A NEW QUESTION IN OUR MEMBERSHIP VOWS

Understanding Holiness, Entire Sanctification & Christian Perfection

"Do you commit yourself to receiving and pursuing holiness and entire sanctification?"

What does that mean?

Entire sanctification is the Methodist doctrine traditionally called Christian perfection. It is the Holy Spirit's work of making our hearts and lives more and more like Jesus—bringing us into a love of God and neighbor that is whole, undivided, and fully surrendered to God.

Christian perfection is not simply trying harder to behave. It is a life so yielded to the Holy Spirit that the love of Christ becomes the ruling desire of the heart. To be perfected in love is to love God with all that we are and, because we belong wholly to him, to love others with the self-giving love of Jesus.

This is why Methodists dare to speak of freedom from sin. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, sin does not have to rule us. In any given moment, grace makes obedience possible: we can surrender our anger, pride, desire, and need for control and choose the Jesus way instead. And if grace makes that surrender possible in this moment, it can make it possible in the next.

Christian perfection does not mean that we lose our freedom or become incapable of sin. Love cannot be forced. We remain free to resist the Spirit and turn back toward ourselves. The question is whether we will keep surrendering—whether we will allow the self that insists on its own way to be crucified with Christ so that his love can fill and direct us.

Christian perfection is perfect love:
a heart wholly surrendered to God, filled and governed by the love of Christ.

A life of holy striving—and endless grace

We will not always surrender perfectly. But failure is not the end of the journey. When we sin, grace meets us in repentance with forgiveness and another invitation to surrender. We get to try again. God calls us to holy striving, not because holiness earns his love, but because his grace really can transform us.

As we surrender more of ourselves to more of God, the Holy Spirit continues his sanctifying work. We may know moments when love of God and neighbor truly fills the heart—moments of Christian perfection. And yet we never outgrow our need to remain surrendered, because we never lose our freedom to choose otherwise.

So what are we promising?

The new vow asks us to receive and pursue holiness. We receive because sanctification is the work of grace. We pursue because grace calls for our willing response. We keep surrendering ourselves to God, participating in the means of grace, and trusting the Holy Spirit to form in us the holy love we could never produce by ourselves.

God calls us to holiness—and gives us his Spirit to make it possible.
When we fail, grace gives us another chance.
So we surrender again, and keep walking toward perfect love.

Source note: *This handout is based on Petition 1430 and the 2026 General Conference Daily Journals. It is intended to help us understand the legislation while the Global Methodist Church completes and publishes the updated Book of Doctrines and Discipline.*