

REPENTANCE AND “FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE” IN EARLY METHODIST REVIVAL

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Introduction

Methodism was a revival movement that sought the conversion of English society not only from Christian nominalism but also from its obliviousness to sin. Charles Wesley articulated this eloquently in a hymn on Jeremiah 8:9:

O would'st thou, Lord, reveal their sins,
And turn their joy to grief,
The world, the Christian world convince
Of damning unbelief.¹

Such concern was similar for John Wesley, who just like his brother, sought to convince “almost Christian” people of sin by calling them to repentance. It was for this reason that the doctrine of repentance has been integral to Methodism’s message and its development. But in order for repentance to be truly genuine, Wesley clarified that it has to produce fruits or what he called, “fruits meet for repentance” in the lives of those who have been convinced of sin. Therefore, his teachings on repentance and its resultant “fruits meet for repentance” provide a rich lens for understanding the Methodist revival. Accordingly, Methodist societies were, by and large, an extension of Wesley’s teaching on repentance as they were meant to provide the means to help those who have been awakened exhibit “fruits” that would validate their repentance. They were meant to help members assume a constant posture of repentance that would eventually lead them to experience justification and Christian perfection. Hence, in this essay, I will examine Wesley’s understanding of the role of repentance and use it as an interpretative lens on the Methodist revival. Additionally, we will pay close attention to his teaching on “fruits meet for repentance” to discern its role not only in helping shape practices in the Methodist societies but also in making it possible for early Methodists to advance from “faith to faith.”

The Methodist Revival and the Preaching of Repentance

The importance of the doctrine of repentance in early Methodism in England cannot be overstated. This is best illustrated in Wesley’s brief account of the beginnings of the revival in his

¹ Charles Wesley, *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1762), #1185, st. 3, 2:14. All Charles Wesley hymns used in this essay have been accessed from the website of The Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, Duke Divinity School, <http://www.divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/wesley-texts>. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Randy Maddox for making these available.

sermon during the dedication of the City Road Chapel in London in 1777 which was an abridged version of his account in Part III of *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1745). Wesley recalled:

Just at the time when we wanted little of ‘filling up the measure of our iniquities’, two or three clergymen of the Church of England began vehemently to ‘call sinners to *repentance*’. Many thousands gathered together to hear them; and in every place where they came many began to show such concern for religion as they never had done before. Many were in a short time deeply *convinced* of the number and heinousness of their sins, of their evil tempers, of their inability to help themselves, and of the insignificance of their outside religion. [emphases added].²

This is a brief summary of the beginnings of the Methodist revival with special emphasis given to the importance of the preaching of repentance and its results. Here, Wesley began his chronicle by highlighting the centrality of repentance in the preaching ministry of “three clergymen,” most likely referring to himself, his brother Charles, and George Whitefield, who labored “vehemently” to “call sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).³ It captures much of the essence of Methodist preaching at the onset of the revival just like the description of Charles preaching to more than a thousand people at the Brickfield in Bristol on September 17, 1739. As Joseph Williams of Kidderminster who was visiting Bristol at that time described in his journal: “I never heard any man discover such evident Signs of a vehement Desire, or labour so earnestly, to convince his Hearers that they were all by Nature in a sinful, lost, undone, damnable State; that, notwithstanding, there was a possibility of their Salvation, thro’ Faith in Christ....”⁴ Williams’ account essentially captures the relationship between Methodist preaching and its objective to “convince”—a dynamic that was also inherent in John Wesley’s more generalized narrative of the revival in the same dedication sermon we have indicated above. Charles, Williams recalled, preached to “convince” his hearers of their “damnable state” (total depravity) yet he balanced it with a hopeful message of salvation through justifying faith in Jesus. Methodist preaching, as William’s account shows, was meant to convince people not only of their sins but also of the availability of divine grace through Christ who makes salvation possible through faith. This was the reason why preaching was so integral to Methodist practice for it is the primary means whereby the

² John Wesley, Sermon 112, “On Laying the Foundation on the New Chapel,” II.5, in *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 586; cf. idem, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Part III (1745), I.4-5, in *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg, vol. 11 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 274-75. Hereafter, all citations taken from this edition shall be referred to as *Works*.

³ Wesley understood the primary objective of the ministry of preaching and that of Methodist preachers was to “call sinners to repentance.” See, for example, John Wesley, Sermon 104, “Prophets and Priests,” §17, in *Works*, 3:471; idem, Sermon 121, “Prophets and Priest,” §18, in *Works*, 4:586.

⁴ Quoted in Geoffrey F. Nuttall, “Charles Wesley in 1739 by Joseph Williams of Kidderminster,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 42 (December 1980): 183. For additional details, see Kenneth G. C. Newport and Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 30-31.

Holy Spirit conveys “convincing grace,” Wesley believed.⁵ Correspondingly, even in the examination of new lay preachers, the ability to convince unbelievers of sin and lead them to an experience of justification served as one of the criteria for confirming whether they were indeed led by the Holy Spirit and called by God. This was the intent at the Conference of 1746 when Wesley and his colleagues asked: “How shall we try those who think they are moved by the Holy Ghost, and called of God to preach?” Their corresponding answer was: “Inquire.... Are any truly convinced of sin and converted to God by their preaching?”⁶ To call people to repentance was undoubtedly a task not taken lightly in early Methodist preaching.

Accordingly, Wesley continued, as indicated from the same quote taken from his dedication sermon, that as he and his colleagues preached repentance: “Many were in a short time deeply *convinced* of the number and heinousness of their sins, of their evil tempers, of their inability to help themselves, and of the insignificance of their outside religion.”⁷ Hence, he defined such convinced state as “self-knowledge” or “awakening” as one is made aware or awakened by the Spirit regarding the gravity of his or her sin and the “danger of hell or damnation.”⁸ For, example, Wesley made this clear in his sermon, “The Way of the Kingdom” (1746):

This is the first repentance, previous to faith, even conviction, or self-knowledge. Awake, then, thou that sleepest. Know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art. Know that corruption of thy inmost nature, whereby thou are very far gone from original righteousness, whereby ‘the flesh lusteth’ always ‘contrary to the Spirit’, through that ‘carnal mind which is enmity against God’, which ‘is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be’. Know that thou art corrupted in every power, in every faculty of thy soul, that thou art totally corrupted in every one of these, all the foundations being out of course.⁹

It is also worth noting that the word “conviction” also appears here since, in addition to self-knowledge and awakening, conviction is another major theme in Wesley’s articulation of repentance. Such correlation between repentance and conviction is found in Part I of *A Farther Appeal*, particularly the last seven sections (VII.11–17), which contains Wesley’s response to “men of reason and religion” who accused him of driving his followers “mad.” Wesley sarcastically exclaimed: “It is my endeavour to drive all I can, into what you may term species of ‘madness’, which is usually preparatory to this, and which I term ‘repentance’ or ‘conviction.’”¹⁰ However, we

⁵ See Kenneth J Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 48–50. For Wesley’s use of the term, “convincing grace,” see John Wesley, Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” II.1, *Sermons III*, in *Works*, 3:204.

⁶ John Wesley, The ‘Large’ Minutes, A and B (1753, 1763), §52, in *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of the Conference*, ed. Henry C. Rack, vol. 10 of *Works*, 861.

⁷ Wesley, Sermon 112, “On Laying the Foundation on the New Chapel,” II.5, *Works*, 3:586.

⁸ Wesley borrowed the term “danger of hell or damnation” from the *Homilies*, Of Fasting, Pt. I. See John Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt. I (1745), VII.12, in *Works*, 11:197.

⁹ John Wesley, Sermon 7, “The Way of the Kingdom,” I.1–II.10, in *Works*, 1:251–60.

¹⁰ John Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt. I (1745), VII.12, in *Works*, 11:196.

must first clarify that Wesley rejected his detractors' use of the term "madness" to refer to the emotional outbursts or hysteria that accompanied his ministry. For in the section prior to the quotation in question (VII.11), Wesley defined it to mean "inward religion—to make them just as mad as Paul..." which he further elaborated in a manner consistent with his understanding of the sanctified life like "the trampling under foot all the pleasures of the world; the seeking no treasure but in heaven," among others.¹¹ Simply put, Wesley understood his mission to be that of "driving" people to "madness" or "inward religion" by calling them to repentance or conviction which is "preparatory to this ['madness' or 'inward religion']." Much will be said about the implications of repentance on the sanctified life in the next section of this paper, however.

Nevertheless, in the section following the quotation we have cited in the previous paragraph (VII.13), Wesley did respond to the criticism that he was driving his followers "mad." He instead referred to what they called "madness" as "*extraordinary* circumstances" that accompanied his preaching and directly associated them with people who were experiencing deep conviction. He recalled:

I grant, thirdly, that *extraordinary* circumstances have attended this conviction in some instances. While the Word of God was preached some persons have dropped down as dead; some have been as it were, in strong convulsions; some roared aloud, though not with an articulate voice; and others spoke the anguish of their souls.¹²

From Wesley's perspective, such "extraordinary" occurrences accompanied "in some instances" the conviction that resulted from the preaching of repentance. His journal entries are full of similar accounts of individuals who fell down or "sunk down" to the ground, in deep agony or despair, groaning, shouting, shaking, having fits, convulsions, and visions, among others. The first of these appear in his journal beginning January 1739 and onwards.¹³ But, as Bernard Holland claims in his "A Species of Madness: The Effect of John Wesley's Preaching" (1973), these occurrences waned after a "few years in Wesley's evangelical ministry" when he began to relax his admonition that only those who have justifying faith are accepted by God. Holland argues that such occurrences were not the results of Wesley's call for repentance but rather his impassioned insistence that they seek after the gift of justifying faith, thereby driving them to deep despair and, consequently, to hysterical outbursts. Incidentally, this was what differentiated Wesley's preaching from that of Charles' and Whitefield's which were less susceptible to these types of occurrences. But these eventually "ceased," Holland claims, when Wesley began to

¹¹ Ibid., VII.11, 11:196.

¹² Ibid., VII.13, 11:197.

¹³ The first instance of such occurrences in Wesley's ministry took place on January 21, 1739, while he was preaching in the Minories in London when a "well-dressed, middle-aged woman suddenly cried out, as in the agonies of death." See John Wesley, January 21, 1739, *Journals and Diaries II (1738-43)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, vol. 19 of *Works*, 215. This is, however, predated by an account of William Delamotte's experience of assurance on July 1738 which was preceded by a period of despair and a "violent agony" which lasted for four hours. Wesley added this to his journal entry on December 5, 1738. See Wesley, December 5, 1738, *Journals and Diaries II (1738-43)*, in *Works*, 19:24-26.

gradually soften his views on the matter as early as 1746 and, ultimately, when he conceded in his sermon, “On Faith” in 1767 that persons “who fear God and work righteousness” or who groan after justifying faith are already accepted by God.¹⁴

I should note, however, that Holland seems to ignore the persistence of “extraordinary circumstances” in Wesley’s journal beyond 1746 or 1767.¹⁵ While they may have certainly decreased in frequency in relation to Wesley’s own ministry,¹⁶ he, nevertheless, carefully reprinted reports from preachers or letters from individuals in the midst of revival and transcribed testimonies from people containing such accounts.¹⁷ Also, Holland’s argument about Wesley driving people to hysteria for pressing them to seek justifying faith needs further study because it simply assumes them to be the results of fear and despair and does not take into consideration other emotions like love and joy which are also present in some accounts.¹⁸ But most importantly, it does not consider other elements in Wesley’s soteriology, like repentance and the yearning for assurance or entire sanctification as possible reasons for such outbursts. For repentance, in particular, we cannot separate a person’s search for justifying faith from repentance since in most, if not all, of the narratives of such cases an experience of justification has always been preceded by a period of deep conviction. While Holland’s thesis begs further investigation, it nevertheless compels us to think deeper about the dynamics between repentance and the quest for justifying faith during the revival. Hence, let us bring up an example to demonstrate not only the persistence

¹⁴ Bernard G. Holland, “A Species of Madness’: The Effect of John Wesley’s Preaching,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 39 (October 1973): 83–84. See also, John Wesley, Sermon 106, “On Faith,” L.10–13, in *Works*, 3:497–98. There has been considerable discussion between Kenneth Collins and Randy Maddox on Wesley’s understanding of “faith of a servant.” See Kenneth J. Collins, “Other Thoughts on Aldersgate: Has the Conversionist Paradigm Collapsed?,” *Methodist History* 30, no. 1 (October 1991): 13–20; Randy L. Maddox, “Continuing the Conversation,” *Methodist History* 30, no. 4 (July 1992): 237–41; Kenneth J. Collins, “A Reply to Randy Maddox,” *Methodist History* 31, no. 1 (October 1992): 51–53.

¹⁵ For accounts of such manifestations while Wesley was preaching or was present, see, for example, John Wesley, May 7, 1750, *Journals and Diaries III (1743-54)*, in *Works*, 20:335; idem, July 15, 1759, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:209; idem, August 4, 1759, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:222–23; idem, June 28, 1769, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:192; idem, August 7, 1772, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:345; idem, April 5, 1782, *Journals and Diaries VI (1776-86)*, in *Works*, 23:235; idem, September 8, 1784, *Journals and Diaries VI (1776-86)*, in *Works*, 23:330–31; idem, May 27, 1789, *Journals and Diaries VII (1787-91)*, in *Works*, 24:138; idem, June 6, 1789, *Journals and Diaries VII (1787-91)*, in *Works*, 24:140–41.

¹⁶ Wesley offered an explanation for this in his journal entry on August 4, 1759: “I preached at eight on ‘The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God.’ The whole congregation was earnestly attentive. But not above one or two cried out. And I did not observe any that fainted away, either then or in the morning. I have generally observed more or less of these outward symptoms to attend the beginning of a general work of God. So it was in New England, Scotland, Holland, Ireland, and many parts of England. But after a time they gradually decrease, and the work goes on more quietly and silently.” See Wesley, August 4, 1759, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:223.

¹⁷ See, for example, Wesley, May 28, 1759, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:195–200; idem, May 20, 1759, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:195–200; idem, July 29, 1759, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:211–21; idem, February 16, 1760, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:240–41; idem, October 1, 1763, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:429–33; idem, June 4–5, 1772, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:329–327.

¹⁸ See, for example, see Wesley, August 4, 1759, *Journals and Diaries IV (1755-65)*, in *Works*, 21:222–23.

of these “extraordinary circumstances” but also to examine how Wesley’s understanding of repentance played out in these narratives.

This is found in Wesley’s detailed account of a revival that broke out among the children and maids at the Kingswood School on September 18, 1770, which also seems to show that even after 1767, Wesley and his preachers still continued to press those who have been awakened to “never rest” until they had justifying faith.¹⁹ Three days prior, Wesley had observed “a very uncommon concern” among the children while he was “explaining and enforcing upon them” repentance and justifying faith or what he described in his journal entry as, “the first principles of religion.”²⁰ Somehow the principles Wesley had taught them, further reinforced by their visit to the funeral of a neighbor who died days earlier, caused the boys to despair about the state of their souls that it drove them to break out into loud spontaneous prayers and violent cries in the days and nights that followed. The atmosphere of conviction was so intense that even the maids who worked at the school were deeply affected by it. In lieu of his own entry for the 26th, Wesley instead posted the following report from Thomas Rankin:

The next morning, I spent some time with all the children and then desired those who were resolved to save their souls to come upstairs with me. I went up, and nine of the children followed me, who said they were ‘determined to flee from the wrath to come’. *I exhorted them never to rest till they found peace with God and then sung and prayed.* The power of God came down in so wonderful a manner that my voice was drowned by their cries. When I concluded, one of them broke out into prayer in a manner that quite astonished me. And during the whole day, a peculiar spirit of seriousness rested on all the children.

After spending some time in the school on Friday, I desired those I had spoke to the day before to follow me, which they did, and one more. *I pressed each of them severally not to rest till he had a clear sense of the pardoning love of God.* I then prayed, and the Lord poured out his Spirit as the day before, so that in a few minutes my voice could not be heard amidst their cries and groans [emphasis added].²¹

Undoubtedly, such outbursts persisted even after thirty years of the Methodist revival as the above description illustrates. It also captures the pattern for Wesley’s narratives on individuals who were awakened, convicted, and eventually justified or, as he often described as, having “found peace with God” or having “the pardoning love of God.” If we were to interpret the narrative through the lens of Wesley’s understanding of repentance, the children were in an awakened or convinced state as they confessed their determination “to flee from the wrath to come,” repeating a very common expression denoting repentance in Methodist circles which we will discuss in the next section. Consequently, Rankin’s encouragement for them to “never to rest till they found peace with God” was an admonition for them to continue in repentance until they receive a “clear

¹⁹ Wesley, September 26, 1770, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22: 250–54.

²⁰ *Ibid*, September 16, 1770, 249–50. Wesley used the term, “the first principles” eight times in his journal, quoting Hebrews 5:12; 6:1, to refer to the teaching of repentance and faith. See, for example, July 20, 1788, *Journals and Diaries VII (1787-91)*, in *Works*, 24:103; October 7, 1789, *Journals and Diaries VII (1787-91)*, in *Works*, 24:157.

²¹ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1770, 251–52.

sense” or assurance of justification. Accordingly, many of the boys and all the maids persisted as instructed for the next few days until the evening of the 29th when “not having been used to so long and violent speaking,” they “were worn out as to bodily strength and so hoarse that they were scarce able to speak.” Yet, the same evening also marked the end of their struggle when they finally received justifying faith or as the preacher described, were “strong in the Spirit, full of love, and of joy and peace in believing.” The next day most of them partook of the Lord’s Supper for the first time.²²

The account from Kingswood appears to fit Methodist expectations of repentance as an intervening period that culminates in a decisive experience of justification made possible by justifying faith. While Wesley recognized that such intervening period of repentance may be shorter for some people especially during outbreaks of revivals like the one in Kingswood and elsewhere,²³ he also assumed that the normative period for repentance prior to justifying faith may be longer. For instance, Wesley’s own quest for justifying faith as a result of his encounter with the Moravians in Georgia lasted two years until he “felt his heart strangely warmed” on May 24, 1738.²⁴ Other similar testimonies from individuals he accounted for in his journal and his other writings show a mixture of both shorter and longer intervening periods between awakening and justifying faith. Nevertheless, such concept is very much foreign to today’s popular evangelical culture wherein the process of repentance has been short-circuited or ritualized in the form of the altar call or the “sinner’s prayer” which reduces the period of repentance to minutes.²⁵ Perhaps, we could learn from Wesley’s conception of such intervening period through a process he termed, “fruits meet for repentance” or, as Charles Wesley called them, “penitential fruits.”²⁶ These fruits played an important role in the way the Methodist societies were shaped.

“Fruits Meet For Repentance” and the Methodist Societies

Returning to our analysis of Wesley’s narrative of the Methodist revival in his sermon during the dedication of City Road Chapel, it is important for us to quote the final sentences immediately following the quotation we have cited at the beginning of the previous section:

And from this *repentance* sprung ‘*fruits meet for repentance*’: the whole form of their life was changed. They ‘ceased to do evil, and learned to do well’. Neither was this all; but over and

²² Ibid., September 28-29, 1770, 252-54.

²³ See Wesley’s conclusions based on his comparison of the revivals in Everton and Weardale. See Wesley, June 5, 1772, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:335-36.

²⁴ See Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 64-67, 81-91. I am cognizant of the different interpretations of Wesley’s Aldersgate experience. See Randy L. Maddox, “Aldersgate: A Tradition History,” in *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), 133-43.

²⁵ Holland makes a similar point regarding justifying faith. See Holland, “A Species of Madness,” 80.

²⁶ For the term “penitential fruits,” see Charles Wesley, MS Luke, 42. Methodist Archive and Research Centre, accession number MA 1977/575 (Charles Wesley Notebooks Box 3).

above this outward change they began to experience *inward religion*. ‘The love of God was shed abroad in their hearts,’ which they enjoy to this day. They ‘love him, because he first loved us’; and this love constrains them to love all mankind, and inspires them with every holy and heavenly temper, with the mind which was in Christ. Hence it is that they are now uniform in their behaviour, unblameable in all manner of conversation, and in whatsoever state they are, they have learned therewith to be content. Thus they calmly travel on through life, never repining, or murmuring, or dissatisfied, till the hour comes that they shall drop this covering of earth, and return to the Father of spirits [emphasis added].²⁷

Wesley further elaborated on the conviction experienced by their hearers. For as he and the others preached repentance, he noted that those who have been “convinced” by their preaching began to show “fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8, Luke 3:8) which he summarized through the following results: 1) they “ceased to do evil,” 2) they “learned to do well,” and 3) compelled by the love of God, they began to “love all mankind” and endeavored to become more like Christ or live a life of holiness. By outlining these three, it is without a doubt that Wesley was alluding to practices commonly observed by the members of the Methodist societies known as the General Rules of the united societies.

When Wesley issued *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies* in early 1743, he wrote that the “one only condition” required for membership in a Methodist society was “a desire to flee from the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7, Luke 3:7) to specifically refer to those who have been awakened during the revival. As masses of people responded to their preaching, Wesley saw them as having moved from spiritual sleep or the “natural state” to spiritual awakening or the “legal state.”²⁸ Such awakened state, Wesley taught, was just an initial step in a person’s path towards genuine conversion or prior to receiving the gift of justifying faith in Jesus Christ. Hence, in the General Rules he explained that whenever such awakening took place it will manifest through the following “fruits” or “evidences manifesting their desire for salvation,” namely: 1) “By doing no harm,” 2) “By doing good,” and 3) “By attending upon all the ordinances of God.”²⁹ What is worth pointing here, though, is that the first two “fruits” or General Rules bear striking resemblance to two of the fruits meet for repentance mentioned in Wesley’s inauguration sermon as we have pointed out in the previous paragraph and used by Wesley in his other writings.³⁰ But as for the third Rule, “attending upon all the ordinances of God,” it appears to bear no similarity to his description of the third fruit in the chapel inauguration sermon. Nevertheless, it is implicit

²⁷ Wesley, Sermon 112, “On Laying the Foundation on the New Chapel,” II.5, in *Works*, 3:586–87.

²⁸ For the terms “natural state” and “legal state,” see Wesley, Sermon 9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” I.1–II.10, *Sermons I*, in *Works*, 1:251–60; Charles Wesley, Sermon 3, “Awake Thou That Sleepest,” I.1, *Sermons I*, in *Works*, 1:142.

²⁹ John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle Upon Tyne” (1743), II.4, in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, *Works*, 9:70–72.

³⁰ For other writings, see, for example, Wesley, Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” III.2, *Sermons II*, in *Works*, 2:162–63; idem, Sermon 9, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” III.2, *Sermons II*, in *Works*, 2:315.

that the experience of “the love of God shed abroad in their hearts” which constrained the awakened to “love all mankind” and walk in holiness would certainly only take place within the context of their “attending upon the ordinances of God.” For it is only through the practice of the different ordinances or means of grace outlined in the third General Rule that they will increase in the knowledge and experience of God’s love or “inward religion.” Just like in our discussion in the previous section, “inward religion” here refers to the blessings of the sanctified life. Also, there are other places where Wesley’s definition of fruits meet for repentance included participation in the “ordinances of God” thereby bringing it much closer to the General Rules. For instance, in Part I of *A Farther Appeal*, the connections to the three rules are undeniably clear:

By repentance, I mean conviction of sin, producing real desires and sincere resolutions of amendment; and by “fruits meet for repentance” forgiving our brother, *ceasing from evil, doing good, using the ordinances of God*, and in general obeying him according to the measure of grace which we have received [emphasis added].³¹

Hence, given the General Rules’ direct correlation with “fruits meet for repentance,” we can safely assume that the societies were meant to provide the means to help those who have been awakened practice genuine repentance. They were intended to help participants assume a posture of repentance as they observed the rules and participated in the various activities of the societies.³² But the societies were not merely meant to serve as communes for penitents, though. For Wesley, the posture of repentance that the rules promote would eventually enable its participants to receive the gift of justifying faith that will result in their justification. In his sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), Wesley reminded: “God does undoubtedly command us both to repent and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; which if we willingly neglect we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all. Therefore both repentance and fruits meet for repentance are in some sense necessary to justification.” But in comparison to justifying faith, he also quickly cautioned, “they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree” reasoning that “fruits are only necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them.”³³ Wesley understood repentance precedes justifying faith while also acknowledging that it is justifying faith that justifies.

In *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained* (1746), Wesley defined repentance as the “porch of religion” that precedes the “door” of faith.³⁴ In another sermon, he equated it to humility or fulfilling the beatitude “poor in Spirit” that prepares the awakened to receive the gift

³¹ Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Part I (1745), I.2, *Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, in *Works*, 11:274–75.

³² See Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 157–58.

³³ John Wesley, Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” III.2, *Works*, 2:162.

³⁴ John Wesley, “The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained” (1746), VI.4, in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, *Works*, 9:227.

of faith.³⁵ The preparatory role of repentance, however, appears to be only implicit in Wesley's writings. Nevertheless, his brother Charles made such understanding much more explicit in a verse he wrote as a commentary to Luke 3:4 which defines the mission of John the Baptist as to "prepare ye the way of Lord":

A ready way repentance makes
For God to man, and man to God,
The sinner who his sin forsakes,
Shall feel applied th' atoning blood,
The broken heart shall take Him in
Who comes to save the lost from sin.³⁶

In using the text from Luke, Charles was unmistakably drawing some parallels between the stated mission of John and repentance and between Jesus and justification. As John prepared the way for Jesus, repentance, on the other hand, prepares us for justification.

But for John Wesley, justifying faith, made possible through repentance and its consequent fruits, is only the beginning. While he acknowledged that repentance is antecedent to faith, he also recognized its significance subsequent to faith by stressing its necessity for a person's journey from "faith to faith" (Rom. 1:17) or, as Wesley implied, from justifying faith to sanctifying faith.³⁷ This was the primary premise of Wesley's sermon, "The Repentance of Believers" (1767):

But notwithstanding this, there is also a repentance and a faith [sanctifying faith] (taking the words in another sense, a sense not quite the same, nor yet entirely different) which are requisite after we have 'believed the gospel'; yea, and in every subsequent stage of our Christian course, or we cannot 'run the race which is set before us'. And this repentance and faith [sanctifying faith] are full as necessary, in order to our continuance and growth in grace, as the former faith [justifying faith] and repentance were in order to our entering into the kingdom of God.³⁸

For Wesley, the repentance and sanctifying faith subsequent to justification parallels the repentance and justifying faith prior to justification. These, he asserted, "are full as necessary, in order to our continuance and growth in grace" meaning, our growth towards entire sanctification. Again, in his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Wesley, however, clarified that this

³⁵ See John Wesley, Sermon 21, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, I" I.4, *Sermons I*, in *Works*, 1:477-78. See also idem, *Sermons II*, in *Works*, 2:162-63; idem, Sermon 44, "Original Sin," III.3, *Sermons II*, in *Works*, 2:184; idem, "Circumcision of the Heart," I.2, *Sermons I*, in *Works*, 1:403.

³⁶ Charles Wesley, MS Luke, st. 2, 39.

³⁷ See, for example, Wesley, Sermon 1, "Salvation By Faith," II.7, *Sermons I*, in *Works*, 1:336; idem, Sermon 14, "The Repentance of Believers," II.4, *Sermons I*, in *Works*, 1:348; idem, Sermon 36, "The Law Established Through Faith, II," III.6, *Sermons II*, in *Works*, 2:43. Later, Wesley expanded this by including the "faith of a servant" that moves to the "faith of a son." The faith of a servant is the faith of the awakened who hasn't reached justifying faith yet. See John Wesley, Sermon 117, "The Discoveries of Faith," §14, *Sermons IV*, in *Works*, 4:35.

³⁸ Wesley, Sermon 14, "The Repentance of Believers," §3, in *Works*, 1:336.

repentance subsequent to justification is “widely different” to the repentance antecedent to it because it “implies no guilt, no sense of condemnation, no consciousness of the wrath of God.” He added: “It is properly a conviction wrought by the Holy Ghost of the ‘sin’ which still ‘remains’ in our heart... of our proneness to evil, of an heart ‘bent to backsliding’, of the still continuing tendency of the ‘flesh’ to ‘lust against the Spirit’.”³⁹ Hence, for Wesley, the repentance subsequent to justification is a deeper level of repentance, one that directly addresses the sinful nature and, accordingly, allows us to yearn for entire sanctification. This yearning was certainly not lost on Charles as shown in two verses of his hymn on 1 John 1:9:

Wherefore thy goodness we implore
 A deeper sense of sin to give,
 That small in our own eyes, and poor
 We may thy richest grace receive
 May always in thy Son abide,
 May always feel his blood applied.

Soon as we every moment feel
 Ourselves vile nothings in thy sight,
 In Christ we every moment dwell
 Blameless we walk with Him in white,
 His perfect purity retain,
 And never soil our robes again.⁴⁰

Charles’ prayer to “always” abide in Christ and to “always” avail of his forgiveness illustrates the constancy of repentance in the Christian life. Simply put, we will never outgrow our need for repentance. We will constantly need to be in repentance and this becomes much more evident as we discern the full ramifications of “fruits meet for repentance.” Since there is repentance subsequent to justification it also naturally follows that there be fruits meet for repentance subsequent to justification. This, I believe, was implicitly codified in the General Rules because, obviously, members of the Methodist societies were still subject to the General Rules even after they have experienced justification. They were still expected to continue producing fruits meet for repentance—to continue to do no harm, do good and attend upon the different means of grace. But as fruits meet for repentance *prior* to justification prepares the awakened for justification, the fruits meet for repentance *after* justification, on the other hand, prepares the justified for entire sanctification. Again, in “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley described how this can take place in the lives of the justified:

From the time of our being ‘born again’ the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled ‘by the Spirit’ to ‘mortify the deeds of the body’, of our evil nature. And as we

³⁹ Wesley, Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” III.8, *Works*, 2:164.

⁴⁰ Charles Wesley, MS Scriptural Hymns (1783) NT, st. 3–4, 50. Methodist Archive and Research Centre, accession number MA 1977/576 (Charles Wesley Notebooks Box 3).

are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We go on from grace to grace, while we are careful to ‘abstain from all appearance of evil’, and are ‘zealous of good works’, ‘as we have opportunity, doing good to all men’; while we walk in all his ordinances blameless, therein worshipping him in spirit and in truth; while we take up our cross and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead us to God.⁴¹

Here is one of the few places where Wesley placed the quest for entire sanctification in direct proximity to “fruits meet for repentance.” For him, entire sanctification becomes possible when we, enabled by the Holy Spirit, cultivate “fruits meet for repentance,” that is, “abstain from all appearance of evil,” “zealous of good works,” and “while we walk in all his ordinances” as we “take up our cross and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead us to God” or what Wesley referred to in the *Minutes* of the 1745 Conference as part of the “general means of grace.”⁴² Hence, Methodists were expected to constantly bear fruits that witness to their repentance for it was this posture of repentance that allowed faith to flourish among them from “faith to faith.”

Such advancement in faith can be discerned in the way early Methodists moved through stages of the Christian life as they bear the necessary fruits meet for repentance mostly within the context of the Methodist societies.⁴³ This was especially true of the third General Rule of “attending upon the ordinances of God” which mostly pertain to specific activities like preaching and chapel services, class meetings, band meetings, quarterly meetings, love feasts, prayer meetings, fasting, and the Lord’s Supper. In his journal, for example, Wesley reported, copied or transcribed testimonies of Methodists who have been awakened initially and later experienced justifying faith during one of the society activities like class meetings, love feasts, and prayer meetings.⁴⁴ This even persisted even through the early nineteenth century in the class meetings. William Dean confirms this based from his survey of memoirs and diaries of individuals born before 1800 “whilst only a handful record conversions without such a background, and none record conversion in the context of a preaching or chapel service.”⁴⁵ Additionally, there were also accounts of Methodists who have experienced entire sanctification through class meetings, prayer meetings, and fasting.⁴⁶ However, as for the first two General Rules of “doing no harm” and “doing good,” I have to admit

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I.8, 2:160.

⁴² For more on the general means of grace, see Andrew C. Thompson, “The Practical Theology of the General Rules,” *The Asbury Journal* 68, no. 2 (2013): 17.

⁴³ The relationship between Wesley’s soteriology and early Methodist structure and practices is found in Thomas R. Albin, “‘Inwardly Persuaded’: Religion of the Heart in Early British Methodism,” in *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. Richard B. Steele (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 33–66.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Wesley, March 6, 1760, *Journals and Diaries IV*, in *Works*, 21:243–45; *idem*, August 3, 1762, *Journals and Diaries IV*, in *Works*, 21:382–83; *idem*, August 1, 1767, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:96; *idem*, February 18, 1769, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:171; *idem*, October 24, 1774, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:432–33; *idem*, September 5, 1773, *Journals and Diaries V (1765-75)*, in *Works*, 22:388.

⁴⁵ William D. Dean, “The Methodist Class Meeting: The Significance of Its Decline,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 63 (December 1981): 44–45.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Wesley, February 16, 1760, *Journals and Diaries IV*, in *Works*, 21:240–41; June 6, 1763, *Journals and Diaries IV*, in *Works*, 21:382–83.

that it is no easy task to identify testimonies on the experience of justifying faith or sanctifying faith through either one of the two. Perhaps, this would be a good premise for further investigation of the subject.

Summary and Conclusion

We have examined Wesley's teaching on repentance and established its value as an interpretative lens on the Methodist revival. Wesley associated repentance with awakening or conviction as one is deeply convinced of the gravity of one's own sins and the danger of damnation. Accordingly, the awakened goes through an intervening period of repentance that culminates in a decisive moment of justification through God's gift of justifying faith. Such understanding fits very well with many accounts of "extraordinary" outbursts in Wesley's journal and helps explain them. While Wesley recognized such intervening period of repentance to be shorter especially in times of revival outbreaks, he also assumed that the normative path between repentance and justifying faith might be longer. This is substantiated by the fact that he insisted that for repentance to be truly genuine, it must produce fruits meet for repentance in the life of the awakened.

Since we have established the correlation of fruits meet for repentance to Wesley's General Rules to the Methodist societies, we can conclude that it was Wesley's intention for the societies to help its members assume a posture of humility through repentance that will enable them to receive the gift of justifying faith. Wesley understood repentance as preparatory for justification but it does not end there. Although he saw it as antecedent to justification, he also believed it to be subsequent to it, therefore, emphasizing the constancy of repentance in the Christian life to enable the penitent to advance from faith to faith. This is self-evident in the persistence of fruits meet for repentance or the applicability of the General Rules after justification to prepare the justified for Christian perfection. Consequently, we have attempted, albeit briefly, to ascertain whether the observance of fruits meets for repentance via the three General Rules did enable Methodists to advance from faith to faith. We did determine the existence of accounts in early Methodism and recent scholarship that supports the efficacy of repentance to enable experiences of justification or entire sanctification via the third General Rule. However, I have to concede that doing the same for the first two General Rules will prove to be much more challenging and, therefore, must be set aside for future research.

While acknowledging that much is yet to be done, we still need to ask, what can we learn from this study? I believe it teaches us that there can be no revival, in the Methodist sense of the word, without genuine repentance and fruits meet for repentance. The call for repentance and its constancy in the Christian life was integral to early Methodist identity. As Wesley and his associates preached free grace or the universality of the gospel of Christ, they also called on people to respond to it through repentance. The offer of free grace to all people also came with the understanding that God's convincing grace through the Holy Spirit enables human response through repentance. They believed repentance prepares people for God's gifts of justifying faith

and sanctifying faith. Hence, whenever we think of programs intended for the renewal of the church there must be space for repentance. Our discipleship programs must be designed with Wesley's fruits meet for repentance in mind. For we cannot help people grow from faith to faith without providing the means for them to assume a posture of self-awareness and humility through repentance. Perhaps, this is the only way we can truly live out the spirit of the General Rules for our time.