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DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Communicating the Gospel in a  
Pluralistic World



**SESSION 5**

The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

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# The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Response of the New Testament Writers to Religious Pluralism**

**Confronting the Charge That Orthodox Christian Faith Is Oppressive**

**Justification by Faith**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- be able to discuss how the writers of the New Testament responded to religious pluralism as it characterized first-century, Greco-Roman society
- understand and be able to discuss the challenge the New Testament proclamation of Christ presented to Greco-Roman religious pluralism
- begin to see how orthodox Christian faith, based on the New Testament, responds to the charge that the gospel of Jesus Christ is oppressive with reference to other religions

# The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

## INTRODUCTION



Numerous books in the New Testament refer to a broader cultural environment thick with religious options. In this atmosphere the young Church was called to proclaim, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). According to His good pleasure, God had “set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9-10).

Acts and the Epistles especially, reveal that in the Greco-Roman world there were many “so-called gods in heaven or on earth” (1 Cor. 8:5). Luke tells us that when the apostle Paul entered the city of Athens he “saw that the city was full of idols.” Paul had even seen one altar containing the inscription, “To an unknown god” (Acts 17:16-23).

In Ephesus, Paul’s preaching of the gospel provoked a riot. So many people were turning from their worship of idols made by human hands that traffic at the temple of Artemis, and the sale of silver shrines devoted to her, was threatened. According to one of the silversmiths, Demetrius, whose business was threatened, Paul had preached that “gods made with hands are not gods” (Acts 19:23-27). In the name of the Alpha and the Omega, John of Patmos boldly confronted the emperor’s claim to deity, speaking instead of “the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8).

This session proceeds on the conviction that the New Testament must be our standard if we hope to speak in Christian terms regarding Christ and other religions. Without equivocation, and in keeping with historic Christian faith, the Church of the Nazarene confesses Christ to be “the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.” He who is “the living bread” is the Word of God who “became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 6:51; 1:14).

The following statement comes from *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick, an influential book in the debate over religious pluralism. The book denies the incarnation of God in Christ the New Testament affirms, and sets the stage for one way of responding to religious pluralism. Will the New Testament permit Hick’s solution?

“The Christians of the early church lived in a world in which supernatural causation was accepted without question, and divine or spiritual visitants were not unexpected. Such assumptions, however, have become foreign to our situation. In the Western world, both popular culture and the culture of the intelligentsia have come to be dominated by the human and natural sciences to such an extent that supernatural causation or intervention in the affairs of this world has become, for the majority of people, simply incredible.”

## RESPONSE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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### NOTES

How did the writers of the New Testament respond to the plurality of deities and religions they encountered? Did they try to carve out space for Jesus as a latecomer in an already crowded religious community? Did they work to show the Greco-Roman world how He could be made into a respectful and accommodating resident? Did they try to identify Jesus with one of the already existing deities, thus jump-starting familiarity with Him and making Him more readily acceptable? Or, maybe in order to extinguish even a flicker of offensiveness, they could have done what some in Colosse wanted to do: treat Christ as one component in a host of deities, the full complement of which would constitute God's fullness.

None of this happened. From Matthew to Revelation, the authors of the New Testament, each in his own distinctive way, declared that the God who created the heavens and the earth has acted decisively and finally in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to redeem the world. In Him the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, is being realized, and will be consummated. In Christ all the promises of God to Israel, to all humankind, and to the creation, are being fulfilled.

Jesus is God's "YES!" (2 Cor. 1:15-22). Christ is in His person the story of God. From one end of the New Testament to the other, Christ alone, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is affirmed to be the *apocalypse*, the revelation, of God. Not only does the New Testament declare Christ to be the story of God, but He is also the story of humankind and the whole creation. He reveals God's truth for both. The apostle Paul tells us God's plan for the fullness of time has been set forth in Jesus Christ. He is, declares Paul, the new and true humanity (Rom. 5:15-21).

The creation too will one day, through Christ, "Obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom.8:21). What the New Testament declares regarding the comprehensive work and person of Christ is unmistakable. Through (in) Christ, the Father is uniting all things in heaven and things on earth (Eph.1:9-10).

The apostle Peter said he had been an eyewitness to the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was present when the Lord "received honor and glory from God the Father." Peter had been on the Mount of Transfiguration when the God of Israel said, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (2 Pet. 1:17). In the Son of God, the great confession of Israel remains secure, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (the




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*Shema*—“Hear”—Deut. 6:4-5, RSV). This God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, seals the status of all so-called lords and gods. Their measure has been taken and their time is short. This is the clear witness of the New Testament.

### **THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE GOSPEL**

The New Testament affirms the singularity of the gospel of God. This means God’s relationship to and purpose for the nations, and all creation is exclusively determined by and through God’s cosmic eschatological-healing in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All other cosmic principles—*stoicheion tou kosmou*—including the Torah, are ruled out as providing God’s relationship with humanity and the world.

The New Testament contradicts the historicist and some postmodern assertions that humans create all religious narratives. The New Testament declares Jesus Christ is God’s action in history, not humanity’s action. Its emphasis is not even first upon human response. Its first emphasis is on God’s action. God has acted in Christ to free humankind, the nations, and all creation from the enslaving powers that stand against God’s purposes.

### **THE GOSPEL IS FIRST A DECLARATION ABOUT GOD AND HIS DEEDS**

Many of us are accustomed to speaking of the gospel as though it is first, news regarding humankind. Indeed the gospel is good news for all persons. It has the power to reconcile persons to God, to themselves, to others, and to God’s creation. The gospel of God takes the measure of human brokenness in all its forms, and will bring healing to the nations (Rev. 22:2).

For Wesleyans, as well as for many other Christians, the gospel of God achieves nothing less than new creation. It transforms all dimensions of human life, both personal and social. But the gospel is good news first because it is news regarding God, and what He accomplished and is accomplishing, in Christ. The debate between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes in Luke 21 is all about what God is like. The tax collectors and sinners hung onto Jesus’ every word because He presented to them a word from God they had not heard, certainly not from the Pharisees and scribes. He is a God who, instead of letting the lost remain lost, goes out into the night to find them. He diligently seeks them, and then lays them on His shoulders, or puts a robe around their wayward shoulders—all because He loves them and seeks their reconciliation. Wonder of wonders, on behalf of the lost He even makes himself vulnerable. Finally, He is so happy when the lost come home that He throws big parties in heaven. The gospel of God is good news for us because it is good news about God.


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Those who set out to bear witness to the gospel of God must make sure they tell it properly. We begin with God, with the story of His being for us and with us, and for and with the creation. We begin with His purposes, His promises, and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Is the human condition to be considered? Indeed! But it doesn't define itself. One of a Christian minister's chief responsibilities is to make sure his or her telling of the gospel matches the gospel's true measure and designs, not the gospel as tailored by a culture, consumer interests, national agendas, class and gender privileges, or political power. Otherwise, the gospel will be drained of the power of God.

We begin with the deeds of God because if we don't we may, in the current pluralist atmosphere, be tempted to reduce the gospel to one religious story among many, to treat it as a socially constructed religious vision that can be politely tucked into the catalog of religious narratives. That is what happened to John Hick. Quarterbacked by modernity, Hick concluded that the Incarnation is a myth: "Supernatural causation or intervention in the affairs of this world has become, for the majority of people, simply incredible."

Christian ministers are to be reporters, not authors. The Church faces many temptations to make humankind—human interests, institutions, and culture—the measure of the gospel of God. To be sure, the gospel addresses all of these. But it doesn't find its origin or begin its definition in any of them.

### **WHO IS THIS GOD?**

Who is this God about whom the gospel speaks? He is the God to whom the Old Testament bears witness—Yahweh. He is the One by whose word the world and all therein exist. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He is the One who through His prophets made grand promises of salvation to His people. Now He has revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth.

After the Holy Spirit had loosed the tongue of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, he exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors" (Luke 1:67-72).

The God who promises, who is faithful to himself, has now fulfilled His promises, not through another prophet, but through His Son, the Only Begotten of the Father (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:15-18; Heb. 10:23). The magnitude of what God has




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accomplished in Jesus Christ should be spoken in terms of new creation. Paul says, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). The Father’s decisive action through His Son has opened space in the world and that space is new creation! Douglas Harink says: “The new creation is in the first place Jesus Christ himself. In the second place it is the cosmos delivered from enslaving powers through the crucifixion. Third, it is disciples of Christ participating in Christ’s death and resurrection through baptism into the Church, and living in the Spirit through loyalty of one Christian to another.”

In Galatians, Paul says, “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” (Gal. 6:14-15). The dawn of a new creation occurred in the crucifixion of Christ. There are two different worlds: the old cosmos and the new creation.

### THE END OF NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

Rather than Christ finding His place among the religions of the world, the New Testament declares that in the purposes of God all other supposed paths to God will someday end. Even if non-Christian religions have in some way served to make people mindful of God (Acts 14:8-18) they will yield to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

In anticipation of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, God has been present in the world, providing to humanity and the nations preliminary knowledge of Him. He has used many vehicles—the Torah, the creation, philosophy, culture, and religion—for this purpose. The Law, for example, was a *païadagogos*—a teacher, a custodian—to bring persons to faith in Christ (Gal. 3:23-25).

In Lystra Paul used the citizens’ worship of Zeus as a way to introduce them to the “living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” God had not “left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:15-16).

In Athens Paul used the philosophy of the Stoics and Epicureans as an opening for proclaiming, “The God who made the world and everything in it, he is Lord of heaven and earth.” God had overlooked the times of human ignorance. But now God “commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:24, 30-31).

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“In His revelation of the Father, the Son has been unwaveringly faithful, even unto death on the cross. Though in the very form of God, He did not cling to His divine status with the Father, but emptied himself. He took upon himself the form of a servant, was found in human flesh, and became obedient to death. God has highly exalted His Son, His suffering Servant. He has bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11, RSV).

The apostle Paul sketches the conclusion of God’s purposes in His Son. Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

What Douglas Harink says about the announcement in the Book of Galatians is true for all the New Testament. “What occurs in the history of Jesus Christ is unsurpassed and unsurpassable; there is no reality, no historical or mythical figure, no system, framework, idea, or anything else that transcends the reality of Jesus Christ, for, in the strongest possible sense, God’s action and the history of Jesus Christ are both one and singular.” The gospel of this Christ, Harink says, “leaves no reserve of space or time or concept or aspect of creation outside or beyond or undetermined by the critical, decisive, and final action of God in Jesus Christ.”

## CONFRONTING THE CHARGE THAT ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FAITH IS OPPRESSIVE



### NOTES

As we saw in the previous session, in the postmodern climate those who think their religious narrative ought to be the narrative of all persons and who do not recognize that all religious narratives are made authentic only by those who embrace them, are oppressors. They erroneously use their own religious vision, parochial in ways they do not even recognize, to run roughshod over others. Totalizing is a term often used to describe such oppression. It simply means one religion or culture thinks it has the total message for all others. It claims to have total knowledge with which all persons ought to comply. In a postmodern climate, totalizing is judged to be exploitative. It ought to be condemned.

By that standard, what this session has presented regarding the gospel certainly appears to qualify as oppressive and totalizing. We must not take this charge lightly. A religion that presents itself to the world as coercive, threatening, oppressive, and as an instrument of injustice will be and ought to be judged evil, Christianity included.

But Douglas Harink warns that those who want to strip the Christian faith of anything that might cause someone to characterize it as totalizing will do so by forfeiting fidelity to the New Testament. “Discriminating judgments, definitions, and differentiations, even ‘totalizing’ claims are intrinsic to the grammar of apocalyptic [revelation] theology.” If Harink is correct, and the content of this session supports him, then it seems a certain measure of offensiveness against the postmodern emphasis upon many narratives is unavoidable.

In his day, the apostle Paul had to make a decision between embracing the wisdom and power of God as manifest in the Cross, and appearing to Jews and Greeks as someone given to folly. With all his being, he chose the former. “Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

That being nonnegotiable, we are still faced with the question of how to proclaim this Christ. There are ways of proclaiming Him that misrepresent and shame the gospel, turning it into what to many sounds like bad news. Persons everywhere ought, in the defense of justice, human dignity, and decency, to oppose all forms of proclamation that are exploitative, entrapping, coercive, and demeaning. The apostle Paul did (2 Cor. 4:1-6) and so should we. Persons must hear the gospel as healing, not as abuse.

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The Book of Revelation provides a summary of what the New Testament writers have said about Christ. Its themes have been voiced throughout the New Testament in one way or another.

- God is the holy and transcendent God. On Him, everything in heaven and on earth relies. He is the Creator (Rev. 4:11) who makes all things new. God, not human or demonic powers, rules the world. God is sovereign. He guides the course of history toward its final triumph over evil.
- The Book of Revelation is a message of hope. The final victory is a matter of hope and expectation. Christian hope is grounded upon the decisive victory that has already been won through Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the Lamb that was slain, yet He now lives and shares with God in ruling the universe.
- Worship, obedience, and honor are the appropriate ways to respond to God and to the Lamb.

## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

JOHN WESLEY, SERMON FIVE  
TEXT FROM THE 1872 EDITION (PART ONE)



### NOTES

“To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

1. How a sinner may be justified before God, the Lord and Judge of all, is a question of no common importance to every child of man. It contains the foundation of all our hope, inasmuch as while we are at enmity with God, there can be no true peace, no solid joy, either in time or in eternity. What peace can there be, while our own heart condemns us; and much more, He that is “greater than our heart, and knoweth all things?” What solid joy, either in this world or that to come, while “the wrath of God abideth on us?”
2. And yet how little hath this important question been understood! What confused notions have many had concerning it! Indeed, not only confused, but often utterly false; contrary to the truth, as light to darkness; notions absolutely inconsistent with the oracles of God, and with the whole analogy of faith. And hence, erring concerning the very foundation, they could not possibly build thereon; at least, not “gold, silver, or precious stones,” which would endure when tried as by fire; but only “hay and stubble,” neither acceptable to God, nor profitable to man.
3. In order to justice, in far as in me lies, to the vast importance of the subject, to save those that seek the truth in sincerity from “vain jangling and strife of words,” to clear the confusedness of thought into which so many have already been led thereby, and to give them true and just conceptions of this great mystery of godliness, I shall endeavour to show. First. What is the general ground of this whole doctrine of justification. Secondly. What justification is. Thirdly. Who they are that are justified. And, Fourthly. On what terms they are justified.
  - I. I am, First, to show, what is the general ground of this whole doctrine of justification.
    1. In the image of God was man made, holy as he that created him is holy; merciful as the Author of all is merciful; perfect as his Father in heaven is perfect. As God is love, so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be an “image of his own eternity,” an incorruptible picture of the God of glory. He was accordingly pure, as God is pure, from


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every spot of sin. He knew not evil in any kind or degree, but was inwardly and outwardly sinless and undefiled. He “loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength.”

2. To man thus upright and perfect, God gave a perfect law, to which he required full and perfect obedience. He required full obedience in every point, and this to be performed without any intermission, from the moment man became a living soul, till the time of his trial should be ended. No allowance was made for any falling short: As, indeed, there was no need of any; man being altogether equal to the task assigned, and thoroughly furnished for every good word and work.
3. To the entire law of love which was written in his heart, (against which, perhaps, he could not sin directly,) it seemed good to the sovereign wisdom of God to superadd one positive law: “Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of the tree that groweth in the midst of the garden;” annexing that penalty thereto, “In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.”
4. Such, then, was the state of man in Paradise. By the free, unmerited love of God, he was holy and happy: He knew, loved, enjoyed God, which is, in substance, life everlasting. And in this life of love, he was to continue for ever, if he continued to obey God in all things; but, if he disobeyed him in any, he was to forfeit all. “In that day,” said God, “thou shalt surely die.”
5. Man did disobey God. He “ate of the tree, of which God commanded him, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it.” And in that day he was condemned by the righteous judgment of God. Then also the sentence whereof he was warned before, began to take place upon him. For the moment he tasted that fruit, he died. His soul died, was separated from God; separate from whom the soul has no more life than the body has when separate from the soul. His body, likewise, became corruptible and mortal; so that death then took hold on this also. And being already dead in spirit, dead to God, dead in sin, he hastened on to death everlasting; to the destruction both of body and soul, in the fire never to be quenched.
6. Thus “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. And so death passed upon all men,” as being contained in him who was the common father and representative of us all. Thus, “through the offence of one,” all are dead, dead to God, dead in sin, dwelling in a corruptible, mortal body, shortly to be dissolved, and under the sentence of death eternal. For as, “by one man’s disobedience,” all “were made sinners;” so, by that offence of one, “judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” (Romans)




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7. In this state we were, even all mankind, when “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end we might not perish, but have everlasting life.” In the fullness of time he was made Man, another common Head of mankind, a second general Parent and Representative of the whole human race. And as such it was that “he bore our griefs,” “the Lord laying upon him the iniquities of us all.” Then was he “wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.” “He made his soul an offering for sin:” He poured out his blood for the transgressors: He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” that by his stripes we might be healed: And by that one oblation of himself, once offered, he hath redeemed me and all mankind; having thereby “made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.”
8. In consideration of this, that the Son of God hath “tasted death for every man,” God hath now “reconciled the world to himself, not imputing to them their” former “trespasses.” And thus, “as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification.” So that, for the sake of his well-beloved Son, of what he hath done and suffered for us, God now vouchsafes, on one only condition, (which himself also enables us to perform,) both to remit the punishment due to our sins, to reinstate us in his favour, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, as the earnest of life eternal.
9. This, therefore, is the general ground of the whole doctrine of justification. By the sin of the first Adam, who was not only the father, but likewise the representative, of us all, we all fell short of the favour of God; we all became children of wrath; or, as the Apostle expresses it, “judgment came upon all men to condemnation.” Even so, by the sacrifice for sin made by the Second Adam, as the Representative of us all, God is so far reconciled to all the world, that he hath given them a new covenant; the plain condition whereof being once fulfilled, “there is no more condemnation” for us, but “we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.”

## II.

1. But what is it to be “justified?” What is “justification?” This was the Second thing which I proposed to show. And it is evident, from what has been already observed, that it is not the being made actually just and righteous. This is “sanctification;” which is, indeed, in some degree, the immediate fruit of justification, but, nevertheless, is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God does for


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us through his Son; the other, what he works in us by his Spirit. So that, although some rare instances may be found, wherein the term “justified” or “justification” is used in so wide a sense as to include “sanctification” also; yet, in general use, they are sufficiently distinguished from each other, both by St. Paul and the other inspired writers.

2. Neither is that far-fetched conceit, that justification is the clearing us from accusation, particularly that of Satan, easily provable from any clear text of holy writ. In the whole scriptural account of this matter, as above laid down, neither that accuser nor his accusation appears to be at all taken in. It can not indeed be denied, that he is the “accuser” of men, emphatically so called. But it does in nowise appear, that the great Apostle hath any reference to this, more or less, in all he hath written touching justification, either to the Romans or the Galatians.
3. It is also far easier to take for granted, than to prove from any clear scripture testimony, that justification is the clearing us from the accusation brought against us by the law: At least if this forced, unnatural way of speaking mean either more or less than this, that, whereas we have transgressed the law of God, and thereby deserved the damnation of hell, God does not inflict on those who are justified the punishment which they had deserved.
4. Least of all does justification imply, that God is deceived in those whom he justifies; that he thinks them to be what, in fact, they are not; that he accounts them to be otherwise than they are. It does by no means imply, that God judges concerning us contrary to the real nature of things; that he esteems us better than we really are, or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous. Surely no. The judgment of the allwise God is always according to truth. Neither can it ever consist with his unerring wisdom, to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am righteous or holy, because another is so. He can no more, in this manner, confound me with Christ, than with David or Abraham. Let any man to whom God hath given understanding, weigh this without prejudice; and he cannot but perceive, that such a notion of justification is neither reconcilable to reason nor Scripture.
5. The plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is that act of God the Father, hereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he “showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of the sins that are past.” This is the easy, natural account of it given by St. Paul, throughout this whole epistle. So he explains it himself, more particularly in this and

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in the following chapter. Thus, in the next verses but one to the text, “Blessed are they,” saith he, “whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” To him that is justified or forgiven, God “will not impute sin” to his condemnation. He will not condemn him on that account, either in this world or in that which is to come. His sins, all his past sins, in thought, word, and deed, are covered, are blotted out, shall not be remembered or mentioned against him, any more than if they had not been. God will not inflict on that sinner what he deserved to suffer, because the Son of his love hath suffered for him. And from the time we are “accepted through the Beloved,” “reconciled to God through his blood,” he loves, and blesses, and watches over us for good, even as if we had never sinned.

Indeed the Apostle in one place seems to extend the meaning of the word much farther, where he says, “Not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law, shall be justified.” Here he appears to refer our justification to the sentence of the great day. And so our Lord himself unquestionably doth, when he says, “By thy words thou shalt be justified;” proving hereby, that “for every idle word men shall speak, they shall give an account in the day of judgment.” But perhaps we can hardly produce another instance of St. Paul’s using the word in that distant sense. In the general tenor of his writings, it is evident he doth not; and least of all in the text before us, which undeniably speaks, not of those who have already “finished their course,” but of those who are now just “setting out,” just beginning to “run the race which is set before them.”

## APPLICATION

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**NOTES**

1. Spend some time exploring various internet sites for “biblical thinking about Jesus and Christian Faith.”
2. Write a reflection paper based on the following questions. Be prepared to share that paper with your mentor.
  - What is the New Testament response to the idea that there are many paths to God?
  - Is it inevitable the Christian gospel will be seen as oppressive by a pluralist culture? Is there anything we can do to address this while being faithful to the gospel?
  - Discuss the reading from John Wesley’s sermon, “Justification by Faith.” What was new or helpful? What was not clear?

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. This module proceeds from the conviction that the New Testament must be our standard for speaking in Christian terms.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. The New Testament is ambiguous concerning the centrality of the person and work of Jesus.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. The gospel of Jesus Christ not only reveals God's provision for us, it also shows us what God is like.
  - A. True
  - B. False
4. Our preaching and teaching in the postmodern context can no longer be accountable to the New Testament gospel.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. The declaration of the message of the Christian Faith in a postmodern audience may be seen as oppressive.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. According to John Wesley, it is an error to ground the doctrine of justification in Jesus' sacrifice for sin.
  - A. True
  - B. False
7. According to John Wesley, the plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, forgiveness.
  - A. True
  - B. False

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Review the exam questions and answers. Discuss any issues or questions they raise for you.
2. What is the New Testament response to the idea that there are many paths to God?
3. Is it inevitable the Christian gospel will be seen as oppressive by a pluralist culture? Is there anything we can do to address this while being faithful to the gospel?
4. Discuss the reading from John Wesley's sermon, "Justification by Faith." What was new or helpful? What was not clear?