

**Personal Report by Mr Denis Haywood about the Wesley Fellowship Meeting held at Zion Church of the Nazarene, Brearley Street, Handsworth, Birmingham, on Saturday 29 October 2011** when the Rev David A. Hull, MLitt, BTh (Cantab.), in the morning session presented a paper entitled ‘Wrestling for a Blessing: Personal Experience in the Hymns of Charles Wesley’, and in the afternoon session Mr Hull preached a sermon entitled ‘A Sermon for those “Convinced of Backsliding”!’. A copy of Mr Hull’s paper is due to be published by the Wesley Fellowship during 2013. Further details of this and all publications of the Wesley Fellowship can be obtained from Wesley Fellowship Book and Audio Sales, c/o Revd Tony Tamburello, 9 Heol Layard, Tremorfa, Cardiff, Wales, UK, CF24 2SB. Telephone: 029 2045 1754. Mobile phone: 07865 392979. Email: [tonytamb@aol.com](mailto:tonytamb@aol.com) Cheques should be made payable in British Pounds Sterling to “Rev. A. Tamburello”.

**MORNING PAPER: ‘WRESTLING FOR A BLESSING: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN THE HYMNS OF CHARLES WESLEY’**

David Hull used Gen 32: 22-32 as text, along with Charles Wesley’s hymn “Come O Thou traveller unknown” (as published in Hymn No. 339 in the version published in the *Methodist Hymn Book* (1933)) as a reference, and reminded us of the turning point in Charles Wesley’s life at the time of his conversion. Two themes emerged from the paper, which come from the hymn. They were:

**Justification.** The believer today, like Jacob in Old Testament times, could not be justified by any of his own works of righteousness but, ultimately, only by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross. Charles Wesley realised this during his own ‘wrestling’.

**Sanctification - Perfect Love.** The fruits of Jacob’s wrestling were mirrored in Charles Wesley’s experience. They both struggled through pain and frustration and both endured until they experienced the power of God’s sanctifying Love. Charles Wesley clearly expresses this in each verse as he shares his experience of the divine struggle and the divine embrace with the Lord. Below are some brief details of these thoughts.

**Verse 1.**

*Come, O thou traveller unknown,  
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!  
My company before is gone,  
And I am left alone with Thee;  
With Thee all night I mean to stay,  
And wrestle till the break of day.*

This describes Jacob wrestling but he is not aware that the ‘preventing grace’ of God is present in those struggles and pain and encouraging him to let go and rest in God’s love and mercy.

**Verse 6.**

*Yield to me now, for I am weak,  
But confident in self-despair;  
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,  
Be conquered by my instant prayer;  
Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,  
And tell me if Thy name is Love.*

This reveals Jacob getting weary in his wrestling encounter, feeling very weak and inadequate yet not able to grasp the presence of God. The Apostle Paul faced many such

encounters which he relates to in 2 Cor 12:10. Charles Wesley, experiencing these encounters, eagerly reminds us that God is present with us through his Holy Spirit, revealing his nature even in the worst complexities of life.

**Verse 7.**

***'Tis Love! 'tis Love! Thou diedst for me!  
I hear Thy whisper in my heart;  
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,  
Pure, universal love Thou art;  
To me, to all, Thy bowels move;  
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.***

Here, Jacob, like Charles Wesley, discovers after many trials the gift of God's Love; "Tis Love!" The night of wrestling is over. The light and power of God's mercy and love breaks through darkness and sin, revealing the nature God's love.

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 'A SERMON FOR THOSE "CONVINCED OF BACKSLIDING"!**

The Rev. David Hull used Revelation 2:1-7 'To the Church at Ephesus' as his foundation passage, and continued by reading from John Wesley's 'Thoughts upon Methodism'. **'I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power'**.<sup>1</sup>

David expounded on the passage from Revelation, and outlined the vision, that the Lord gave to John, of God's Sovereignty during his time on the Isle of Patmos. What follows is a summary of a few of the points which were shared with the congregation gathered at the Birmingham meeting.

1. The symbolic language of verse one is also used in 1:20; it reveals the significance of the seven stars and lamps given to the seven churches which John was addressing. Despite the suffering and trials which the churches were suffering the Lord still had His hand upon them and it was in Him alone that they had their hope.
2. Despite the present strife and persecution, the Church with all its failings must continue in its relationship with the Lord and continue to be the servant of His mission to the world. On the final day it will be the Lord who will have the final verdict.
3. The Lord knows the continuing hardship which individual believers are experiencing in exercising their stewardship of discipleship. However, **they must continue to be faithful because their witness for him is not in vain. The Lord will come and destroy all false doctrines and idols.**
4. The believer must **flee from all dangers of complacency** and continue to remember to examine themselves before the Lord.
5. They must remember the high standing of grace in which they stood with the Lord and now:  
"Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard;

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<sup>1</sup> See: [John Wesley] *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9, Bi-Centennial Edition, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 527. Wesley's 'Thoughts upon Methodism' was first published in 1787 in *The Arminian Magazine*.

obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” (Rev. 3: 2-3, NIV);  
and “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1: 7).

### **Conclusion.**

In this sermon, we were reminded of the consequences of backsliding in our relationship with Lord, and challenged about the importance of regular self-examination, and of faithfulness in our accountability to the Lord. And that, as we seek to follow Him as disciples, to endeavour never to lose our enthusiasm and love for the Lord.