire as “the access to heaven.”<sup>96</sup> Desire, is also, according to The *Cloud of Unknowing*, “what God sees with His all merciful eyes. It is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with His all merciful eyes, but what you desire to be.”<sup>97</sup>

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 desires to please God, yet at times fails to accomplish its own desire of pleasing God (Rom 7:15-20). This failure to please God causes the emphatic “I” sorrow and pain (Rom 7:24). However, it must be said, that the sorrow and pain that the emphatic “I” experiences is not only for what it does, that is, for its failure to please God (Rom 7:15); the sorrow and pain of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is also because of what it is. Rom 7:24 states that the emphatic “I” not only is in pain for what it does (Rom 7:15-19), but also for the fact of its own existence and condition. The cry of “Wretched Man” is not simply a cry of pain and anguish over one's acts, deeds, misdeeds,

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

and failures. The cry of “Wretched Man” is also a cry over one's true and sinful condition. For a person to cry out that it is “wretched” means that the person has seen itself in the light of God's holiness and greatness. The reason for this is: the only place a soul will see its own wretchedness is in the light of God's holiness and greatness. Thus, when the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 cries out that it is “wretched”, this means that the emphatic “I” has seen itself in the light of God's holiness and greatness. The cry of the emphatic “I” can be seen as the cry over its own “wretched” condition.

The experience described by the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 over their sinful condition are similar experiences. Both the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the emphatic “I”, not only are in sorrow over their failure to please God, but are also in deep agony over the fact that they are truly wretched sinners and not just people who commit acts of sin. The agony over one's being, or condition, is a deep agony of the soul. By this is meant that the pain, or agony, of the soul is of such a nature that the soul, at times is in deep despair.<sup>98</sup>

The Christian who has experienced union with God will see him or herself as a “foul, stinky lump,” which must be hated, despised and forsaken. This is a similar experience by Paul in the cry of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, when the emphatic “I” cries out, “O wretched man”. Both cries are cries of despair over self. Both cries are cries of a spiritually mature Christian who is growing closer and closer to God and at the same time sees themselves as sinners, wretched and to be despised.

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<sup>98</sup> “For as often as he would have a true knowing and feeling of God in purity of Spirit (insofar as that is possible in this life); and then feels that he cannot for he constantly finds his knowing and feeling as it were occupied and filled with a foul, stinky lump of himself, which must always be hated and despised and forsaken, if he shall be God's perfect disciple, taught by Him alone on the mounts of perfection—he almost despairs for the sorrow that he feels, weeping, lamenting, writhing, cursing and blaming himself,” *Ibid.*, 104.

#### 4. Julian of Norwich

Another Mystic who writes about union with God is Julian of Norwich who writes and claims that visions and other mystical experiences are no guarantee of greater spirituality. What is important, according to Julian, is a life lived in union with God. This life is a life of love, which is demonstrated by obedience.<sup>99</sup> What is important to note is that Julian writes this, after having, what she calls “*revelations that come from God*”. This means that although she had experienced revelations<sup>100</sup> she writes to others and teaches that these revelations are not the most important aspect of the spiritual life.

The most fundamental and important aspect of the spiritual life is the desire for God. The soul longs for God. According to Julian, nothing less than God Himself can satisfy us.<sup>101</sup> The soul, which has been touched by the Holy Spirit, longs for the fullness that can only come from union with God Himself. It is for this reason that visions and other mystical experiences are not fundamental to the spiritual life. Julian, along with the majority of mystics, says that a person may experience visions and other mystical experiences without experiencing the fullness that comes from union with God. Mystical experiences, in and of themselves are no guarantee that the one who has experienced these mystical experiences is more spiritual or even good. Julian writes and claims that, “the revelation itself does not make me good.”<sup>102</sup>

Julian of Norwich believes and writes that the “human being will not seek or respond to God, unless God first reaches out and reveals Himself to the human being.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xx.

<sup>100</sup> There is no attempt to credit or discredit Julian's claims.

<sup>101</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

In this statement can be seen the teaching that we love God, because He first loved us. In Julian's teaching can be seen the priority of God's grace and the response of the human being. God first reaches out in grace to the human being. The response of the human being is based on God first reaching out to the human being in grace. When God does reach out to a human being in grace, grace then urges that human being to respond to God by seeking God with a fervent longing.<sup>104</sup>

It can be understood from the above that the response of the human being to the grace of God as defined by Julian, is a fervent longing for God. Whereas other commentators would write and define the human response as faith, Julian is of the opinion the human response to God's grace is a fervent longing and seeking for God Himself. There is no intention to state that Julian of Norwich did not believe that the human response to God's grace is faith. The intention here is to state that a fervent longing for and seeking for God Himself characterize the faith of the human being, who has been touched by the grace of God, according to Julian. In other words, for Julian, faith is experienced and expressed in a fervent longing for God. Julian did believe that the person must believe the truth of the Gospel. She writes that the beginning of the spiritual life is when a person starts to "hate sin and to amend their ways, according to the laws of Holy Church."<sup>105</sup> Here can be seen, that Julian of Norwich believed that faith was the revelation given by God to the human race through the Church. Faith, however, was expressed and experienced in the human soul as a fervent longing for God and a desire to obey God. Faith was not, for Julian, only or even primarily an adherence to the correct dogma. Faith was, indeed, holding to the correct doctrine. However, faith was also an

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

experienced event, a living relationship of desire for God.

For Julian of Norwich, the seeking for God, in this life was the highest experience that a person can have. She puts forth the proposition that, “As long as God allows us to struggle on this earth, seeking God is as good as seeing.”<sup>106</sup> The seeking for God, according to Julian, is the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer.<sup>107</sup> The Holy Spirit works in the soul of the believer to cause that believer to desire God. The desire for God is the work of the Holy Spirit. It can be drawn out from these statements, that to desire God is to have God. In other words, the desire for God, being the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul, is also the proof or evidence that the seeking believer has God living in their soul that is to have God in their life. It can be further stated that only the one who truly is seeking for and longs for God, is a true believer.

Julian's anthropology begins with the fact that all human beings are sinful.<sup>108</sup> She writes and states that, “we must see clearly that in ourselves we are entirely sinful and wretched.”<sup>109</sup> She claims further that, “every man is sinful and will always be to the end of his days.”<sup>110</sup> Her view of the sinfulness of the human being does not undergo a radical change, even for the believer who has experienced union with God. She writes that the closer a believer comes to God, that person must and will continue to see themselves as sinful.<sup>111</sup> By this is meant that Julian of Norwich is not teaching an experience of sinless perfection. The closer a believer comes to God that is the more spiritually mature a

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Some hold the opinion that Julian “departed from traditional Augustinian understandings of sin,” J. Wiseman, review of D. Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich: Showings From Vision to Book*, CHR 3 (1995): 439.

<sup>109</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 159.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



person is, the clearer that person's understanding of their own sinfulness will be. According to Julian, even the spiritually mature commit sin unintentionally.<sup>112</sup>

Julian of Norwich states that there are two basic categories of sin<sup>113</sup>. These categories of sin are: intentional sin and unintentional sin. She writes: “Do not be too upset with the sin you commit without meaning to.” This must mean that, according to Julian, the believer will face struggles with sin all their time in this world. It also means that the believer will sin, although not intending to sin. The believer, even the spiritually mature believer, will sin “against one’s own will,” that is “without meaning to.”

Julian also states that the believer will sin “habitually”. This does not mean that the believer will live a wanton life of sin or will live in habitual sin. She states that the spiritual life begins when a person has begun to “amend their ways according to the Holy Law of the Church.”<sup>114</sup> The Holy Law of the Church certainly states and maintains that a person who lives a wanton life of sin will not be tolerated or allowed within the Church. When a person has begun to amend their ways according to the Holy Law of the Church, this means that the person has accepted the Church's view of sin while at the same time this person desire to live apart from sin. This being said, when Julian writes that the believer will sin “habitually” she must mean that the believer will never, in this life, arrive at an experience of sinless perfection. Julian holds this position for the beginner in

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<sup>112</sup> Julian of Norwich writes concerning sin which is committed unintentionally. This idea is very similar to Wesley’s idea of sin as a willful transgression. Julian’s words are: “Do not be too upset by the sin you commit without meaning to, and here I understand why the Lord looked at the servant with pity instead of blame. In this fleeting life we are not expected to live entirely without blame and sin. He loves us eternally though we sin habitually, and very gently he reveals himself to us. Then we quietly sorrow and grieve, turning to gaze at this mercy, accepting that we do nothing but sin. When we fall and when we rise again, we are very precious to him and are protected by the same love. In God's view we do not fall, and in our view we do not stand” (*Ibid.*, 164).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

the spiritual life and for the mature believer. This is seen in the above quote where Julian writes “in this fleeting life we are not expected to live entirely without blame and sin” and “accepting that we do nothing but sin.”<sup>115</sup>

The closer a believer comes to God, the more mature a believer is, will be seen in their view of themselves. Julian writes: When our blindness or weakness makes us fall, then our kind Lord gently touches us and calls us. He wants us to look how wretched we are and humbly face up to it.<sup>116</sup>

The continuing realization that one is a sinner, wretched before God, is the teaching of Julian. This does not mean that she was a defeated Christian. She writes that God does not want the believer to be “preoccupied with self-accusations and wallowing in self-pity”<sup>117</sup> but wants the believer to turn to Him and draw ever closer to Him. There is a difference between wallowing in self-pity because of one's sin and in having a realistic view of who one is, that is, before God, a wretched sinner. It must not be thought that Julian was teaching morbid self-reflection. Julian was teaching that mature believers will have a true and realistic view of themselves. This true, realistic view will be that the believer, no matter how mature, is still a sinner. In today's terminology, Julian teaches that a mature believer will have a “positive self-image.” This is certainly not saying that Julian teaches that everyone is “okay”. What is to be understood from the teaching of Julian of Norwich is that a positive self-image is a true image of oneself. This must mean a view that one is indeed, before God, a sinner.

According to Julian of Norwich, union with God is experienced in the will. She

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

writes: “What is important is this holy act of saying ‘yes’--this inner decision that we are for Him, in heart and soul and with all our strength.”<sup>118</sup> Here it can be seen that the “decision” to live for God, is both a holy act and an act which is fundamental. The decision to live for God is made and maintained in the will of the human being. Thus, union with God is experienced in the will.<sup>119</sup> The will is set on God, on living for God, on following the footsteps of Jesus, this is union, and this is perfection, according to Julian. Although the will is set on following Christ, the believer will still struggle with temptations, failings and sin. This is another way of stating that Julian held to two fundamental categories of sin; intentional and unintentional.

The believer who experiences union with God, experiences the highest blessing that God gives in this life. Union with God is seen in the will of the human being united with God's will and is seen in the believer's fervent desire to be closer and closer to God. This fervent desire to be closer and closer to God, which is the experience of the mature believer, is accompanied by a “hate and a despising of the sin which remains in the life of the believer.”<sup>120</sup>

It can be seen that Julian teaches that mature believers, at times hates and despises themselves. They hate the remaining sin in their lives. They hate the fact that they are more than ones who “commit” sin, but that they are sinners. This realization that one is a sinner in the most essential part of their being, Julian calls “darkness”. It is a “darkness”

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>119</sup> See the discussion above concerning union of the human will with the will of God.

<sup>120</sup> Julian of Norwich states this concerning the ongoing struggle of the spiritually mature. She writes: “At times we hate and despise our evil inclinations and everything that could make us sin, physically and spiritually. Christ is our protector and we shall never just submit to the darkness, but anguish under it and hang on, in pain and sorrow, praying through to the time when God again reveals Himself to us. We stand in this tangle all the days of our life” (*Ibid.*, 107).

under which the mature believer will “anguish in pain and in sorrow.” This “darkness” is a pain greater than hell itself.<sup>121</sup>

This pain, which is greater than the pains of hell itself, is because of the remaining sin in the life of the believer. The believer desires to be pleasing to God in all things, yet sees that there are areas in its own life which are far from being what the believer desires to be. The not being what one desires to be is a great sadness and pain, to the mature believer.

The anguish that Julian is writing about is the anguish of a mature believer. The beginner in the spiritual life, the immature believer, knows that he/she commits sin, yet has not arrived at the point where he/she despise him/herself because he/she is a sinner.<sup>122</sup>

The soul that is living in harmony with nature and grace can only be a mature believer. Immature believer's lives are not lived in harmony with either nature or grace. To the mature believer, sin is “incomparably vile and painful than hell itself.” This is to say that the mature believer would rather, if given a choice, “go to hell” than displease their Lord. Even the mere thought of displeasing the Lord is painful to the mature believer. The mature believer, in this life “never ceases from moaning, crying and longing till the face of the Lord is clearly seen.”<sup>123</sup>

#### **4.1 Comparison of Julian of Norwich and the Emphatic “I” of Rom 7**

Julian of Norwich writes that those who experience union with God also see that sin is vile and horrible. She also says that the closer a Christian comes to God; the more he/she

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

will see him/herself as wretched.<sup>124</sup>

Julian writes that to the believer who has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, sin is more painful than hell itself. The mystics taught that the closer one came to God, the clearer they saw their own sinfulness. A believer who was growing closer to God, saw themselves not only as a sinner in the sense of one who commits acts of sin, but also in the light and truth that they are “a lump of sin.” This revelation was a painful experience for the believer. The believer who had experienced the “spiritual marriage” desired to be pleasing to God in all things. This desire, that is to be pleasing to God in all things, was the fundamental desire of the believer who had experienced the “spiritual marriage”. When a Christian believer, who desires to be pleasing to God in all things, sees him/her self as a “lump of sin”, this revelation is extremely painful.

Julian of Norwich expresses the same view of a Christian who has experienced union with God as does Teresa of Avila and as does the *Cloud of Unknowing*. These three mystics state that the closer a person comes to God, the clearer that person sees him or herself. The self-perception of a person who has experienced union with God or the “spiritual marriage” is one where the person sees themselves as “wretched,” “a lump of sin” and “a worm.”

The experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 when compared with the mystical experience called the “spiritual marriage” leads to the conclusion that the emphatic “I” is

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<sup>124</sup> Her words are: “When we by God's grace and with His help, live in harmony with nature and grace, we shall see the truth that sin is incomparably more vile and painful than hell itself. It is a horrible sight for the soul who wishes to be lovely and shining.” *Ibid.*, 130. Also F. Huntley has written: “Not that we require an absolute perfection (which, as it is incident to none, so if it were would exclude all need and use of meditation), but rather an honest sincerity of the heart, not willingly sinning, willingly repenting when we have sinned,” *Bishop Joseph Hall and Protestant Meditation in Seventeenth-Century England* (F. Huntley; Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1981), 76.

a mature Christian. The reason for stating this is that the believer, who has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, is painfully aware of their own broken-ness and sin.<sup>125</sup>

## 5. Concluding Statement

The experience described by Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila and the *Cloud of Unknowing*, called in various places the “spiritual marriage” and *Union with God*, is the highest experience, according to the Mystics, that a human believer can have in this life. When this experience is compared with Wesley’s doctrine of *perfection*, it is seen to be a similar experience. When Wesley’s doctrine of *perfection* and the Mystical experience called the “spiritual marriage” are compared with the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, it is seen that the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is also a similar experience that is called the “spiritual marriage” and Wesley’s doctrine of *perfection*. Because these experiences are similar, then the identity of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is to be known and his/her spiritual portrait “painted”. The conclusion to be drawn is that the emphatic “I” is regenerate.

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<sup>125</sup> See above, in this chapter for a fuller explanation.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The identity of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 and his/her spiritual portrait is an important element in the sanctification of the Christian Church.<sup>1</sup> To discover the identity of the emphatic “I,” Rom 1-8 has been researched with a focusing on Rom 7.<sup>2</sup> During the study of Rom 7, the predominate verb tenses used in Rom 7 have been examined. The purpose of this has been to try and discover if Paul, by using the aorist in Rom 7:7-13 and the present tense in Rom 7:14-25, was trying to make a statement about a major change which occurred in his own life.<sup>3</sup> The context and statements of the emphatic “I” in Rom 7 have also been examined. In addition, Rom 7, within its context of Rom 5-8 has been looked at. The next stage in the discovery of the identity of the emphatic “I” has been to look at Paul’s statements elsewhere in the Pauline Corpus.<sup>4</sup> The reason for this is to compare Paul’s statements in Rom, especially Rom 7 with what he has written elsewhere. The underlying purpose has been to try and discover a Pauline “thought” running through his writings. If what Paul wrote in Rom 7 concerning the emphatic “I” is consistent with what he wrote elsewhere concerning Christian believers, then, it is to be concluded that Paul, in Rom 7 was writing about a Christian believer.

After examining Rom 1-8, the experience of the emphatic “I” was also looked at. This was done primarily through the studying of the “statements” of the emphatic “I” as found in Rom 7. This was done to try and discover the “experience” of the emphatic “I.” This experience was then compared with the experience which John Wesley called

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1 of this study for the reasons and support of this statement.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2 and 3 of this study.

<sup>3</sup> Again see Chapter 3 of this study for the detailed discussion of the verb tenses used in Rom 7.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 4 of this study.

“perfection” and the experience the Mystics called the “spiritual marriage” or union with God. The purpose of comparing the experience of the emphatic “I” with Wesley’s “perfection” and the Mystics’ “spiritual marriage” was to discern whether these experiences are similar.<sup>5</sup> The reason for this was: Wesley’s “perfection” and the Mystics’ “spiritual marriage” are considered to be the highest experiences a Christian believer can experience in this life.<sup>6</sup> The comparing of the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 was then done with the experience of “perfection” and the Mystical experience called *the* “spiritual marriage”. The purpose of this comparison was to see if there were similarities between the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 and Wesley’s “perfection” and the “spiritual marriage” of the Mystics. If there were similarities found between these experiences, this would also lead to the conclusion that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 was a mature, Christian believer.

The following is a summation of the characteristics of the emphatic “I,” followed by a summation of Wesley’s “perfection” compared with the emphatic “I,” which is then followed by summations of the three Mystical writers: Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which is then compared to the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7. Lastly, there is a concluding statement where the various strands of this study are brought together.

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<sup>5</sup> The dependence of J. Wesley and the Mystics on Paul, for this study, was limited to the comparison of the *experiences* of Wesley, the Mystics and Paul. It was discovered that J. Wesley and the Mystics did write on a common experience with Paul, thus, demonstrating Wesley’s and the Mystics’ dependence upon Paul.

<sup>6</sup> For the explanation of this statement, see Chapter 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 of this study.



## 1. Characteristics of the Emphatic “I”

The emphatic “I” does not desire to sin, as can be seen from Rom 7:15 where it states “what I am doing, I do not desire to do.” This leads to the statement that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is in agreement with the law of God (Rom 7:16). The reason for this statement is that the emphatic “I” states that s/he<sup>7</sup> is doing what s/he hates (Rom 7:15). The emphatic “I” also states that s/he is in agreement with the Law, that is, that s/he desires to obey it (Rom 7:16, 22). The emphatic “I” says that it desires to do the good (Rom 7:19). The emphatic “I” also agrees with the law of God. The conclusion based on the statements of the emphatic “I” is that the emphatic “I” desires to obey the law of God.

It can be seen from the above statements, that the “will” of the emphatic “I” is set on obeying the law of God, that is, set on doing the good. The desire of the will of the emphatic “I” is to do the good. This is very important. The word for “desire” is θέλω, which means: “the active resolution, the will urging on to action.”<sup>8</sup> This means that the “will” of the emphatic “I” is truly set on doing the good. Doing the good is not simply a passing thought to the emphatic “I.” The emphatic “I” has set his will, which also includes his acting in conformity with his will, on doing the good. The emphatic “I” not only 'desires' to do the good, but is also acting and attempting to do the good, which is to obey the law of God.

However, the emphatic “I” fails to completely accomplish what it desires and

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<sup>7</sup> Although the masculine pronoun is used, this does not limit the identity of the emphatic “I” to Paul. This study shows that the emphatic “I” is a mature, spiritual Christian believer. The term is used in this study as an umbrella term to include Paul, J. Wesley, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and every other mature, spiritual Christian believer. Of course, this includes men and women. So, when the masculine pronoun is used in Rom 7 in reference to the emphatic “I,” it is to be understood that this has reference to all mature, spiritual Christian believers, regardless of gender.

<sup>8</sup> G.R. Berry, *A Dictionary of New Testament Greek Synonyms*, 24.

what it has set its will on. Rom 7:20 states that the emphatic “I” does what it does not desire (θέλω) to do. This means that the 'will' of the emphatic “I” is not only set on doing the good, the will of the emphatic “I” is set against sin. The emphatic “I” itself says that it does not desire (θέλω), to do what, at times it does. There is to be seen in this statement that not only does the emphatic “I” not desire to act against the law of God, but the emphatic “I” is also “acting” in conformity with its desires. This means that the emphatic “I” is doing what it can to obey the law of God and to not sin. As it has already been stated, θέλω means more than simply “desire”. It means 'desire' which leads to action. The action that comes out of this “desire,” must be action, that is, in conformity with this “desire”. Thus, it can be seen that θέλω means desire that is accompanied by action which is in agreement with the desire.

The emphatic “I” as a mature believer means that the emphatic “I” cannot be in the flesh. To be in the flesh means to have a mind set on sin. The sinful mind cannot please God, nor is it able to (Rom 8:7). The sinful mind belongs to those who are in the flesh (Rom 8:8). Those who are in the flesh are those who do not have the Spirit of God (Rom 8:9). This means that those who are in the flesh are not Christians. Those who do not have the Spirit of God do not belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). The ones who are in the flesh are not able to please God (Rom 8:8), nor do they desire to please God. The desire to please God is the evidence of God dwelling within (Phlp 2:13). Paul writes in Phlp 2:13 that it is God who works in you to will, desire (θέλω) and to act according to his good purpose.

The Philippians statement is better understood in Rom 8:5: that the ones who do not have the Spirit of God have set their minds, their wills on the things of the flesh (Rom

8:5). The mind, the will set on the things of the flesh means that the mind, the will is not set on the things of God (Rom 8:5). The mind set on the flesh is enmity towards God (Rom 8:6). The mind set on the flesh, also, is not in submission to the law of God, nor is it able (Rom 8:7). Here it can be seen that the mind, the will set on the flesh, cannot agree with the law of God. The reason for this is that the law of God does not belong to the realm of the flesh. A further statement is that the mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the law of God are against each other (Rom 8:5-7). The mind set on the flesh, being against the law of God and being opposite to the law of God, resulting in the mind being at war with the law of God, will not desire to obey the law of God. Thus, when the mind is set on the things of the flesh, the law of God is not an object that the fleshly mind desires. The mind set on the flesh is not set on the things of God (Rom 8:5), the mind set on the flesh, which means those who are in the flesh, are those who do not desire the things of God in order to do them or to obey them (1 Cor 2:14). The conclusion drawn from the discussion concerning the mind and the flesh is that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 must be a Christian, that is one whose mind is set on knowing, obeying, and desiring the things of God as expressed in and through the law of God (Rom 7:15).

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is not perfect.<sup>9</sup> This reality can be seen throughout Rom 7. The emphatic “I” claims: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Rom 7:15). Two facts are to be noticed from this verse.

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<sup>9</sup> J.W. Shepherd puts forth this understanding regarding Paul and the emphatic “I” who cried out, ‘O wretched man’: “Paul did not exaggerate his own condition or that of anyone who is a Christian, hard pressed in the struggle to overcome the old man and put him off. Paul had to overcome much of the Pharisaical pride and many other frailties in his human nature.” He writes further that “Paul has not yet reached perfection. He is not yet free from imperfection and faults” (*The Life and Letters of St. Paul*, 406). See also O. Chambers *My Utmost For His Highest*, (ed. J. Reimann; Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publications, 1992), September 18 reading, no page given.

The first is that the emphatic “I” does things “unknowingly” or “does not understand what it does.” Here, it must be said that the emphatic “I” is not robotic, that is, the emphatic “I” acts without any knowledge of what it is doing. The word “know” (γινώσκω) can also mean, “understand.”<sup>10</sup> What is to be seen in this is that the emphatic “I” acts without always understanding why it acts in a particular way. There are many “subconscious” reasons why people act in the ways that they do.<sup>11</sup> These subconscious reasons include family background. Everyone has learned ways of acting, relating, understanding, speaking, and being by living in a family, the culture in which they live, and sin, both original and personal.<sup>12</sup> These “learned” behaviors are for the most part “subconscious.” That is to say that the person will act in a way that reflects their family background without “knowing” or “understanding” that they are acting “out of the learned behaviors” which are the result of their family background, culture and or sin, both personal and original.

The family background, regional culture in which they live and grow, ethnic grouping, national culture and other factors “form” each and every person. The formation made by the various factors in a person's life, is, as has been said, “subconscious.” This means that the values, ways of thinking and behaving, which are “normative” for that particular region and group become part of the “subconscious” ways of acting of each and every person. In other words, very few, if any, “know” or understand to the full extent why they act and behave. Thus, when the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 states that it does not

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<sup>10</sup> W. Arndt & W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 161.

<sup>11</sup> See chapter 2 and 3 of this study for a detailed examination of these unconscious reasons for a person's behavior, which at times, determine their thoughts, actions, and behaviors.

<sup>12</sup> For a further discussion of these factors that form a person, see chapter 2 and 3 of this study and the concluding statement of this chapter of the study.

understand what it is doing, this may be seen as a very insightful statement regarding the complexity of a human being.

Another factor that is to be seen in Rom 7:15 is that the emphatic “I” does what it does not desire (θέλω), to do. This certainly must be understood as the emphatic “I” as acting against its will. This is to say that the emphatic “I” does what it does not “will” to do. The situation where the emphatic “I” is acting against its will is also seen in Rom 7:19. Here it is stated that the emphatic “I” does not do what it desires (θέλω), to do.

The emphatic “I,” at times acts out of the “subconscious” factors that have formed and influenced it and not out of its will. The emphatic “I” cries out that it does what it hates and that this means that the indwelling sin is the one that is performing these hated deeds (Rom 7:15-17). This cry, coupled with the statement that there is in the members of the body a different law which is at war with the mind affirms that within the emphatic “I” there is the mind to do the will of God and there is also within the members of the body the “sub-conscious” factors that have influenced and formed it.

## **2. Wesley and the Emphatic “I”**

John Wesley stated that Christians who are perfected in love<sup>13</sup> will, at times, act, behave, speak, and think, not out of their “will,” which has been perfected in love, but will act out

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<sup>13</sup> “Perfection” as understood by J. Wesley – and also the Mystics - is perfect love. See also Mother Teresa, *Jesus: the Word to be Spoken* (New York: Walker and Company, 1987), 66, 67.

of their infirmities.<sup>14</sup> By infirmities, Wesley meant those aspects of the human being's life that have been damaged by sin and conditioned by culture and upbringing. Wesley also said: "even those who are perfect in love may still be an occasion of temptation to you, for they are still encompassed with infirmities."<sup>15</sup> Again it is to be stated that Wesley's doctrine of "perfection" did not mean absolute perfection that is the attaining to the standard of God's holiness. In Wesley's doctrine of "perfection", he taught that those who are perfect in love will have struggles with and will act out of their infirmities. Wesley further states that the Christian who is perfect in love is still liable to mistakes.<sup>16</sup>

Wesley writes: "Sins of infirmities are involuntary failings as the saying a thing we believe true, though in fact it prove to be false, or the hurting our neighbor without knowing or desiring it."<sup>17</sup> Within this quote by Wesley are several very important words

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<sup>14</sup> J. Wesley said it this way: "Christians are not so perfect as to be free either from ignorance or error. We may thirdly add, nor from infirmities. Infirmities are (1). Bodily infirmities (2). all those inward or outward imperfections which are not of a moral nature. Such are weakness or slowness of understanding, dullness or confusedness or apprehension, incoherency of thought" (J. Wesley's Sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 4). See also A. Edersheim who states that "the sin-offering and the trespass-offering applied only to sins through ignorance in opposition to those done presumptuously (or with a high hand). For the latter the law provided no atonement. By sins through ignorance we are to understand, according to the Rabbis, not only such as were committed strictly through want of knowledge, but also those which had been unintentional or through weakness, or where the offender at the time realized not his guilt," (*The Temple*, 128).

<sup>15</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *On Temptation*, Vol. 6, 479.

<sup>16</sup> Again J. Wesley's words are appropriate: "While we are in the body we cannot be wholly free from mistakes. Notwithstanding, all our care, we shall still be liable to judge wrong in many instances. And a mistake in judgment will very frequently occasion a mistake in practice, nay a wrong judgment may occasion something in the temper or passions, which is not strictly right. It may occasion fear or ill-grounded hope, unreasonable love or unreasonable aversion. But all this is no way inconsistent with perfection" (J. Wesley's Sermon, *On Perfection*, Vol. 6, 414). See also M. Simons, "Foundation of Christian Doctrine," *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, (ed. J.C. Wenger; trans. L. Verduin; Scottdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1956), 188. M. Simons wrote: "My good reader, examine the Scriptures correctly and you will find that to the free children of God there is no liberty promised as to the flesh here on earth." It is to be admitted that M. Simons would not be included in the category of "holiness writers." However, he is saying the same thing as J. Wesley. Both are saying that the Christian believer is not free from the flesh in this life. Simons admitted his own failings as a Christian believer, ("Why I do Not Cease Teaching and Writing," *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 310). He does however reject perfectionism. Simons called perfectionism, "sham holiness" (*The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 311). J. Wesley would also reject perfectionism.

<sup>17</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The First Fruits of the Spirit*, Vol. 5, 92.

and phrases that need to be noticed and examined. The first is Wesley's word "involuntary." He writes that "sins" of infirmities are "involuntary" failings. By involuntary, he means that the failings are not voluntary, that is that the person who acts does not act voluntarily or willfully.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the Christian who is perfected in love, at times will do, fail to act, think, speak, and behave the way that both they and God want. In these times of "involuntary" failings, the Christian who is perfected in love will act in ways that they do not desire to. It must be understood that when a Christian who is perfected in love fails but not voluntarily, the will of the Christian who is perfected in love, will not be in agreement with the "involuntary" failings. In other words, the times when the Christian who is perfected in love fails, "involuntarily," at these times, the will of the Christian is not in agreement with what the Christian is doing.

The second word or phrase to be noticed is: "without knowing or desiring it." Wesley made this comment after stating that Christians who are perfected in love will "involuntarily" fail. Christians who are perfected in love will at times "involuntarily" fail "without knowing or desiring it." These words and phrases from Wesley himself state that the Christian who is perfect in love, may and will do things that they do not want to do. These unwanted, yet accomplished acts result in wrong judgments, wrong behaviors and even hurting of one's neighbor.<sup>19</sup> These unwanted acts are the result, not of a willful choice of the person, but are the result of the person's cultural and family upbringing and original sin and come out of the damage that sin has done in that person's life.

The experience that Wesley describes for the Christian who is perfect in love is

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<sup>18</sup> For a fuller discussion of Wesley's use of the term "involuntary" see chapter 5 of this study.

<sup>19</sup> J. Wesley shows us that he made a distinction between acts that are willful and acts that come out of a person's character which has been formed by sin, culture and upbringing (J. Wesley's sermon, *On Temptation*, Vol. 6, 479).

similar to the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7.<sup>20</sup> Both, the emphatic “I” and the Christian who is perfect in love both desire to do what is right and holy in the sight of God. The emphatic “I” desires to do the “good” (Rom 7:16, 19). The Christian who is perfect in love has a pure intention to love God and one's neighbor. Here it can be seen that the Christian who is perfect in love and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 both desire to do what is holy and well pleasing in the sight of God.

The Christian who is perfect in love and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 not only have the common experience of desiring to do what is holy and well-pleasing in the sight of God, which results in pleasing God in all things, but they also share another common experience. This second shared experience is the occasional failing to do what is good and loving. When they fail to do what is good, loving, and well pleasing in the sight of God, they do what fails to meet God's standard.

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 and the Christian who is perfect in love fail, at times to do what is holy and well pleasing in the sight of God. Wesley's position is that the Christian who is perfect in love will fail “involuntarily.” What Wesley means is that the “will” of the Christian who is perfect in love will be set on doing what is holy and well-pleasing in the sight of God, but at times, the Christian will act out of something other than their “will.” Wesley claims that at these times, the Christian who is perfect in love acts out of their infirmities. Wesley claims that there are two “sources” within the Christian who is perfect in love, out of which they will act, speak, and behave. The first

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<sup>20</sup> As it has been stated in chapter 1 of this study that the direct dependence of J. Wesley on Paul will not be researched and thus the direct dependence of Wesley on Paul is not a part of this study. The examination of the *experiences* being described by J. Wesley, Paul and the Mystics is the main point of this study and not the discovering of Wesley's and the Mystics dependence on Paul. To repeat the point made in chapter 1, the emphasis to be examined is on the commonality of the experiences being described.



of these “sources” is the “will”; the second of these “sources” is the “infirmities.”

As it has been seen in chapter 2 of this study, the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 also has two “sources” within them, out of which they act, speak, and behave. When the emphatic “I” acts not consistent with their will, their desire, the emphatic “I” is not the one acting, but the “sin that indwells in them.” Here it can be seen that there are two “sources” out of which the emphatic “I” acts. The first source is the will, the desire, and the second source is the “sin that indwells.” The emphatic “I” calls the “sin which indwells” another law which operates within the members of their body (Rom 7:23). This “second” law is a law that is in opposition to their will, their  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  - which is, according to Berry, the “moral center of a human being.”<sup>21</sup> It can be seen that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 has two sources out of which they act, speak and behave. The first source is their  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , their will. The second source is a “law” which operates within the members of their bodies.

The struggle of the emphatic “I” with another law that operates within the members of their body is not a struggle between the material and the spiritual. The law that operates within the members of the emphatic “I” which is in opposition to their will is the sin that indwells them (Rom 7:15).<sup>22</sup> The emphatic “I” goes on to say that when they sin, when they act against their will, it is not they who are sinning, but the sin that indwells them (Rom 7:20). The emphatic “I” acts, at times consistent with their will and at other times, the emphatic “I” acts not consistent with their will, but in opposition to it.

Wesley said that the Christian who is perfect in love acts, at times consistent with their will and at other times acts in opposition to their will. When the Christian who is perfect in love acts in opposition to their will to please God, Wesley said that they were

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<sup>21</sup> G.R. Berry, *A Dictionary of New Testament Greek Synonyms*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 2 and 3 of this study.

acting out of their infirmities and what they did, he called mistakes. Wesley said and taught in his doctrine of “perfection” that Christians who are perfect in love act, at times out of their will and at other times the Christian who is perfect in love will act, not out of their will, but will act out of another source which is located within them. This other source cannot be the will of the Christian who is perfect in love. The reason for this is that the will of the Christian who is perfect in love is set on pleasing God in all things. This other source, though not the will, must be found within the Christian who is perfect in love. Somewhere within the Christian who is perfect in love is another “source” out of which they act, speak, and behave. Wesley called this other source “infirmities.” The infirmities of a Christian who is perfect in love are found within them, but not within their will. Because the infirmities of a Christian who is perfect in love are found within them and are not their will; the infirmities of a Christian who is perfect in love are found within their “members.”

Wesley said that Christians who are perfect in love at times fail to meet God's standard. When these Christians fail to meet God's standards, they act in opposition to their will and act involuntarily. Wesley is describing an experience where a Christian who is perfect in love (one could also call this Christian a spiritually mature Christian), fails to do what is right, good and well-pleasing in the sight of God. At the same time, while failing to meet God's standard, the Christian who is perfect in love, also acts in opposition to their will, because the perfect Christian has set their will on pleasing God.

The experience of desiring to be and do what God desires, yet, at times failing to meet God's standard of love is a similar experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7. The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 has set their will on the good, that is on pleasing God by obeying

his law. However, at times, the emphatic “I” finds that it acts in opposition to their will. In these times of acting in opposition to their will, the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 fails to do what is right, holy, and well pleasing in the sight of God. What can be seen from these common experiences of the Christian who is perfect in love and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is that both act against their desiring, their will, when they fail to do what is good, loving, and well-pleasing in the sight of God.

Wesley defined sin as a willful transgression of a known law.<sup>23</sup> The question that is to be asked is: Does the emphatic “I” sin willingly? The answer to that question is no. The desire of the emphatic “I” is to do what pleases God. Rom 7:15, 18, 19, 20 all clearly state that the emphatic “I” desires, not to sin, but to please God. Rom 7:15 states: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” Here it can be seen that the emphatic “I” does not do what it wants, what it desires to do. Rom 7:18-20 states: “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature; for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” These verses make it clear that the desire of the emphatic “I” is to do what is good, what is pleasing to God. These verses also state that the emphatic “I” does not desire to sin.

Rom 7’s relation with Rom 8 will confirm the statement that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is a mature, Christian believer. Rom 8 is a continuation of the discussion concerning the sanctification of the believer. Rom 7 begins the discussion of the struggle within the Christian with remaining sin. Rom 8 continues this discussion and explains

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<sup>23</sup> J. Wesley’s sermon, *On Obedience to Parents*, Vol. 7, 107.

further that Christians “groan” waiting for the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23). The groaning of Christians waiting for their bodies’ redemption are those who in whom the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled, those who do not walk according to the flesh, but who walk according to the spirit (Rom 8:4). This is referring to mature, spiritual Christians (Rom 8:12-15), those who are described as living in bodies that are dead to sin (Rom 8:10, 11). Mature Christians groan, waiting, for the redemption of their bodies. According to Rom 6, these bodies are dead to sin. The teaching that these bodies are dead to sin and that these groans must mean that there is a struggle going on within mature, spiritual Christians with sin. Rom 8 is a chapter that describes how a Christian is to please God. However, within Rom 8, itself, is a description of not only how to please God, there is also within Rom 8 a description of the struggle within the believer with sin, the Christian who is walking to please God.

Rom 8:7 describes a mindset set on the flesh – which is the mindset of unbelievers (Rom 8:5, 6, compare with Rom 8: 9, 10). The description of the mindset set on the flesh, which is not the mindset of Christians, is that this mindset does not, nor is it able to, subject itself to the Law of God. Rom 8, certainly a chapter that discusses the sanctification of Christians, clearly states that the mindset of Christians is subject to the Law of God. Christians are not free from obeying the spirit of the Law of God. In fact, the essence of salvation is the desire to obey God and to please Christ (2 Cor 5:9).

The context of Rom 8:9-17 is that of a Christian believer living in a dead body. This dead body still is able to do misdeeds, though the mindset of the Christian is on obeying the law of God. Yet, this person, who has the Spirit of God dwelling within, is called an heir of God.

Rom 8:9-27 is a description of a Christian, who, still groans because s/he is still living in an unredeemed body (Rom 8:23), who still struggles with weakness (Rom 8:26), who, lives in a body which is dead because of sin, yet their spirit is alive because of righteousness (Rom 8:10). In Rom 8:10 is a clear description of a Christian believer whose spirit desires holiness and righteousness while their body desires sin. This is the very same description of the emphatic “I” in Rom 7:22-25 where it says that there are two “laws” within the emphatic “I.” One “law” desires to obey God and the other “desires” sin (see especially Rom 7:23, 25). Thus, Rom 8:10 confirms the statement that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is a Christian believer.

Christian believers also live in bodies where they still suffer (Rom 8:18).<sup>24</sup> Christian believers are exhorted to put to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). This can only be understood in the sense that the body still has deeds that must be put to death. If that is not the case, why then, would Christians be exhorted to put to death non-existent deeds? The body that is dead because of sin, which the believer has, cannot be dead in the sense that it does not function nor is it dead in the sense of not being physically alive. Dead because of sin means that the body is not alive in the sense that it has no relation to God. This is another way to say that the body is unredeemed (Rom 8:23). The word unredeemed means that the body is still in bondage to sin. Rom 8:20-23 explains that creation itself is waiting to be set free into the freedom of the children of God. The freedom of the children of God is understood as freedom from sin and corruption. God’s children experience this freedom now in the experience that is called the “first fruits”

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<sup>24</sup> The suffering of Rom 8:18 is certainly suffering from persecution, but the context states that Christians also suffer from living in a body dead because of sin. The groaning of the Christian believer is due, in part to his or her living in a body dead because of sin.

(Rom 8:23). This means that Christians have the Holy Spirit now and the presence of the Holy Spirit is the first fruits of the fullness that is to come. The experience of the first fruits is a freedom from sin (Rom 6:7). The Christian is then freed from sin. However, within this experience of freedom there is the groaning waiting for the full redemption of the body (Rom 8:23). The body in which Christians are still living is a dead body (Rom 8:10). Now of course, this does not mean that the body is dead in the sense that it cannot, nor does not, respond to the various stimuli. Free Christians are living in dead bodies. These are bodies that cause Christians to groan and to respond in ways that the believer does not want or desire.

The emphatic “I” sins “unwillingly” (Rom 7:16); this is stated in Rom 7 and is confirmed in Rom 8. The emphatic “I” does not desire to sin, nor does the emphatic “I” ‘will’ sin. Because the emphatic “I” does not sin willingly nor will to sin, the sin of the emphatic “I” must belong to Wesley's categories of mistakes or involuntary failings. Wesley said that the Christian who is perfect in love will, as long as they are in a mortal body, make “mistakes.” He writes: “Christian ‘perfection’ does not imply an exemption either from ignorance or mistakes or infirmities.”<sup>25</sup> He also states that weaknesses and infirmities will remain while this corruptible body remains.<sup>26</sup> Wesley defined “infirmities” as involuntary failings.<sup>27</sup> Thus, according to Wesley's own definitions, it must be seen that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 sins, not willingly, but unwillingly, that is involuntarily. When the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is compared to the experience of Wesley's Christian who is perfected in love, it can be seen that the emphatic

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<sup>25</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Vol. 6, 5.

<sup>26</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The End of Christ's Coming*, Vol. 6, 277.

<sup>27</sup> J. Wesley's sermon, *The First Fruits of The Spirit*, Vol. 6, 92.

“I” of Rom 7 and the Christian who is perfected in love share the same experience. This is another way of saying that the empathic “I” of Rom 7 and Wesley's Christian who is perfected in love are one and the same.

Based on the context and wider study, it is to be seen that Rom 7:14-25 is an enlargement of the struggle that Christian believers have with remaining sin. The discussion of this struggle with remaining sin is started in Rom 7 and is continued in Rom 8.

### **3. The Mystics and the Emphatic “I”**

#### **3.1 St. Teresa of Avila**

The Mystics state that the “spiritual marriage” is the highest state that a Christian can enter in this life. This experience will now be compared to the experience of the emphatic “I” and to Wesley’s doctrine of “perfection”.

Teresa of Avila says that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, desires to please God in all things.<sup>28</sup> However, this soul has also gained a clearer understanding of God's greatness and the misery of its own condition.<sup>29</sup> When the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, which means that the desire of this soul is to please God in all things, realizes that it rarely accomplishes its own heart's desire, that is to please God in all things, this realization causes the soul “torture.”<sup>30</sup> Teresa, one who

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<sup>28</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

is recognized by the church as one who experienced the “spiritual marriage”, when looking at herself in the light of God's holiness and greatness, called herself “a worm.”<sup>31</sup> From this it can be seen that, according to Teresa of Avila, the Christian who has experienced the “spiritual marriage” has a view of him or herself that can be described in modern psychological terms as “poor.” When one truly sees themselves in the light of God's holiness and greatness, one cannot walk away from that encounter with a view of self that in modern psychological terms would be considered a “high” self-image. However, when one truly sees oneself in the light of God's holiness and greatness and one is able to “walk” away, the self-perception that one will take with them is truly realistic.

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 desires to do what is good and pleasing to God (Rom 7:15-25). While desiring to do what is good and pleasing to God, the emphatic “I” also realizes that it does not always act the way it desires. The emphatic “I” does desire to please God and at times accomplishes its desire. The emphatic “I” says that it does serve God in the will.

However, the emphatic “I” does not always act in a way that is consistent with its desire to please God. When the emphatic “I” acts in a way that is contrary to its own desire to please God, this acting not in conformity to its own desire to please God, causes the emphatic “I” to cry out in anguish and pain. This cry is “O Wretched Man.”

The cry of the emphatic “I” of “O Wretched Man” is a similar cry by Teresa when she called herself a “worm.” Teresa says that even the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, will still be troubled by temptations and failings.<sup>32</sup> The reality of

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.



failing causes the soul in the “spiritual marriage” to “sorrow” over its sins.<sup>33</sup>

Teresa says that the soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, desires to please God in all things. This soul, while desiring to please God in all things, also realizes that it rarely truly accomplishes its own heart's desire. This realization causes the soul in the “spiritual marriage” to cry out in pain and anguish. The soul, which has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, also sees itself very clearly. It sees itself in the light of God's holiness and greatness. This vision also causes the soul in the “spiritual marriage” to cry out in pain and anguish.

Teresa's description of a soul that has experienced the “spiritual marriage” can be seen as a similar experience that John Wesley described as the Christian who is perfect in love, yet acts involuntarily out of their infirmities. This is also the same experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, who desires to do what is good, yet at times fails to perfectly and fully accomplish its desire of pleasing God in all things.

### **3.2 The Cloud of Unknowing**

The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* was also a mystic. This unknown person describes “perfection” as a “good will.”<sup>34</sup> A good will is a will that desires to please God in all things. However, the Christian with a “good” will is not a Christian who has reached sinless perfection in this life.<sup>35</sup>

Even the holiest person, in this life, is not free from the effects of sin. This means that the holiest person will still struggle and at times fail to accomplish what it desires,

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 111.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

and this is to please God in all things. This failure to accomplish its own desire of pleasing God causes the holiest of souls a deep sorrow. However, the deepest sorrow of a person who has arrived at the “spiritual marriage” is the sorrow that they are. This sorrow is an existential sorrow that comes from the understanding that one falls so far short of God’s glory. It is this sorrow that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 experiences when he/she cries out “O Wretched Man” (Person).<sup>36</sup>

The soul, which realizes that not only that it sins, but that it is sinful, experiences deep authentic sorrow. This statement is to be understood in the sense that the soul which realizes that it not only commits acts of sin, but that, in the very core of its being, it is sinful, experiences deep authentic sorrow. The soul, which is simply repentant for what it does, has not yet experienced the union of God that the *Cloud of Unknowing* is attempting to describe. The soul that is simply repentant for what it does has not experienced this deep sorrow. This sorrow, which the *Cloud of Unknowing* is attempting to describe, is of a kind that causes the soul to moan and cry out in anguish over its own existence. When a soul has experienced the union of God, according to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, this soul will repent over its very existence and being. Wherever this soul goes, it is still near the “pit” of its own being. This soul can run as far and as fast and as long as it is possible to run, yet, when it stops it will realize that it can not run away from itself.<sup>37</sup> This realization, that the soul is sinful in its very core, causes the soul, which has experienced

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<sup>36</sup> As stated by *The Cloud of Unknowing*: “the sorrow I speak of is genuine sorrow and perfect, and blessed is the man who experiences it. Every man has plenty of cause for sorrow, but he alone understands the deep universal reason for sorrow, who experiences that he is. Every other motive pales besides this one. He alone feels authentic sorrow who realizes not only what he is, but that he is” (*Ibid.*, 103).

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 2 of this study, where the “broken-ness of the human being as a result of sin (Rom 5), and chapter 4 where a wider look at the Pauline Corpus was done regarding Paul’s position that the mature, Christian believer, in this life, is righteous but in experience must become what they are in Christ, i.e. righteous.

union with God, deep sorrow. According to the *Cloud of Unknowing*, when the soul sees its true condition, it will have seen itself “as it really is a miserable and defiled creature less than nothing without God.”<sup>38</sup> This is what causes the soul to sorrow not only over what it does, but that it is.

The *Cloud of Unknowing* also teaches that the soul, which has experienced union with God, will, as long as it is in this life, struggle with temptation. The *Cloud of Unknowing* states that, “the remnants of original sin will plague you to the grave despite all your efforts.”<sup>39</sup> Here, it can be seen that the *Cloud of Unknowing* is not teaching sinless perfection, when it describes union with God. The soul, which has experienced union with God still struggles and is plagued by temptations. The teaching of the *Cloud of Unknowing* concerning union with God also states that the closer a “man comes to the truth the more sensitive he must become to error.”<sup>40</sup> This means that the closer a person comes to God; the clearer the person will see itself. When a soul is growing closer to God, this soul will also become more and more aware of the areas in its own life that are far from God. The error that the *Cloud of Unknowing* refers to is not only the error “in” the world, but more importantly the error that is in the person, which is growing closer, and closer to God. As Teresa called herself a “worm,” The *Cloud of Unknowing* also shares the same view of self. It is to be remembered that this view comes from one who has experienced union with God. The *Cloud of Unknowing* says this about the self: “This foul, wretched lump called sin is none other than yourself.”<sup>41</sup> By this quote, it can be seen that The *Cloud of Unknowing* and Teresa of Avila, both mystics, share the same view of

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<sup>38</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 89.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

themselves. This view is that they are a “worm” and “foul.” Again, it is to be stated that this view is of a mature Christian, one who has experienced union with God and in Teresa's terms, the “spiritual marriage”.

The *Cloud of Unknowing* describes “perfection” as a “good will.”<sup>42</sup> By a good will, the *Cloud of Unknowing* means “a will that is harmoniously attuned to God's will in an abiding contentedness and enthusiasm for all He does.”<sup>43</sup> The *Cloud of Unknowing* describes desire as “the access to heaven.”<sup>44</sup> Desire, is also, according to The *Cloud of Unknowing*, “what God sees with His all merciful eyes. It is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with His all merciful eyes, but what you desire to be.”<sup>45</sup>

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 desires to please God, yet at times fails to accomplish its own desire of pleasing God (Rom 7:15-20). This failure to please God causes the emphatic “I” sorrow and pain (Rom 7:24). However, it must be said, that the sorrow and pain that the emphatic “I” experiences is not only for what it does, that is for its failure to please God (Rom 7:15); the sorrow and pain of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is also because of what it is. Rom 7:24 states that the emphatic “I” not only is in pain for what it does (Rom 7:15-19), but also for the fact of its own existence and condition. The cry of “Wretched Man” is not simply a cry of pain and anguish over one's acts, deeds, misdeeds, and failures. The cry of “Wretched Man” is also a cry over one's true and sinful condition. For a person to cry out that it is “wretched” means that the person has seen itself in the light of God's holiness and greatness. The reason for this is: the only place a soul will see its own wretchedness is in the light of God's holiness and greatness. Thus, when the

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

emphatic “I” of Rom 7 cries out that it is “wretched,” this means that the emphatic “I” has seen itself in the light of God's holiness and greatness. The cry of the emphatic “I” can be seen as the cry over its own “wretched” condition.

The experience described by the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 over their sinful condition are the same experiences. Both the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the emphatic “I” are not only in sorrow over their failure to please God, but are also in deep agony over the fact that they are truly wretched sinners and not just people who commit acts of sin. The agony over one's being, over one's condition is a deep agony of the soul. By this is meant that the pain, the agony of the soul is of such a nature that the soul, at times is in deep despair.<sup>46</sup>

The Christian who has experienced union with God will see him or herself as a “foul, stinky lump,” which must be hated, despised and forsaken. This is a similar experience by Paul in the cry of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, when the emphatic “I” cries out, “O Wretched Man.” Both cries are cries of despair over self. Both cries are cries of a spiritually mature Christian who is growing closer and closer to God and at the same time sees themselves as sinners, wretched and to be despised.

### **3.3 Julian of Norwich**

Julian of Norwich writes that those who experience union with God also see that sin is vile and horrible. She also says that the closer a Christian comes to God; the more they

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<sup>46</sup> “For as often as he would have a true knowing and feeling of God in purity of Spirit (insofar as that is possible in this life); and then feels that he cannot for he constantly finds his knowing and feeling as it were occupied and filled with a foul, stinky lump of himself, which must always be hated and despised and forsaken, if he shall be God's perfect disciple, taught by Him alone on the mounts of perfection—he almost despairs for the sorrow that he feels, weeping, lamenting, writhing, cursing and blaming himself” (*Ibid.*, 104).

will see themselves as wretched.<sup>47</sup>

Julian writes and says that to the believer who has experienced the “spiritual marriage”, sin is more painful than hell itself. The mystics taught that the closer one came to God, the clearer they saw their own sinfulness. A believer who was growing closer to God, saw themselves not only as a sinner in the sense of one who commits acts of sin, but also in the light and truth that they are “a lump of sin.” This revelation was a painful experience for the believer. The believer who had experienced the “spiritual marriage” desired to be pleasing to God in all things. This desire, that is to be pleasing to God in all things, was the fundamental desire of the believer who had experienced the “spiritual marriage”. Based on Julian’s writings quoted above, it is seen that when this believer, who desired to be pleasing to God in all things, saw him/her self as a “lump of sin,” then, this revelation was extremely painful.

Julian of Norwich expresses the same view of a Christian who has experienced union with God as does Teresa of Avila and as does the *Cloud of Unknowing*. These three mystics state that the closer a person comes to God, the clearer that person sees him or herself. The self-perception of a person who has experienced union with God or the “spiritual marriage” is one where the person sees themselves as “wretched,” “a lump of sin” and “a worm.”

The experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 when compared with the mystical experience called the “spiritual marriage” leads to the conclusion that the emphatic “I” is a mature Christian. The reason for stating this is that the believer, who has experienced

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<sup>47</sup> Her words are: “When we by God's grace and with His help, live in harmony with nature and grace, we shall see the truth that sin is incomparably more vile and painful than hell itself. It is a horrible sight for the soul who wishes to be lovely and shining” (Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 130).

the “spiritual marriage”, is painfully aware of their own broken-ness and sin.<sup>48</sup>

#### **4. New Life in Christ and the Emphatic “I”**

Christian believers are new creations in Christ, this means that they have a new life in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). Although Christian believers are new creations in Christ, there still remains within these new creations the flesh that is in warfare with the Spirit (Gal 5:17). This experience of the Christian believer as a new creation in Christ will be compared to the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7.

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 desires to please God but finds within it another force or power that is antagonistic to the desire it has to please God. This internal battle is stated in Rom 7:23. This must be seen as an experience of a mature Christian. The reason for stating this is that the very same internal struggle between the desire to please God and the “pull” to turn away from God is stated in Gal 5:17. This passage, that is Gal 5:17, is almost universally accepted as the experience of a Christian. This passage, Gal 5:17, states that the flesh, σάρξ, desires against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. Rom 8:9-27 is a description of a Christian, who, still groans because s/he is still living in an unredeemed body (Rom 8:23), who still struggles with weakness (Rom 8:26), who, lives in a body which is dead because of sin, yet their spirit is alive because of righteousness (Rom 8:10). In Rom 8:10 is a clear description of a Christian believer whose spirit desires holiness and righteousness while their body desires sin. This is the very same description

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<sup>48</sup> See this chapter for a fuller explanation of this statement.

of the emphatic “I” in Rom 7:22-25 where it says that there are two “laws” within the emphatic “I.” One “law” desires to obey God and the other “desires” sin (see especially Rom 7:23, 25). Thus, Rom 8:10 confirms the conclusion that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is a Christian believer. Rom 7:23 can be understood in that the flesh remains in the believer. The flesh, the brokenness and residue of both original sin and personal sin, remains within the believer. If the flesh did not remain within the believer, then this verse could not be speaking of a believer. The context of Gal 5:16-26 provides ample evidence that the description of Gal 5:17 is of a believer.<sup>49</sup>

The evidence that the person described in Gal 5:17 is a believer is that the person is exhorted to walk and live by means of the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Only a believer is able to walk and live by means of the Spirit. This is because only Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them (Rom 8:9-11). The person in Gal 5:16-26 also has the possibility of being led by the Spirit of God (Gal 5:18). It is only the believer who is led, or follows the leading of the Spirit of God. Paul writes and says, “For the ones who are led by the Spirit of God, these ones are the children of God (Rom 8:14). Thus, it can be seen that the person described in Gal 5:16-26 who is being led by the Spirit of God must be a believer. The reason for this is that the ones who are being led by the Spirit, these ones are the believers.

The believer, as is seen in Gal 5:16-26, has the flesh remaining within him or her. This does not mean, however, that the believer is in the flesh. There is a difference between being in the flesh and the flesh remaining within the believer. As has already been stated, the flesh, which remains within the believer, is the residue, the damage done

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<sup>49</sup> See chapter 4 of this study for a detailed discussion regarding Gal 5:17 and its context.



by original sin and personal sin. The fact of the flesh remaining within a believer is different than being in the flesh. Being in the flesh means that the person who is in the flesh has the flesh as the dominant and controlling principle in their life. Being in the flesh, therefore, means that the person is living for the flesh. The flesh is the “god” of the person who is in the flesh.

The believer who walks by the Spirit will not fulfill the desire of the flesh (Gal 5:16). Here it is evident that the believer, the one who has the Spirit, is also faced with the desires of the flesh. There is simply no reason to exhort a believer to do something, i.e. walk by the Spirit, so that the believer will not do something else, i.e. fulfill the desires of the flesh, if the fulfilling of the desires of the flesh were not a possibility for the believer. Because the flesh is the result of damage done both by original sin and personal sin, the believer, who is exhorted to not fulfill the desires of the flesh, must have the flesh remaining within them.

A Christian has the flesh remaining within him or her. A Christian, however, cannot be and is not in the flesh (Rom 8:9). The person who has the Spirit of God within them, that is a Christian, a believer, is not in the flesh, although the flesh remains within him or her. The fact of the Spirit's indwelling a believer proves that the believer is not in the flesh. The believer desires to be led by the Spirit of God and not the flesh. The believer desires to obey God and not the flesh. The presence of the Spirit of God within a person proves that that person is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit (Rom 8:9).

Christians, not in the flesh, but having the flesh within them, have an inner struggle, or inner warfare, going on within. In Gal 5:17 it is recorded that the flesh and the Spirit desire against each other, so that the believer does not do what he or she desires.

Here it can be seen that within a Christian is the desire ( $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega$ ) to act, to do, to live, to walk by the Spirit, so that the Christian is pleasing to God. Yet, at the same time, within the believer, who desires to please God, is another force, power, that desires against the desire to please God. These two desires cause an inner warfare and inner struggle to occur within the Christian.

The description of Gal 5:17 is the same description that John Wesley gives for a Christian who is perfect in love. The description of Gal 5:17 as the inner struggle of a believer is the same description of a Christian who has reached the “highest state” a Christian can reach in this life. This “highest state” or experience is called by the mystics “union with God” and or the “spiritual marriage”. The description of Gal 5:17 as a Christian who struggles with the flesh, Wesley's Christian who is perfected in love and the mystical experience called the “spiritual marriage” or *union with God*, is the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7. The reasons for stating this are: both Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” desire ( $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega$ ) to please God. Rom 7:19 states that the emphatic “I” desires to do the good, the will of God as expressed in the law. As it has been seen in chapter 4 of this study, Gal 5:17 states that the inner struggle which is between the flesh and the Spirit results in the Christian not doing what he or she desires.

While having this common desire to please God, both the Christian described in Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” find within them another force, or power, that is antagonistic toward the desire within them to please God. This antagonistic force within the believer in Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 causes the believer in Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” to, at times not do what they desire, but to do what they do not desire. Gal 5:17 affirm that the warfare within the Christian causes the Christian to not do

what they desire. Rom 7:15, 19, 23 are very clear in stating that the warfare within the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 causes the emphatic “I” to not do what it desires, but, at times to do what it does not desire.

It has already been stated and noticed that the description of Gal 5:17 is of a believer. The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 must also be a believer because this person shares the same inner experience as the believer described in Gal 5:17. Both the Christian described by Paul in Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, desire to please God. Both the Christian of Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 have an inner warfare between the flesh and the Spirit. This warfare rages within each of them. Because the Christian of Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 both desire to please God, and because both the Christian of Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 have an inner warfare between the flesh and the desire to do what is good, that is to please God and to walk after the Spirit, the common experience of the Christian of Gal 5:17 and the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 leads to the conclusion that the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is a Christian believer.

## **5. Rom 7 and the Emphatic “I”**

The main emphasis of Rom 7 is the depth, the extent of the problem of sin and from which the believer in Christ has been delivered. Rom 7 is emphasizing the total depravity of the believer. Rom 7 is a spiritual/psychological portrait of a believer who realizes the depth and extent of the problem of sin in their own life. Rom 7 is also a celebration of deliverance, by the believer, from what they have been delivered from. Rom 7, describes

the depth and extent of sin in the life of the believer, yet, at the same time, Rom 7 is a celebration by the believer, while still struggling with sin, of their own deliverance from that sin, by the blood of Christ. This can be seen in Rom 7:25 – which is a hymn of praise and thankfulness for redemption in Jesus Christ. The portrait of Rom 7 is of a believer<sup>50</sup> who realizes that, in their flesh, there is nothing good and that they, even after justification, even after experiencing the “spiritual marriage”, even after experiencing “perfection” in Wesleyan understandings, are still sinners, still a “lump of sin.”<sup>51</sup>

The emphatic “I” as a mature believer is also seen in the tenses used in Rom 7. The predominant tense used in Rom 7:7-13 is the aorist/past tense. The predominant tense used in Rom 7:14-25 is the present tense. As it has been discussed in chapter 2 of

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<sup>50</sup> “The seventh chapter of Romans gives us Paul’s testimony concerning this warfare within himself,” J.D. Pentecost, *Designed To Be Like Him*, 79.

<sup>51</sup> W. Elwell and R. Yarbrough also support the position that Paul in Rom 7:7-25 is writing about the struggle that Christian believers wage with sin, *Encountering the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 280. D. Guthrie states that Rom 7:7-25 is best understood as a regenerate man. The reasons he gives are very illuminating, being that “we have no picture of the unregenerate experience per se but we do have the righteous man’s retrospect for he alone is in a position to assess the slavery of sin,” *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 1970), 1028. He goes on to say that Rom 7:7-25 is “Paul’s self-estimate as viewed in the light of God’s law,” *The New Bible Commentary*, 1029; J. Calvin states that “man is held captive by the yoke of sin that he can of his own nature neither aspire to good through resolve nor struggle after it through effort” (J. Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, 309). Here it can be seen that J. Calvin states that the unregenerate is not able to aspire (desire) or struggle after good. This being said, according to J. Calvin, the emphatic “I” who desires to do the good, must be regenerate. J.I. Packer also agrees: “The belief that full deliverance from all known sin is enjoyed by consecrated, spirit-filled Christians makes reading Rom 7:14-25 impossible in the natural way. Rom 7:14-25 is best seen as a frank and representative acknowledgement by a lively, healthy Christian (Paul) that sin, stirred up in him by the very law that forbids and condemns it, still controls him to an extent that is grievous to contemplate” (J.I. Packer, *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, 161). B. Metzger, however disagrees. He says that Rom 7:7-23 is “Paul’s reflection on the past, namely what a life lived under the Mosaic law looks like,” B. Metzger, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 661. There are many reasons to disagree with Metzger. One is that the Bible teaches that unregenerate does not seek God (Rom 3:10-18). Another reason is that the cry of: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ” Rom 7:25 is part of Rom 7. An important question is: Which Non-Christian believer thanks God for Jesus Christ? Also Rom 7:25, after thanking God for Jesus Christ, clearly states that the emphatic “I” serves, with his mind, the law of God, while with the flesh he serves the law of sin. He is clearly seen the struggle within a Christian believer. The reason being is that only a Christian believer will thank God for Jesus Christ. A. McClain also disagrees. He says that “God wrote Rom 7 to warn men and women, believers and unbelievers, that there is no holiness by works of the law,” A. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace*, 152. Also B. Carradine, 11.

this study, there are many differing opinions regarding the meaning of the predominant tenses used in Rom 7. The meaning of the tenses used in Rom 7 cannot be determined apart from the overall contextual setting and meaning of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7.

The overall contextual meaning and setting of the emphatic “I” is, as has been shown, to be a Christian believer. When it is understood that the identity of the emphatic “I” is a Christian believer, then the meaning of the tenses used in Rom 7 can be arrived at. The meaning of the tenses used in Rom 7 is a statement concerning the life of the emphatic “I.” The use of the aorist/past tense used in Rom 7:7-13 describes a time in the life of the emphatic “I” before the writing of the letter of Romans. The use of the present tense in Rom 7:14-25 refers to the life of the emphatic “I” at the time of the writing of the letter to the Romans.

If the whole passage of Rom 7:7-25 was describing the “present” life of the emphatic “I,” then the dramatic usage of the verbal tenses would have no meaning at all. If Rom 7:7-25 was describing the “present” life of the emphatic “I” then the present tense or the aorist tense could have been used throughout Rom 7:7-25 with the same meaning and emphasis. However, since there is such a sharp distinction in Rom 7:7-25 of the verb tenses used, this distinction must have a meaning in itself. The meaning of the distinction of the verb tenses used in Rom 7:7-25 is a description of the life of the emphatic “I” into two different “parts.” Rom 7:7-13 describes the life of the emphatic “I” before a life changing event and Rom 7:14-25 describes the life of the emphatic “I” after this life-changing event. Rom 7:7-13 describes the “past” life of the emphatic “I” while Rom 7:14-25 describes the present life of the emphatic “I”. The life changing event that divides the life of the emphatic “I” must be an event of such magnitude that the emphatic “I” sees

its life as having two different “parts.” The two different “parts” of the life of the emphatic “I” are set out by the predominate use of the aorist tense in Rom 7:7-13 and the present tense used in Rom 7:14-25. The only event of such a magnitude could be the conversion of the emphatic “I.” Thus, Rom 7:7-13 describes the life of the emphatic “I” as a pre-Christian and Rom 7:14-25 describes the life of the emphatic “I” as a Christian believer.

## **6. Concluding Statement**

The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 sees itself as it truly is; “a wretched person,” (Rom 7:24). It desires to please God (Rom 7:15, 19, and 20), but knows that it commits sins. This is evident from Rom 7:15, 19, and 20 where it says that the emphatic “I” does what it does not desire. The “doing” recorded in these verses is a testimony by the emphatic “I” that it has and is, at times, still committing sins. However, starting from Rom 7:22, the discussion by the emphatic “I” goes to a different dimension. The “testimony” of the emphatic “I” begins to describe not just its own “committing” of sin, but the existential existence of itself. It sees within itself an existential “rift.” There is the inner person (Rom 7:22) who desires to serve God (Rom 7:25) and there is the “other law” (Rom 7:23) which wages war against the inner person. This existential “rift” causes the emphatic “I” to cry out “O Wretched Man, who will save me from the body of this death.” (Rom 7:24). This is not a cry of a person who is still under the law, which is to say who is unregenerate. This is a cry of a regenerate Christian believer who is approaching ever

closer to God. While approaching closer to God, the emphatic “I” sees itself clearer and clearer. This self-perception is painful to the emphatic “I.” The pain comes from the fact that sin is not simply a legalistic keeping of the law, but, sin is everything that falls short of God’s glory.<sup>52</sup> Paul states the same thing in Rom 2:12. He writes that those who sin without the law will perish without the law. Here it can be seen that Paul is saying that sin is greater or deeper than mere transgression of the law. Sin is that which falls short of God’s glory. The emphatic “I” of Rom 7 is an early Christian believer who sees the truth that s/he not only commits acts of sin, but that they are also, in the existential self, sinners.<sup>53</sup> To be a sinner, in this sense, is to see oneself as “a lump of sin” – as would later be similar in the understanding of the Mystics. To see one self as “a lump of sin” is to realize that there is nothing good within oneself, that is apart from Christ. This is similar to Paul’s understanding and theology (Phlp 3:1-14).

The realization of the believer growing closer to God is the very thought, realization and expression of the emphatic “I.” It sees itself as a sinner and realizes that within itself, apart from Christ, there is nothing good in it (Rom 7:18). The cry of the emphatic “I” of “Wretchedness” is the cry of a mature Christian believer. Stott agrees

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<sup>52</sup> A. McClain recognizes this and says that “sin is a greater thing than mere transgression of the law. Sin is lawlessness. It exists where there is no law” (A. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace*, 136). J.I. Packer agrees with this assessment when he claims that “getting beyond conflict, outward or inward, in our pursuit of holiness in the world is an escapist dream” (J.I. Packer, *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, 111).

<sup>53</sup> J. Murray states that the Paul of Rom 7:22 is a Christian believer because he has the mind of the spirit (Rom 8:6). Murray’s reason is that Paul’s mind was not enmity towards God or God’s law. Paul’s mind joyfully delighted in God and the law of God. This, according to Murray, means that the delight in the mind of Paul of Rom 7:22 is evidence that Paul truly loved God and obeyed God. The question that comes out of this is: How can you delight in God and be an enemy of God? (J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 258).

with this view of the “wretched man”.<sup>54</sup> He states that only a mature Christian believer would think and talk of him/herself in this manner. Stott also says that this cannot be a sinner, for a sinner does not see him/herself as a miserable sinner. He goes on to say that this cannot be an immature believer, for an immature believer is characterized by self-confidence.<sup>55</sup> According to Stott, only the mature believer reaches the place of self-disgust and of self-despair. He states further that only a mature believer is one who recognizes with clarity that in his flesh dwells nothing good.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> J.R.W. Stott, *Men Made New*, 72-73. A very serious objection to the view that the emphatic “I” is unregenerate is Cranfield’s position. He claims that the reason many would hold the position that the emphatic “I” is unregenerate is because of “the failure to grasp the full seriousness of the Christian’s obligation to express his gratefulness to God by the obedience of life” (C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary*, 169). Also, E. Palmer (*Salvation By Surprise: A Commentary on The Book of Romans*, 84) who claims that Rom 7:14-25 “sets the Christian person free from a tyranny, the tyranny of the presumption that I am flawless;” also K. Burbulyus who writes concerning the inner struggle that is recorded in Rom 7:14-25: “Sios kovos iki galo nepazista moralistai ir idealistai, o tik krikscionys,” and “Tikras krikscionis, esantis Vispaties maloneje, isoriskai ivykdo Istatyma, bet vidinai labai jaucia ta kova,” *Kas Slypi Sventojo Rasto Zodyje* (Vilnius, Lithuania: Apyausrio leidykla, 2002), 660.

<sup>55</sup> A. Nygren is in agreement. He states that “only that love which pronounces judgment on all that is not love is in the deepest sense a restoring and saving love,” A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper, 1969), 104.

<sup>56</sup> J.R.W. Stott, *Men Made New*, 72-73. See also: E. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 317. See also F.F. Bruce (*The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 43); C.E.B. Cranfield, (C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans; A Shorter Commentary*, 165); R. Haldane, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, 300; Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, (American Edition, eds.; J. Pelikan and H. Lehman, trans. W.A. Lambert; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1943), 451, 452). According to Luther, the cry of the emphatic “I” must be a Christian believer, because deep in the heart of the unregenerate, they hate the Law. J. Owen is in agreement with this position, J. Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 242. See also J. Owen, (*Gospel Grounds and Evidences of the Faith of God’s Elect* (Albany, Oregon: Sage Library, CD, 1996), 65); A. Murray (*Absolute Surrender* (Springdale: Whitaker House, 1981), 80). So also G. Ladd, *A Theology of The New Testament*, 131; T. Dubay is also in agreement. He writes concerning Teresa of Avila, “We find in these meetings with ‘His majesty’ an explanation of how and why St. Teresa viewed her sins with such horror. Tepid, lukewarm people consider this hatred for sin, even venial sin, as being a sentiment overblown by the saints, but that is because they know so little about what being in love is like. Mediocrity has little contact with infinite purity, goodness and love.” T. Dubay, *Fire Within*, 26; J.A. Beet *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to The Romans*, 212; W. Hulme, *Dealing With Double-Mindedness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 110; H. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 84; J. Stalker, *Life of Christ* (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1909), 44. Also P. Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 160. He further writes: “The justified please God on account of Christ, although sin still clings to them. He does not say that there is no sin in the pious, but no condemnation,” *Commentary on Romans*, 163; C. Allen, *God’s Psychiatry* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), 101. P. Rees writes: “Holiness is gift and grace. It casts out sin, yet leaves the heart of the one so cleansed unceasingly sure both of unworthiness and of disparity between it and the vision of God’s perfection,” *Triumphant in Trouble*, 38, 39; C. Sheldon, *In His Steps* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1988), 23; C. Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve* (Waco: Word Books, 1981), 173; T.M.



The emphatic “I” is not perfect. The cry of imperfection is the cry found throughout Rom 7. However, the emphatic “I” of Rom 7 desires to be holy, perfect and pleasing to God. The distance between the heart's cry of the emphatic “I” which is to be holy and pleasing to God, and the actual experiential experience of the emphatic “I” causes it to cry out in deep agony, “O Wretched Man.” This experiential condition of not being perfect causes the emphatic “I” much pain and agony. The emphatic “I” however, is not defeated or downtrodden by its experiential condition, even though its experiential condition is far from its righteousness in Christ and the desire of the life that is to please God in all things. It knows that Christ is its righteousness and that, as the Mystics say, God sees the person as their desire. The *Cloud of Unknowing* agrees with this when it says: “It is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with His all merciful eyes, but what you desire to be.”<sup>57</sup> The knowledge that Christ is the righteousness of the emphatic “I”, even though the experiential condition of the emphatic “I” is far from its righteousness in Christ, causes it to cry out in agony (Rom 7:24) and also in victory (Rom 7:25). The situation of the emphatic “I” is, at the same time, one of agony and of victory. It desires to be holy and pleasing to God, yet, the closer it grows to God, the clearer it sees itself, sees that its motives are mixed with self, sees that even in its best moments the emphatic “I” is infinitely far, experientially speaking, from God's actual righteousness. Packer says that “increased holiness means an increased sensitivity to what

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Rhodes, *Contemplating the Cross* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 12, 13; C. Swindoll, *Living Above The Level of Mediocrity* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 271; also P. Gräbe, *The Power of God in Paul's Letters*, 261; F. Tuoti, “Contemplative Prayer: Antidote for An Ailing Generation,” *Merton Annual* 16 (2003): 27-40; J.M. Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 67.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 146.

God is and hence a clearer estimate of one's own sinfulness."<sup>58</sup> The emphatic "I" is not satisfied with a declaration of being righteous. It desires to be experientially what it is in Christ, that is, to be experientially righteous. Paul states this also in Phlp 2:12, 13 where he exhorts the Philippians to "work out their salvation" because it is God in them enabling them to desire to be holy and to grow, i.e. to work out their salvation.

The cry of the emphatic "I" is the cry of a Christian believer who desires to be holy, but in growing closer to God realizes that it is, experientially, far from God's perfection.<sup>59</sup> This knowledge causes agonizing pain<sup>60</sup> to the emphatic "I". However, at the same time it cries out in agony<sup>61</sup> over its experiential distance from God's righteousness, it knows that "in Christ" (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 5:19; 2 Cor 5:21; Phlp 3:9; 1 Cor 1:2) it is actually righteous and one day knows that it will become in experience what it is "in

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<sup>58</sup> J.I. Packer, *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, 106. See also T. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 1996), A Monk of The Eastern Church, *Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 98.

<sup>59</sup> Those who claim that the cry "Wretched Man" is the cry of the unregenerate do not take into account F.F. Bruce's claim that "we have no evidence that Paul, before his conversion, suffered from an uneasy conscience" (F.F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 139). In fact, Paul's own statement is that as to righteousness which was found in the law, he was blameless (Phlp 3:6). There certainly is no uneasy conscience in Paul, according to Paul's own statement. Paul adds to his self-appraisal before his Christian conversion in Gal 1:14 where he claimed that he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries. Again, we find in Gal 1:14 no uneasy conscience regarding sin.

<sup>60</sup> K. Barth, (*Dogmatics In Outline*, (trans. G.T. Thomson, Phlposophical Library, New York, 1949), 150); K. Barth *The Word of God and The Word of Man* (trans. D. Horton; New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 317.

<sup>61</sup> E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation*, 292; R. Foster, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), 121; R. Coleman, *The New Covenant* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1984), 115; C. Miller, *Into the Depths of God* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2000), 32; J. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* (New Kensington, PA.: Whitaker House, 1993), 161-3; R. McGee, *The Search For Significance*, 116; V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of The Eastern Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 205; Bishop K. Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), 107; P. Yancy, *What's So Amazing About Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 273; H. Nouwen, *The Way Of The Heart*, 79; W. Hamilton, *The Christian Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 36; D. Bubna, *Building People* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1978), 152,153; G. MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* (New York: Oliver Nelson, 1986), 218.

Christ.”<sup>62</sup>

As has been shown in chapter 2 of this study, the order of Rom 5-8 is very descriptive of the conclusion that the “emphatic I” of Rom 7 is a Christian believer. Rom 5 discusses the fact of justification. Rom 6, following Rom 5’s discussion of justification, describe in detail the Christian believer’s freedom from sin, positionally in Christ. Rom 7, following Rom 6’s description of the freedom of Christian believers in Christ, describe the present experience of Christian believers. Although they have been freed from sin in Christ, they still are in unredeemed bodies. The fact that Christian believers, in this world, are still living in unredeemed bodies is further stated in Rom 8:23. Rom 8 then describes the ever more and more victorious life that can be lived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

While desiring to be holy, the emphatic “I” knows that experientially it is far from God's holiness.<sup>63</sup> The emphatic “I,” being a mature, Christian believer, as all people have,

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<sup>62</sup> R. Stedman writes that “It is in his spirit that he is made a slave to righteousness, while in his soul the struggle with sin goes on,” R. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory*, 231. See also H.A. Ironside, *Full Assurance* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1937), 80-84; J. Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 65 J. Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978), 48ff; A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, INC., 1982), 90, 102,105. J.D. Pentecost, *Designed To Be Like Him*, 79; K. Barth, *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, 317; G. MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (New York: Oliver Nelson, 1985), 153; L. Richards, *Remarriage: A Healing Gift From God*, 45; K. Strong, *All The Master’s Men* (Chappaqua, New York: Christian Herald Books, 1978), 54; C. Swindoll, *Strengthening Your Grip* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 196-197; D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (trans. R.H. Fuller; New York: Collier Books, 1963), 317; C. Swindoll *The Grace Awakening*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 232; J.O. Sanders, *Shoe—Leather Commitment*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 179; D. Hartman and D. Sutherland, *A Guidebook to Discipleship* (Irving, California: Harvest House Publishers, 1960), 59; C. Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 192; L. Richards, *Becoming One In The Spirit* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977), 67; V. Grounds, *Radical Commitment* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1984), 45; Major W.I. Thomas, *The Saving Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 149; D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (trans. J.W. Doberstein; New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 113; M. Cavit, *The Three Ways*, 67-70; K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 129; J.M. Bonino and N.O. Miguez, *That You May Have Life* (New York: The Mission Education and Cultivation Program Department for the Women’s Division of The General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church), 49; W. Hulme, *Dealing with Double-Mindedness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 110; R. Coleman, *The New Covenant* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1984), 115; R. Coleman, *Nothing To Do But Save Souls* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1990), 82.

<sup>63</sup> J.W. Shepherd, *The life and Letters of St. Paul*, 407. See also R. Austgen, *Natural Motivation in the Pauline Epistles*, 105. Also R.T. Kendall who is of the opinion that many “so called problems” in the

has learned ways of acting, relating, understanding, speaking and being by living in a family. These learned behaviors are for the most part “subconscious.” That is to say that the person will act in a way that reflects their family without “knowing” or “understanding.” Here is seen the cry of the emphatic “I” in Rom 7:15, where it was said that “what I do, I do not know or understand.”

Another of the subconscious reasons out of which people act and which “form” people is the cultural setting in which each and every person grows. Within a person's cultural environment is their particular family background, the “regional” culture in which they live and grow, the ethnic grouping to which they belong, the nation which they belong, the purpose for which they live their lives, the faith to which they have embraced, and decisions that they have made throughout their lives. These factors form, influence and are the “source” out of which people act and behave. As it has been stated in the discussion over family background, these factors also, are for the most part, “subconscious.” That is that they form, or influence, people without the individual's conscious realization. People act, behave, speak, possess and exhibit a multitude of many other behaviors, subconsciously, from these and other factors that they are not aware of.

A third “grouping” of “subconscious” factors that form, or influence, people is original sin. Every human being has been affected by original sin.<sup>64</sup> The effect that original sin has had on every human being is one of distortion, twisting, and depraving. This means that when people act, behave and live, they act out of a damaged being. The reality is that, apart from God, no one knows the extent of the damage that original sin

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lives of Christian believers are really a thorn in the flesh, which Kendall posits keeps Christian believers from far more serious problems, R.T. Kendall, *The Thorn In The Flesh* (Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma House, 2004), 216.

<sup>64</sup> For a detailed discussion of original sin, sin and consequences, see Chapter 2 of this study.

has caused in the heart, mind, and soul of people. Original sin also damages people differently. This is to mean that sin damages one person in one way and will damage another person in a different way. The particular individual is not fully aware of the damage done to him/her by original sin. Thus, when a person acts, behaves and lives, they act out of the damage done to them by original sin.

This distance from the desire of its own heart and its actual experiential condition causes the emphatic “I” deep pain. However, at the same time that the emphatic “I” cries out in deep pain because of its experiential distance from God's holiness, the emphatic “I” knows that, in Christ, it is actually righteous and this causes the emphatic “I” to cry out in victory.<sup>65</sup>

One of the main objections to the view that the emphatic “I” is a regenerate person is Paul’s description of being a slave under the power of sin. C.E.B. Cranfield’s position here is illuminating. He writes:

We ought to ask ourselves whether our inability to accept this expression as descriptive of a Christian is not perhaps the result of failure on our part to realize the full seriousness of the ethical demands of God’s law (or of the gospel). Are we not all of us too prone still to understand them legalistically, as did the young man who could say, ‘Master, all these things have I observed from my youth’ (Mark 10:20)? And is it not true that the more the Christian is set free from legalistic ways of thinking about God’s law and so sees more and more clearly the full splendour of the perfection towards which he is being summoned, the more conscious he becomes of his own continuing sinfulness, his stubborn all-pervasive egotism?<sup>66</sup>

As the literature shows, there is a remarkable consistency in the teaching and understanding that the closer a Christian believer gets to God, the more this Christian

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<sup>65</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *My Utmost For His Highest* (ed. J. Reimann; China, Discovery House Publishers, 1992), March 1 entry.

<sup>66</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *Romans, A Shorter Commentary*, 158.

believer is aware of his or her own sinfulness.<sup>67</sup> Paul, in the describing the experience of the emphatic “I” is describing a person who is becoming more and more aware of his or her own sinfulness. The teaching of the literature is in conformity with Paul, both in Rom 7 and in the wider Pauline Corpus, in describing a person who is growing closer to God.

*In the “painting” of the spiritual portrait of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7, the identity of the emphatic “I” has been reached. The conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the identity of the emphatic “I” is of a regenerate Christian believer, one who is growing ever closer and closer to God.*

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<sup>67</sup> The consistency in this understanding and teaching is seen in Protestant writers: J. Wesley amongst others, of the deeper life, Roman Catholic writers on the mystical life which concludes in the “spiritual marriage”/union with God and in the Orthodox writers on the mystical experience of union with God.