

## Excursus A – A Comparison of “total depravity”

A Reformed understanding of total depravity is given by L. Berkhoff. He says, “In view of its pervasive character, inherited pollution is called total depravity. This phrase is often misunderstood, and therefore calls for careful discrimination. Negatively, it does not imply: (1) that every man is as thoroughly depraved as he can possibly become; (2) that the sinner has no innate knowledge of the will of God, nor a conscience that discriminates between good and evil; (3) that sinful man does not often admire virtuous character and actions in others, or is incapable of disinterested affections and actions in his relations with his fellow-men; nor (4) that every unregenerate man will, in virtue of his inherent sinfulness, indulge in every form of sin; it often happens that one form excludes the other. Positively, it does indicate: (1) that the inherent corruption extends to every part of man's nature, to all the faculties and powers of both soul and body; and (2) that there is no spiritual good, that is, good in relation to God, in the sinner at all, but only perversion” (*Systematic Theology*, 246, 247).

Here follows Wesley's definition of total depravity. He writes that depravity means that all “are prone to all evil, averse to all good; insomuch that we are not only sick, but dead in trespasses and sins, till God breathes upon the dry bones and creates life by the fruit of his lips. Yea, suppose God has now thoroughly cleansed our heart and scattered the last remains of sin; yet how can we be sensible enough of our own helplessness, our utter inability to all good, unless we are every hour, yea, every moment, endued with power from on high? Who is able to do think one good thought, or to form one good desire, unless by that almighty power which works in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure?”“ (J. Wesley's sermon, *Of the Church*, Vol. 6, 398).

When comparing Berkhof and Wesley's definition of depravity, there is to be seen much that is the same, especially the fundamental understanding and teaching that without the grace of God, all people are not able to chose God or to desire to obey God's will. This inability to desire God is seen even clearer in Wesley's teaching on preventing grace. He writes that preventing grace is included in the “entire work of salvation from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory. If we take this in its utmost extent, it will include all that is wrought in the soul by what is termed natural conscience, but more properly preventing grace—all the drawings of the Father, the desires after God, if we yield to them, increase more and more—all that light wherewith the Son of God “enlightens every one that cometh into the world” showing every man to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with his God—all the conviction, which his spirit from time to time, works in every child of man, although it is true, the generality of men stifle

them as soon as possible and after a while forget or at least deny that they had them at all” (J. Wesley’s sermon, *Scripture Way of Salvation*, Vol. 6, 44). See also J. Wesley’s journal, June 28, 1740, Vol. 1, 280; Tuesday July 13, 1756, Vol. 2, 377; his sermon, *The Witness of the Spirit*, Vol. 5, 134; his sermon, *The means of Grace*, Vol. 5, 187; his sermon, *Sermon on the mount, Discourse 3*, Vol. 5, 9. 290, and his sermon, *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, Vol. 6, 509 where he says that preventing grace is the first desire to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will and the first transient conviction of having sinned against him.” In this same sermon J. Wesley says, concerning preventing grace, “that no man alive is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is more not natural; it is more properly called preventing grace,” 512.

## **Excursus B – Objections to Wesley’s doctrine of perfection**

I list only the objections to Wesley and not the objectors. The reason for this is that the objections and not the objectors to Wesley will undermine Wesley’s *perfection*. In addition, the objections that are raised against Wesley today are the same objections Wesley himself faced. Because the objections today are the same ones that Wesley himself faced and answered, what is important to this study is how Wesley answered these objections. If there are objections that nullify Wesley’s doctrine, then, this would shipwreck the comparison of Wesley’s *perfection* with the experience of the emphatic “I” of Rom 7. I will, in Wesley’s own words, list the objections and his answers to these objections. Here follows Wesley’s words:

“I proposed, in the second place, to answer some objections to this scriptural account of perfection. One common objection to it is, that there is no promise of it in the word of God. If this were so, we must give it up; we should have no foundation to build upon: For the promises of God are the only sure foundation of our hope. But surely there is a very clear and full promise that we shall all love the Lord our God with all our hearts. So we read, (Deut. xxx. 6,) ‘Then will I circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.’ Equally express is the word of our Lord, which is no less a promise, though in the form of a command: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind’ (Matt. xxii. 37). No words can be more strong than these; no promise can be more express. In like manner, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,’ is as express a promise as a command. 2. And indeed that general and unlimited promise which runs through the whole gospel dispensation, ‘will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts,’ turns all the commands into promises; and, consequently, that among the rest, ‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus’. The command here is equivalent to a promise, and gives us full reason to expect that he will work in us what he requires of us. 3. With regard to the fruit of the Spirit, the Apostle, in affirming, ‘the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance,’ does, in effect, affirm, that the Holy Spirit actually works love, and these other tempers, in those that are led by him. So that here also, we have firm ground to tread upon; this scripture likewise being equivalent to a promise, and assuring us

that all these shall be wrought in us, provided we are led by the Spirit. 4. And when the Apostle says to the Ephesians, (iv. 21-24,) ‘Ye have been taught, as the truth is in Jesus,’ — to ‘be renewed in the spirit of your mind’, and to ‘put on the new man, which is created after God’, — that is, after the image of God, — ‘in righteousness and true holiness’, he leaves us no room to doubt, but God will thus ‘renew us in the spirit of our mind’, and ‘create us anew’ in the image of God, wherein we were at first created: Otherwise it could not be said, that this is ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’. 5. The command of God, given by St. Peter, ‘Be ye holy, as he that hath called you is holy’, in all manner of conversation, implies a promise that we shall be thus holy, if we are not wanting to ourselves. Nothing can be wanting on God's part: As he has called us to holiness, he is undoubtedly willing, as well as able, to work this holiness in us. For he cannot mock his helpless creatures, calling us to receive what he never intends to give. That he does call us thereto is undeniable; therefore he will give it if we are not disobedient to the heavenly calling. 6. ‘The prayer of St. Paul for the Thessalonians, that God would ‘sanctify’ them throughout, and ‘that the whole of them, the spirit, the soul, and the body, might be preserved blameless’, will undoubtedly be heard on behalf of all the children of God, as well as of those at Thessalonica. Hereby, therefore, all Christians are encouraged to expect the same blessing from ‘the God of peace;’ namely, that they also shall be ‘sanctified throughout, in spirit, soul, and body;’ and that ‘the whole of them shall be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’. 7. But the great question is, whether there is any promise in Scripture that we shall be saved from sin. Undoubtedly there is. Such is that promise, (Psalm cxxx. 8,) ‘He shall redeem Israel from all his sins;’ exactly answerable to those words of the angel, ‘He shall save his people from their sins’. And surely ‘he is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God through him’. Such is that glorious promise given through the Prophet Ezekiel: (xxxvi. 25-27:) ‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them’. Such (to mention no more) is that pronounced by Zechariah, (Luke 1. 73-75) ‘The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies,’ (and such, doubtless, are all our sins,) ‘to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life’. The last part of this promise is peculiarly worthy of our observation. Lest any should say, ‘True, we shall be saved from our sins when we die’, that clause is remarkably added, as if on purpose to obviate this pretence, all the days

of our life. With what modesty then can any one affirm, that none shall enjoy this liberty till death? 8. 'But', say some, 'this cannot be the meaning of the words; for the thing is impossible. It is impossible to men: But the things impossible with men, are possible with God. Nay, but this is impossible in its own nature: For it implies a contradiction, that a man should be saved from all sin while he is in a sinful body'. Here is a great deal of force in this objection. And perhaps we allow most of what you contend for. We have already allowed that while we are in the body we cannot be wholly free from mistake. 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 needless fear or ill-grounded hope, unreasonable love or unreasonable aversion. But all this is no way inconsistent with the perfection above described. 9. You say, 'Yes, it is inconsistent with the last article: It cannot consist with salvation from sin.' I answer, It will perfectly well consist with salvation from sin, according to that definition of sin, (which I apprehend to be the scriptural definition of it,) a voluntary transgression of a known law. 'Nay, but all transgressions of the law of God, whether voluntary or involuntary, are sin': For St. John says, 'All sin is a transgression of the law'. True, but he does not say, All transgression of the law is sin. This I deny: Let him prove it that can. To say the truth, this is a mere strife of words. You say none is saved from sin in your sense of the word; but I do not admit of that sense, because the word is never so taken in Scripture. And you cannot deny the possibility of being saved from sin, in my sense of the word. And this is the sense wherein the word sin is over and over taken in Scripture. 'But surely we cannot be saved from sin, while we dwell in a sinful body.' A sinful body? I pray observe, how deeply ambiguous, how equivocal, this expression is! But there is no authority for it in Scripture: The word sinful body is never found there. And as it is totally unscriptural, so it is palpably absurd. For no body or matter of any kind, can be sinful: Spirits alone are capable of sin. Pray in what part of the body should sin lodge? It cannot lodge in the skin, nor in the muscles, or nerves, or veins, or arteries; it cannot be in the bones, any more than in the hair or nails. Only the soul can be the seat of sin. 10. 'But does not St. Paul himself say, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God?'' I am afraid the sound of these words has deceived many unwary souls; who have been told, Those words, they that are in the flesh, mean the same as they that are in the body. No; nothing less. The flesh, in this text, no more means the body than it does the soul. Abel, Enoch, Abraham, yea, all that cloud of witnesses recited by St. Paul in the eleventh of the Hebrews, did actually please God while they were in the body, as he himself testifies. The expression, therefore, here means neither more nor less than they

that are unbelievers, they that are in their natural state, they that are without God in the world.

11. But let us attend to the reason of the thing. Why cannot the Almighty sanctify the soul while it is in the body? Cannot he sanctify you while you are in this house, as well as in the open air? Can the walls of brick or stone hinder him? No more can these walls of flesh and blood hinder him a moment from sanctifying you throughout. He can just as easily save you from all sin in the body as out of the body. ‘But has he promised thus to save us from sin while we are in the body?’ Undoubtedly he has: For a promise is implied in every commandment of God: Consequently in that, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. For this and every other commandment is given, not to the dead, but to the living. It is expressed in the words above recited, that we should walk in holiness before him all the days of our life. I have dwelt the longer on this, because it is the grand argument of those that oppose salvation from sin; and also, because it has not been so frequently and so fully answered: Whereas the arguments taken from Scripture have been answered a hundred times over.

12. But a still more plausible objection remains, taken from experience; which is, that there are no living witnesses of this salvation from sin. In answer to this, I allow, (1.) That there are not many. Even in this sense, there are not many fathers. Such is our hardness of heart, such our slowness to believe what both the Prophets and Apostles have spoke, that there are few, exceeding few, true witnesses of the great salvation. (2.) I allow that there are false witnesses, who either deceive their own souls, and speak of the things they know not, or speak lies in hypocrisy. And I have frequently wondered, that we have not more of both sorts. It is nothing strange, that men of warm imaginations should deceive themselves in this matter. Many do the same with regard to justification: They imagine they are justified, and are not. But though many imagine it falsely, yet there are some that are truly justified. And thus though many imagine they are sanctified, and are not, yet there are some that are really sanctified. (3.) I allow that some who once enjoyed full salvation have now totally lost it. They once walked in glorious liberty, giving God their whole heart, rejoicing, evermore, praying without ceasing, and in every thing giving thanks. But it is past. They now are shorn of their strength, and become like other men. Yet perhaps they do not give up their confidence; they still have a sense of his pardoning love. But even this is frequently assaulted by doubts and fears, so that they hold it with a trembling hand

13. ‘Nay, this,’ say some pious and sensible men, ‘is the very thing which we contend for. We grant, it may please God to make some of his children for a time unspeakably holy and happy. We will not deny, that they may enjoy all the holiness and happiness which you speak of. But it is only for a time: God never designed that it should continue to their lives’ end. Consequently, sin is only suspended: It is not

destroyed.’ This you affirm. But it is a thing of so deep importance that it cannot be allowed without clear and cogent proof. And where is the proof? We know that, in general, the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He does not repent of any gifts which he hath bestowed upon the children of men. And how does the contrary appear, with regard to this particular gift of God? Why should we imagine, that he will make an exception with respect to the most precious of all his gifts on this side heaven? Is he not as able to give it us always, as to give it once? as able to give it for fifty years, as for one day? And how can it be proved, that he is not willing to continue this his loving kindness? How is this supposition, that he is not willing, consistent with the positive assertion of the Apostle? who, after exhorting the Christians at Thessalonica, and in them all Christians in all ages, to ‘rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in every thing give thanks, — immediately adds, (as if on purpose to answer those who denied, not the power, but the will of God to work in them,) ‘For this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus.’ Nay, and it is remarkable, that, after he had delivered that glorious promise, (such it properly is,) in the twenty-third verse, ‘The very God of peace shall sanctify you wholly: And the whole of you’, (so it is in the original,) the spirit, the soul, and the body, shall be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; he adds again, ‘Faithful is he that hath called you, who also will do it. He will not only sanctify you wholly, but will preserve you in that state until he comes to receive you unto himself.’ 14. Agreeably to this is the plain matter of fact. Several persons have enjoyed this blessing, without any interruption, for many years. Several enjoy it at this day. And not a few have enjoyed it unto their death, as they have declared with their latest breath; calmly witnessing that God had saved them from all sin till their spirit returned to God. 15. As to the whole of the objections taken from experience, I desire it may be observed farther, either the persons objected to have attained Christian perfection, or they have not. If they have not, whatever objections are brought against them strike wide of the mark. For they are not the persons we are talking of: Therefore, whatever they are or do is beside the question. But if they have attained it, if they answer the description given under the nine preceding articles, no reasonable objection can lie against them. They are superior to all censure; and every tongue that riseth up against them will they utterly condemn. 16. ‘But I never saw one,’ continues the objector, that answered my idea of perfection. It may be so. And it is probable (as I observed elsewhere) you never will. For your idea includes abundantly too much; even freedom from those infirmities which are not separable from a spirit that is connected with flesh and blood. But if you keep to the account that is given above, and allow for the weakness of human understanding, you may see at this day undeniable instances of genuine, scriptural perfection.

III. 1. It only remains, in the Third place, to expostulate a little with the opposers of this perfection. Now permit me to ask, Why are you so angry with those who profess to have attained this? and so mad (I cannot give it any softer title) against Christian perfection? — against the most glorious gift which God ever gave to the children of men upon earth? View it in every one of the preceding points of light, and see what it contains that is either odious or terrible; that is calculated to excite either hatred or fear in any reasonable creature. What rational objection can you have to the loving the Lord your God with all your heart? Why should you be afraid of it? Would it do you any hurt? Would it lessen your happiness, either in this world or the world to come? And why should you be unwilling that others should give him their whole heart? or that they should love their neighbors as themselves? — yea, as Christ hath loved us? Is this detestable? Is it the proper object of hatred? Or is it the most amiable thing under the sun? Is it proper to move terror? Is it not rather desirable in the highest degree? 2. Why are you so averse to having in you the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus? — all the affections, all the tempers and dispositions, which were in him while he dwelt among men? Why should you be afraid of this? Would it be any worse for you, were God to work in you this very hour all the mind that was in him? If not, why should you hinder others from seeking this blessing? or be displeased at those who think they have attained it? Is any thing more lovely? any thing more to be desired by every child of man? 3. Why are you averse to having the whole ‘fruit of the Spirit’ — ‘love, joy, peace, longsuffering, meekness, gentleness, fidelity, goodness, temperance?’ Why should you be afraid of having all these planted in your inmost soul? As against these ‘there is no law’, so there cannot be any reasonable objection. Surely nothing is more desirable, than that all these tempers should take deep root in your heart; nay, in the hearts of all that name the name of Christ; yea, of all the inhabitants of the earth. 4. What reason have you to be afraid of, or to entertain any aversion to, the being ‘renewed in the whole image of him that created you?’ Is not this more desirable than any thing under heaven? Is it not consummately amiable? What can you wish for in comparison of this, either for your own soul, or for those for whom you entertain the strongest and tenderest affection? And when you enjoy this, what remains but to be ‘changed from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord?’ 5. Why should you be averse to universal holiness, — the same thing under another name? Why should you entertain any prejudice against this, or look upon it with apprehension? whether you understand by that term the being inwardly conformed to the whole image and will of God, or an outward behaviour in every point suitable to that conformity. Can you conceive any thing more amiable than this? anything more desirable? Set prejudice aside, and surely you will desire to see it diffused over all the



earth. 6. Is perfection (to vary the expression) the being ‘sanctified throughout, in spirit, soul, and body?’ What lover of God and man can be averse to this, or entertain frightful apprehensions of it? Is it not, in your best moments, your desire to be all of a piece? — all consistent with yourself? — all faith, all meekness, all love? And suppose you were once possessed of this glorious liberty, would not you wish to continue therein? — to be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ? 7. For what cause should you that are children of God be averse to, or afraid of, presenting yourselves, your souls and bodies, as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God? — to God your Creator, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier? Can any thing be more desirable than this entire self-dedication to him? And is it not your wish that all mankind should unite in this reasonable service? Surely no one can be averse to this, without being an enemy to all mankind. 8. And why should you be afraid of, or averse to, what is naturally implied in this; namely, the offering up all our thoughts, and words, and actions, as a spiritual sacrifice to God, acceptable to him through the blood and intercession of his well beloved Son? Surely you cannot deny that this is good and profitable to men, as well as pleasing to God. Should you not then devoutly pray that both you and all mankind may thus worship him in spirit and in truth? 9. Suffer me to ask one question more. Why should any man of reason and religion be either afraid of, or averse to, salvation from all sin? Is not sin the greatest evil on this side hell? And if so, does it not naturally follow, that an entire deliverance from it is one of the greatest blessings on this side heaven? How earnestly then should it be prayed for by all the children of God! By sin I mean a voluntary transgression of a known law. Are you averse to being delivered from this? Are you afraid of such a deliverance? Do you then love sin that you are so unwilling to part with it? Surely no. You do not love either the devil or his works: You rather wish to be totally delivered from them; to have sin rooted out both of your life and your heart. 10. I have frequently observed, and not without surprise, that the opposers of perfection are more vehement against it when it is placed in this view, than in any other whatsoever. They will allow all you say of the love of God and man; of the mind which was in Christ; of the fruit of the Spirit; of the image of God; of universal holiness; of entire self-dedication; of sanctification in spirit, soul, and body; yea, and of the offering up of all our thoughts, words, and actions, as a sacrifice to God; — all this they will allow so ‘we will allow sin, a little sin, to remain in us till death.’ 11. Pray compare this with that remarkable passage in John Bunyan’s ‘Holy War’ When Immanuel, says he, ‘had driven Diabolus and all his forces out of the city of Mansoul, Diabolus preferred a petition to Immanuel, that he might have only a small part of the city. When this was rejected, he begged to have only a little room within the walls.’ ‘But’ Immanuel answered, ‘he should have no

place in it at all; no, not to rest the sole of his foot. Had not the good old man forgot himself? Did not the force of truth so prevail over him here as utterly to overturn his own system? — to assert perfection in the clearest manner? For if this is not salvation from sin, I cannot tell what is. 12. ‘No,’ says a great man, ‘this is the error of errors: I hate it from my heart. I pursue it through all the world with fire and sword.’ Nay, why so vehement? Do you seriously think there is no error under heaven equal to this? Here is something which I cannot understand. Why are those that oppose salvation from sin (few excepted) so eager, — I had almost said, furious? Are you fighting *pro aris et focis*? for God and your country? for all you have in the world? for all that is near and dear unto you? for your liberty, your life? In God's name, why are you so fond of sin? What good has it ever done you? what good is it ever likely to do you, either in this world, or in the world to come? And why are you so violent against those that hope for a deliverance from it? Have patience with us, if we are in an error; yea, suffer us to enjoy our error. If we should not attain it, the very expectation of this deliverance gives us present comfort; yea, and ministers strength to resist those enemies which we expect to conquer. If you could persuade us to despair of that victory, we should give over the contest. Now we are saved by hope: From this very hope a degree of salvation springs. Be not angry at those who are ‘*felices errore suo*, happy in their mistake’. Else, be their opinion right or wrong, your temper is undeniably sinful. Bear then with us, as we do with you; and see whether the Lord will not deliver us! whether he is not able, yea, and willing, to save them to the uttermost that come unto God through him” (Wesley’s sermon, *On Perfection*, Vol. 6, 415-424).

Thus, the objections that Wesley himself faced concerning his doctrine of *perfection* are listed and answered by Wesley himself. As it can be seen from Wesley himself, he found no validity in the objections, nor, according to Wesley, did the objections deny or disprove his teaching on *perfection*.

## Excursus C: Objectors to the Mystical teaching on the “Spiritual Marriage”

The objectors will not be listed. What is important is the objections themselves and not those who object. The reason for this is: it is the objections that may undermine the teaching concerning the *spiritual marriage*. T. Dubay summarizes these objections and offers a counter to these objections. I will quote T. Dubay for the purpose of giving these objections and his counters. He writes that “the most frequent objection bears on the *nada* doctrine, the drastic detachment taught by the Mystics. Death to one’s senses and desires is unhealthy if not impossible, it is said, ‘We understand better today that we can find God not in negation but in affirmation, joy and celebration. Mortification, penance and self-denial are considered to be of the old school, whereas an emphasis on delight and jubilation is more appealing nowadays.’ T. Dubay’s counter is: ‘People who argue against detachment and self-denial are perhaps unaware that they are simultaneously rejecting the same teaching found in the New Testament. Jesus lays it down that to be his disciple, anyone and everyone must ‘renounce *all* that he possesses, not just part or most of it (Luke 14:33). In Titus 2:12 we read that ‘what we have to do is give up *everything* that does not lead to God.’ Teresa and the Mystics ask not a whit more or less.”

The second objection concerns those who have “dabbled in Christian and oriental mysticisms and consider that they are more or less indistinguishable.”

His counter is that “an expert will not make this astonishing mistake of not recognizing the vast gulf between the two. Buddhist ‘contemplation’ is impersonal, not a love matter at all, whereas Christian mysticism is preeminently a profound personal love union with God.”

The third objection T. Dubay lists concerns the Teresian mansions: Those who make this objection claim that the Teresian mansions have psychological explanations.

“His counter is that the best response to these objections is experience, the experience of advanced contemplation” (*Fire Within*, 5-8).

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