The Almost Christian

A summary of John Wesley's sermon by Rev. Dr. Brett Opalinski,
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On July 25, 1741, as a former student and fellow at Oxford, John Wesley took his turn preaching at St. Mary's, the University church. In his journal, Wesley described the service as being well attended, in fact one of the largest gatherings he had seen. However, Wesley was unclear of the reasons people turned out. Some perhaps clamored to hear the young preacher leading a revival movement that rankled the religious higher ups. Others were certainly present simply because it was expected. Still others were, no doubt, critics, looking for fodder to strengthen their critique.

The sermon he preached that day, *The Almost Christian*, was a challenge to all who were willing to hear. It called for disciples to grow deeper than being surface level Christians, simply believing the right things, doing the religious rituals and practices, but neglecting transformation of heart and life. Wesley was coming to define Christian maturity as *having the love of God shed abroad in one's heart.*[1] Those who settled for anything less were settling for an "almost" version of Christianity.

His sermon that day implicitly and explicitly challenged a form of Christianity that settled for being safe, comfortable, privileged, and static. Rather, Wesley sought a faith where a person was constantly growing in love of God and neighbor, and their way of life was thereby transformed. This is the Christianity Wesley felt Christ was calling all disciples to, then and now. Perhaps this sermon will challenge Methodists today to seek more than a safe and comfortable religion, but a deeper form of faith that leads to total transformation of heart and life.

[1] A reference to Romans 5:5

John Wesley quotes that speak to themes from The Great Commandment

Heart:
"A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his (her) heart, by the Holy Ghost given unto him (her)." (John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist)*

Soul:
"It is good to renew ourselves from time to time by closely examining the state of our souls, as if we had never done it before." (John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection)*

Mind:
"A constant attention to the work God entrusts us with is a mark of solid piety."
(John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection)*

Strength:
“Let us pray, that we may be delivered from all sin; that both root and branch may be destroyed; that we may be ‘cleansed from all pollution of flesh and spirit,’ from every evil temper, and word, and work; that we may ‘love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength’; that all the fruit of the Spirit may be found in us…”
(John Wesley, *Wandering Thoughts)*

Neighbor:
“Do you then love your neighbor as yourself? Do you love every man (person), even your enemies, even the enemies of God, as your own soul? As Christ loved you?”
(John Wesley, *The Almost Christian)*