

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Communicating the Gospel in a  
Pluralistic World



**SESSION 6**

The Wesleyan Way of Salvation:  
Prevenient Grace, the Gift of Faith, Justification

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# The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Prevenient Grace, the Gift of Faith, Justification

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Prevenient Grace, Justification, and the Gift of Faith**

**The Spirit's Gift of Faith and Human Response**

**Justification by Faith**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## INTRODUCTION

“The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the image of God is what John Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity.”

“John Wesley is convinced that God's Spirit is at work everywhere in the world extending God's prevenient graciousness among all peoples.”

*Theodore Runyon, The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 8 and 33.*

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand and be able to discuss the theological foundations of the Wesleyan way of salvation

## PREVENIENT GRACE, JUSTIFICATION, AND THE GIFT OF FAITH



### NOTES

The Bible tells the story of the free God who is Holy Love. In contrast to idols of silver and gold who are nothing more than “blocks of wood” (Isa. 44:19), “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases” (Ps.115:3). His freedom is of a special kind. Unlike humans and the powers and principalities of this age, no external limitations can be imposed upon the Triune God. No finite creature can establish boundaries for him.

Some creatures, including humankind, have a limited measure of freedom. But theirs is a finite freedom that comes with all kinds of unavoidable limitations. By contrast, any limitations God may have are ones He places upon himself in the interest of His love. His freedom is one in which He is steadfastly faithful as Holy Love to himself and to His creation. “His steadfast love endures forever” (Ps. 118:4). God freely acts in love, in loving freedom.

God’s freedom refers first to the interrelationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the One God—and to the ways He acts to create and redeem. As the psalmists testify, His ways are marvelous to behold. “Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD” (Ps. 113:5-9).

In His sovereign freedom God acts in history to “fulfill the prediction of his messengers” (Isa. 44:26). In His freedom, God takes persons seriously their personalities, their domestic histories, their religious histories, and so forth. No one can tell God He must proceed according to some rigid pattern in His efforts to redeem. Think of how in 537 BC God surprised the Hebrews by using Cyrus, king of Persia, to achieve release for the captives. Or think of how He freely chose a virgin maiden of no social and religious distinction to give birth to our Lord. When the times had been fulfilled, God freely sent His Son in a form that scandalized the Jews and the Greeks (1 Cor. 1:20-31). Of this much we can be certain: in His freedom God will always be faithful to himself, and hence faithful to us.

The Wesleyan tradition affirms the free God, and—because of its study of the Scriptures, tradition, and our experience of faith—embraces a distinctive way of understanding God’s ways with reference to salvation. We refer to it as “the Wesleyan way of salvation.” We will now look at the elements of the Wesleyan way—sometimes called the “order”—of salvation.


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## PREVENIENT GRACE

The doctrine of prevenient grace in the Wesleyan tradition is one of its strongest features. The doctrine is by no means unique to Wesleyans, but Wesleyan theology does provide special nuances. In the Wesleyan tradition we use the phrase *prevenient grace* to describe the initial movements—efforts—of God to achieve redemption of His creation. Prevenient grace is the grace that goes before to prepare persons to hear and receive the gospel. The goal and full expression of prevenient grace is a faithful life in Christ. Prevenient grace names the active presence of the Holy Spirit prior to conversion as He seeks to draw all persons to repentance and to “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5).

Even the most elementary interest in and knowledge of God is the result of the Spirit’s prevenient activity. The Spirit raises the question of God in us, no matter how embryonic the question may be. “It is not nature but the Son of God that is ‘the true light, which enlighteneth every man which cometh into the world.’ So that we may say to every human creature, ‘He,’ not nature, ‘hath shown thee O man, what is good.’” (John Wesley)

Before the human evangelist or witness appears on the scene, the gracious God has already been there. He is already at work, and in surprising ways governed only by His purposes. For some persons such as this author, that reality is much easier to say than to embody.

Even now God sustains His creation by the word of His power. Both the Old and New Testaments declare and celebrate this. “You have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand today, for all things are your servants” (Ps. 119:90-91). Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:15-17). His constant faithfulness to the creation is one reason for our believing the whole creation and all therein can abide in Him in unbroken love and confidence.

Wesleyans reject the notion some doctrinal traditions embrace, to the effect that we should distinguish between God as Creator and God as Redeemer. The notion is that while God creates and sustains all persons, as Redeemer He is selective. For the sake of His glory, and in a deed of undeserved mercy, God elects one part of humanity for salvation and another for damnation. Correctly, all persons are already dead in their sins and deserving of damnation, but according to some Christians, in His marvelous grace, God elects to renew, reconcile, and give eternal life to some, not all. In this He is glorified. Wesleyans reject this doctrine!



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We believe there is a continuity of grace between the orders of creation and redemption. In line with the New Testament, John Wesley taught that by grace God even now sustains the creation (Col. 1:15-17). If this were not so, the world would sink into oblivion. The same is true for all persons. They are immediately dependent upon the gracious Creator (Acts 17:22-28; Col. 1:15-20).

We think efforts to distinguish between God the Creator and God the Redeemer are artificial, imposed by prior theological commitments, and not required by what the Scriptures teach. To reaffirm, we believe wherever God is present, He is there as both Creator and Redeemer. Acts of creation and redemption are the gracious work of God. Importantly, the New Testament declares the Son in whom God has revealed himself as Redeemer is also the One through whom the Father created and sustains the world. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, connects Christ as Redeemer and Christ as Creator. “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Heb. 1:1-2).

For John Wesley the continuity of creation and redemption is best voiced in the New Testament doctrine of new creation. With Paul, Wesley understood the fruit of the gospel to be “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). For him, salvation includes the individual, but it is also cosmic in scope. Wesleyan theologian Theodore Runyon says the work of Christ the Creator-Redeemer involves “nothing less than a *new* creation transforming all dimensions of human existence, both personal and social.”

One will not get very far into Wesleyan theology until he or she understands the relationship between creation, redemption, and new creation, and not until he or she understands how comprehensive Wesley’s soteriology is. For him, as it was for the apostle Paul (Rom. 8:18-25), the gospel will not have achieved its goal until there is “a general deliverance of creation.” All creatures will share in the deliverance the Redeemer has won: “Nothing can be more express: Away with vulgar prejudices, and let the plain word of God take place. They ‘shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into glorious liberty,’—even a measure, according as they are capable—of ‘the liberty of the children of God.’”

The gracious relationship between creation and redemption is, therefore, at the heart of Wesleyan theology. “The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the image of God is what Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity.” (Runyon, *The New Creation*, 8.)


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Sustenance is part of God's nearness to His creation, but it involves more than mere preservation. His nearness is Christological, gracious, and redemptive. This means the Creator-Redeemer is nearer to the creation, including humanity, than the creation is to itself, for He is, as Paul says in Colossians, its center of coherence (Col. 1:17). This is true for all persons.

Wesleyans, therefore, believe that according to the Father's creative-redemptive purposes revealed in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3-10), all persons are the object of re-creation. To exclude anyone from the plan of redemption would be to remove from that person God's creative and re-creative presence. We believe all persons are provisionally included in Christ's atonement.

In one's very existence, through the Holy Spirit, the Redeemer is present as Creator and as wanting to be the Redeemer. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all persons might come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). At primordial levels, and in creative ways no human can exhaust, the Creator-Redeemer seeks to bring all persons to faith and reconciliation.

This is the rationale for the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace. The whole doctrine of God with His world undergirds it. The doctrine is bedrock for all that follows. "God is not a respecter of persons. [He] is not partial in his love. The words mean, in a particular sense, that He does not confine his love to one nation; in a general, that he is loving to every man, and willeth all men should be saved."

In the Wesleyan tradition, confidence in the gospel is partly anchored in our certainty that long before a person actually hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit is already working to draw them to Christ, to condition them to hear the gospel and be converted. We believe this happens both inside and outside the Church. Children in church are being evangelized by the Holy Spirit through the Christian examples of parents, through godly teachers and pastors, through Bible stories, the sacraments, and through prayer and sacred music. The Spirit works to evangelize adults in the Church who have yet to confess faith in Christ.

Outside the Church, the Holy Spirit isn't at all immobilized. The ways the Spirit works in persons who have never heard the gospel will be as varied as the Spirit chooses. He certainly works through the conscience and through one's religious sensitivities—one's God-given capacities for God.

In His prevenient—anticipatory—work, the Spirit restores a person's moral sense and freedom to respond to the Spirit. Prevenient grace prompts "the first wish to please God." It explains "the first dawn of light concerning God's will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance


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from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible to God and the things of God.” As we shall see, the doctrine of prevenient grace prepares us well to bear witness to the Christ of God in a pluralistic and postmodern world.

### **JUSTIFICATION: THE PARDON OF THE SPIRIT**

There are two great branches of salvation:

- Justification—what God does for us through his Son
- Sanctification—what God works in us by his Spirit on the basis of Christ’s atonement

Broadly understood, sanctification includes regeneration, the “immediate fruit of justification.” The breadth of God’s saving work in us can be stated with one hyphenated word: justification-regeneration-sanctification. Transformation of the whole person is God’s intention, and justification provides the foundation.

In Paul’s teaching regarding the death and resurrection of Christ, he brought together justification and regeneration. He described justification as being buried with Christ by baptism into a death like His (Rom. 6:4). Regeneration he described as being “united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:5). This is what it means to be born anew by the Spirit. Raised with Christ, we now walk “in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

#### *Repentance*

Mark 1:15 and Matthew 4:17 say Jesus began His public ministry with a call to repentance. Mark connects repentance with hearing the good news and Matthew with the nearness of the Kingdom. After Jesus’ resurrection He told His disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in Christ’s name to all nations (Luke 24:47).

The relationship between repentance, and hearing, believing, and receiving the gospel, is intense in the New Testament. Repentance and forgiveness of sins, and repentance and faith are inseparable. The most common New Testament word for repentance is *metanoia*. Its usual senses are a change of mind and regret or remorse. Both of these are included in the repentance associated with receiving the gospel.

Repentance also means turning away from (Mark 1:4). More completely, it means an about face. By the power of the Holy Spirit a repentant sinner, broken in heart by his or her transgressions, confesses his or her sins against God and against others. He or she rejects and turns away from allegiance to the old order of hostility toward God, and turns to embrace the new reality, the kingdom of God.




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A readiness to obey, what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the first concrete step of obedience, must be joined to repentance. Repentance is an act of faith the Spirit makes possible. A repentant sinner must be convinced that “of Christ only cometh our salvation.” If one thinks more highly of oneself than that, then for him or her, the gospel will not be good news.

### *Reconciliation*

Reconciliation—justification—with the Father comes through faith in His obedient and faithful Son (Rom. 5:15-21; Heb. 10:7-10). In all things, even to death on the Cross, the New Adam, by the power of the Spirit, lived in unbroken fidelity to His Heavenly Father’s will. He is the faithful and righteous one (1 John 2:1), the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the “joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2). Christ’s pioneering faithfulness is the meritorious basis of salvation. Our faith is in the Faithful One. Because of His faithfulness in all things, we call Him Savior, the Redeemer. God justifies the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

Justification is the manifestation and work of the righteousness of God. This means the God who is holy love freely gives what He commands: reconciliation. The Law of God commands that we love, worship, and obey Him, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Sold under sin, dead in our trespasses, we can’t do this. Justification means pardon, the forgiveness of our sins, the removal of guilt, and our reconciliation with God. The “plain scriptural notion of justification,” Wesley said, “is pardon.” The work of prevenient grace, Wesley said, “is carried on by *convincing grace*, usually in Scripture termed *repentance* . . . Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, ‘through grace,’ we ‘are saved by faith.’”

All attempts to do our way into God’s favor only confirm the sinful independence from God we children of Adam have declared. Through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father reconciles all who will abandon their own righteousness and radically rely upon his grace. Justification means pardon, the forgiveness of our sins, the removal of guilt, and our reconciliation with God.

### *Adoption*

Justification marks the beginning of the Christian life, our adoption by God as His sons and daughters. Justification “begins the process of restoring the image of God in us, for our lives are realigned for a purpose: not only to receive from God, but [also] to share what we have received with others.”

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Theodore Runyon explains that when by grace we repent of our sins and respond positively to the gospel, we “advance from the porch of prevenient grace to the door of justification and new *birth*.” This happens through the powerful action of the Holy Spirit. He convinces us of the truth of the gospel. He calls us to repentance and faith. He sustains us “in communion with himself through participation in his people.”

## THE SPIRIT'S GIFT OF FAITH AND HUMAN RESPONSE



### NOTES

John Wesley stood in complete harmony with the 16th century Protestant Reformers who proclaimed that we are justified by grace through faith alone. Saving faith is radical dependence upon Christ for reconciliation with God. Pardon is applied to the penitent sinner through the faith the Spirit gives. Faith, says Wesley, is “the ear of the soul, whereby a sinner hears the voice which alone wakes the dead, ‘son, thy sins are forgiven thee.’”

The Spirit gives the power to believe, for “no man is able to work such saving faith in himself.” If saving faith were a human achievement, then salvation would be to some extent our own accomplishment. To receive the gift of faith and the Spirit of adoption is to be given restored fellowship with God.

Often persons who claim to represent the Wesleyan tradition have grievously erred by abandoning the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. They have, even if unintentionally, strayed into semi-Pelagianism at best, or Pelagianism at worst, by teaching that by our own free will we can turn to Christ in faith.

The truth is the will is not free. If it were, then the doctrine of original sin would have to be abandoned. Active response to the offer of salvation can occur only if the Holy Spirit makes that possible. The offer of faith and the ability to receive and exercise it are God's deed alone. While the human response is a real and critical one, it is a response enabled by the Spirit of God alone.

Faith in Jesus Christ unto eternal life is a gift from God. Humans contribute nothing to their salvation. Faith is both a gift and a Spirit-empowered response. We call divine initiative and human response evangelical synergism. On the one hand the phrase makes clear that faith is God's gift alone. On the other hand it affirms a Spirit-empowered active human response. The divine initiative in evangelical synergism clearly defends the Wesleyan understanding of grace against those who say that making a place for active response only reintroduces works righteousness.

## JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

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

### NOTES

III.

1. But this is the third thing which was to be considered, namely, Who are they that are justified? And the Apostle tells us expressly, the ungodly: "He (that is, God) justifieth the ungodly;" the ungodly of every kind and degree; and none but the ungodly. As "they that are righteous need no repentance," so they need no forgiveness. It is only sinners that have any occasion for pardon: It is sin alone which admits of being forgiven. Forgiveness, therefore, has an immediate reference to sin, and, in this respect, to nothing else. It is our "unrighteousness" to which the pardoning God is "merciful:" It is our "iniquity" which he "remembereth no more."
2. This seems not to be at all considered by those who so vehemently contend that a man must be sanctified, that is, holy, before he can be justified; especially by such of them as affirm, that universal holiness or obedience must precede justification. (Unless they mean that justification at the last day, which is wholly out of the present question.) So far from it, that the very supposition is not only flatly impossible, (for where there is no love of God, there is no holiness, and there is no love of God but from a sense of his loving us,) but also grossly, intrinsically absurd, contradictory to itself.

For it is not a saint but a sinner that is forgiven, and under the notion of a sinner. God justifieth not the godly, but the ungodly; not those that are holy already, but the unholy. Upon what condition he doeth this, will be considered quickly: but whatever it is, it cannot be holiness. To assert this, is to say the Lamb of God takes away only those sins which were taken away before.

3. Does then the good Shepherd seek and save only those that are found already? No: He seeks and saves that which is lost. He pardons those who need his pardoning mercy. He saves from the guilt of sin, (and, at the same time, from the power,) sinners of every kind, of every degree: men who, till then, were altogether ungodly; in whom the love of the Father was not; and, consequently, in whom dwelt no good thing, no good or truly Christian temper—but all such as were evil and abominable—pride, anger, love of the world—the genuine fruits of that "carnal mind" which is "enmity against God."


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4. These who are sick, the burden of whose sins is intolerable, are they that need a Physician; these who are guilty, who groan under the wrath of God, are they that need a pardon. These who are “condemned already,” not only by God, but also by their own conscience, as by a thousand witnesses, of all their ungodliness, both in thought, and word, and work, cry aloud for Him that “justifieth the ungodly,” through the redemption that is in Jesus—the ungodly, and “him that worketh not;” that worketh not, before he is justified, anything that is good, that is truly virtuous or holy, but only evil continually. For his heart is necessarily, essentially evil, till the love of God is shed abroad therein. And while the tree is corrupt, so are the fruits; “for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.”
5. If it be objected, “Nay, but a man, before he is justified, may feed the hungry, or clothe the naked; and these are good works;” the answer is easy: He may do these, even before he is justified; and these are, in one sense, “good works;” they are “good and profitable to men.” But it does not follow, that they are, strictly speaking, good in themselves, or good in the sight of God. All truly “good works” (to use the words of our Church) “follow after justification;” and they are therefore good and “acceptable to God in Christ,” because they “spring out of a true and living faith.”

By a parity of reason, all “works done before justification are not good,” in the Christian sense, “forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ;” (though from some kind of faith in God they may spring;) “yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not” (how strange soever it may appear to some) “but they have the nature of sin.”

6. Perhaps those who doubt of this have not duly considered the weighty reason which is here assigned, why no works done before justification can be truly and properly good. The argument plainly runs thus—No works are good, which are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done. But no works done before justification are done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done: Therefore, no works done before justification are good.

The first proposition is self-evident; and the second, that no works done before justification are done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, will appear equally plain and undeniable, if we only consider, God hath willed and commanded that “all our works” should “be done in charity;” (*en agape*) in love, in that love to God which produces love to all mankind. But none of our works can be done in this love, while the love of the Father (of God as our Father) is not in us; and this love can




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not be in us till we receive the “Spirit of Adoption, crying in our hearts, Abba, Father.” If, therefore, God doth not “justify the ungodly,” and him that (in this sense) “worketh not,” then hath Christ died in vain; then, notwithstanding his death, can no flesh living be justified.

## IV.

1. But on what terms, then, is he justified who is altogether “ungodly,” and till that time “worketh not?” On one alone; which is faith: He “believeth in Him that justifieth the ungodly.” And “he that believeth is not condemned;” yea, he is “passed from death unto life.” “For the righteousness (or mercy) of God is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: Whom God hath set forth for a propitiation, through faith in his blood; that he might be just, and” (consistently with his justice) “the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus:” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law;” without previous obedience to the moral law, which, indeed, he could not, till now, perform. That it is the moral law, and that alone, which is here intended, appears evidently from the words that follow: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: Yea, we establish the law. What law do we establish by faith? Not the ritual law: Not the ceremonial law of Moses. In nowise; but the great, unchangeable law of love, the holy love of God and of our neighbour.”
2. Faith in general is a divine, supernatural “*elegchos*,” “evidence” or “conviction,” “of things not seen,” not discoverable by our bodily senses, as being either past, future, or spiritual. Justifying faith implies, not only a divine evidence or conviction that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself;” but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for “my” sins, that he loved “me,” and gave himself for “me.” And at what time soever a sinner thus believes, be it in early childhood, in the strength of his years, or when he is old and hoary-haired, God justifieth that ungodly one: God, for the sake of his Son, pardoneth and absolveth him, who had in him, till then, no good thing. Repentance, indeed, God had given him before; but that repentance was neither more nor less than a deep sense of the want of all good, and the presence of all evil. And whatever good he hath, or doeth, from that hour when he first believes in God through Christ, faith does not “find,” but “bring.” This is the fruit of faith. First the tree is good, and then the fruit is good also.
3. I cannot describe the nature of this faith better than in the words of our own Church: “The only instrument of salvation” (whereof justification is one branch) “is faith; that is, a sure trust and confidence that God both hath and will forgive our sins, that he hath accepted us again into His favour, for the merits of Christ’s death and passion. — But here we must


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take heed that we do not halt with God, through an inconstant, wavering faith: Peter, coming to Christ upon the water, because he fainted in faith, was in danger of drowning; so we, if we begin to waver or doubt, it is to be feared that we shall sink as Peter did, not into the water, but into the bottomless pit of hell fire." ("Second Sermon on the Passion")

"Therefore, have a sure and constant faith, not only that the death of Christ is available for all the world, but that he hath made a full and sufficient sacrifice for "thee," a perfect cleansing of "thy" sins, so that thou mayest say, with the Apostle, he loved "thee," and gave himself for "thee." For this is to make Christ "thine own," and to apply his merits unto "thyself." ("Sermon on the Sacrament, First Part")

4. By affirming that this faith is the term or "condition of justification," I mean, First, that there is no justification without it. "He that believeth not is condemned already;" and so long as he believeth not, that condemnation cannot be removed, but "the wrath of God abideth on him." As "there is no other name given under heaven," than that of Jesus of Nazareth, no other merit whereby a condemned sinner can ever be saved from the guilt of sin; so there is no other way of obtaining a share in his merit, than "by faith in his name."

So that as long as we are without this faith, we are "strangers to the covenant of promise," we are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and without God in the world." Whatsoever virtues (so called) a man may have—I speak of those unto whom the gospel is preached; for "what have I to do to judge them that are without?" whatsoever good works (so accounted) he may do, it profiteth not; he is still a "child of wrath," still under the curse, till he believes in Jesus.

5. Faith, therefore, is the "necessary" condition of justification; yea, and the "only necessary" condition thereof. This is the Second point carefully to be observed; that, the very moment God giveth faith (for "it is the gift of God") to the "ungodly" that "worketh not," that "faith is counted to him for righteousness." He hath no righteousness at all, antecedent to this, not so much as negative righteousness, or innocence. But "faith is imputed to him for righteousness," the very moment that he believeth. Not that God (as was observed before) thinketh him to be what he is not. But as "he made Christ to be sin for us," that is, treated him as a sinner, punishing him for our sins; so he counteth us righteous, from the time we believe in him: That is, he doth not punish us for our sins; yea, treats us as though we are guiltless and righteous.


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6. Surely the difficulty of assenting to this proposition, that “faith is the “only condition” of justification,” must arise from not understanding it. We mean thereby thus much, that it is the only thing without which none is justified; the only thing that is immediately, indispensably, absolutely requisite in order to pardon. As, on the one hand, though a man should have every thing else without faith, yet he cannot be justified; so, on the other, though he be supposed to want everything else, yet if he hath faith, he cannot but be justified.

For suppose a sinner of any kind or degree, in a full sense of his total ungodliness, of his utter inability to think, speak, or do good, and his absolute meetness for hell-fire; suppose, I say, this sinner, helpless and hopeless, casts himself wholly on the mercy of God in Christ, (which indeed he cannot do but by the grace of God,) who can doubt but he is forgiven in that moment? Who will affirm that any more is “indispensably required” before that sinner can be justified? Now, if there ever was one such instance from the beginning of the world, (and have there not been, and are there not, ten thousand times ten thousand?) it plainly follows, that faith is, in the above sense, the sole condition of justification.

7. It does not become poor, guilty, sinful worms, who receive whatsoever blessings they enjoy, (from the least drop of water that cools our tongue, to the immense riches of glory in eternity,) of grace, of mere favour, and not of debt, to ask of God the reasons of his conduct. It is not meet for us to call Him in question “who giveth account to none of his ways;” to demand, “Why didst thou make faith the condition, the only condition, of justification? Wherefore didst thou decree, “He that believeth,” and he only, “shall be saved?”

This is the very point on which St. Paul so strongly insists in the ninth chapter of this Epistle, viz., that the terms of pardon and acceptance must depend, not on us, but “on him that calleth us;” that there is no “unrighteousness with God,” in fixing his own terms, not according to ours, but his own good pleasure; who may justly say, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy;” namely, on him who believeth in Jesus. “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth,” to choose the condition on which he shall find acceptance; “but of God that showeth mercy;” that accepteth none at all, but of his own free love, his unmerited goodness. “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy,” viz., on those who believe on the Son of his love; “and whom he will,” that is, those who believe not, “he hardeneth,” leaves at last to the hardness of their hearts.


**NOTES**

8. One reason, however, we may humbly conceive, of God's fixing this condition of justification, "If thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt be saved," was to "hide pride from man." Pride had already destroyed the very angels of God, had cast down "a third part of the stars of heaven." It was likewise in great measure owing to this, when the tempter said, "Ye shall be as gods," that Adam fell from his own steadfastness, and brought sin and death into the world. It was therefore an instance of wisdom worthy of God, to appoint such a condition of reconciliation for him and all his posterity as might effectually humble, might abase them to the dust. And such is faith.

It is peculiarly fitted for this end: For he that cometh unto God by this faith, must fix his eye singly on his own wickedness, on his guilt and helplessness, without having the least regard to any supposed good in himself, to any virtue or righteousness whatsoever. He must come as a "mere sinner," inwardly and outwardly, self-destroyed and self-condemned, bringing nothing to God but ungodliness only, pleading nothing of his own but sin and misery. Thus it is, and thus alone, when his "mouth is stopped," and he stands utterly "guilty before" God, that he can "look unto Jesus," as the whole and sole "Propitiation for his sins." Thus only can he be "found in him," and receive the "righteousness which is of God by faith."

9. Thou ungodly one, who hearest or readest these words! thou vile, helpless, miserable sinner! I charge thee before God, the Judge of all, go straight unto him, with all thy ungodliness. Take heed thou destroy not thy own soul by pleading thy righteousness, more or less. Go as altogether ungodly, guilty, lost, destroyed, deserving and dropping into hell; and thou shalt then find favour in his sight, and know that he justifieth the ungodly. As such thou shalt be brought unto the "blood of sprinkling," as an undone, helpless, damned sinner.

Thus "look unto Jesus!" There is "the Lamb of God," who "taketh away thy sins!" Plead thou no works, no righteousness of thine own! No humility, contrition, sincerity! In nowise. That were, in very deed, to deny the Lord that bought thee. No: Plead thou, singly, the blood of the covenant, the ransom paid for thy proud, stubborn, sinful soul. Who art thou, that now seest and feelest both thine inward and outward ungodliness? Thou art the man! I want thee for my Lord! I challenge "thee" for a child of God by faith! The Lord hath need of thee. Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell, art just fit to advance his glory; the glory of his free grace, justifying the ungodly and him that worketh not. O come quickly! Believe in the Lord Jesus; and thou, even thou, art reconciled to God.



**NOTES**

[Edited anonymously at the Memorial University of Newfoundland with corrections by George Lyons of Northwest Nazarene College (Nampa, Idaho) for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology (<http://wesley.nnu.edu>).]

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## APPLICATION

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**NOTES**

1. Spend some time exploring various internet sites for the words “John Wesley” or “Wesleyan way of Salvation”.
2. Write a reflection paper based on the following questions. Be prepared to share that paper with your mentor.
  - What do you find most helpful in the doctrine of prevenient grace?
  - Discuss the interaction of God’s grace and human response in our justification. How can we reconcile the corruption of original sin and the need for human response?
  - Discuss the selection from John Wesley’s sermon, “Justification by Faith.” What was new or helpful? What was not clear?

## EXAM

**NOTES**

1. God is free to act as He wills, but His character of love means that He will always be faithful.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
2. Prevenient grace is grace that goes before our conversion.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
3. God is selective in His work as Redeemer.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
4. Wherever God is present He is there as both Creator and Redeemer.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
5. The active presence of the Holy Spirit prior to conversion is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. repentance
  - B. the new creation
  - C. prevenient grace
  - D. sanctification
  
6. We are able, by the exercise of our own will, to turn to Christ in faith.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
7. God's cosmic vision of salvation is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. repentance
  - B. the new creation
  - C. prevenient grace
  - D. sanctification
  
8. God seeks to bring all persons to faith and reconciliation with Him.
  - A. True
  - B. False

**NOTES**

9. Turning away (from sin) and turning toward (God) is \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. repentance
  - B. new creation
  - C. justification
  - D. sanctification
10. Saving faith is radical dependence upon Christ for reconciliation with God.
- A. True
  - B. False
11. There is a continuity of grace between the orders of God's creation and redemption.
- A. True
  - B. False
12. \_\_\_\_\_ is what God does for us through His Son.
- A. repentance
  - B. justification
  - C. prevenient grace
  - D. sanctification
13. \_\_\_\_\_ is what God works in us by His Spirit.
- A. repentance
  - B. justification
  - C. sanctification
14. Justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins and restoration of relation with God.
- 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 do you find most helpful in the doctrine of prevenient grace?
3. Discuss the interaction of God's grace and human response in our justification. How can we reconcile the corruption of original sin and the need for human response?
4. Discuss the selection from John Wesley's sermon, "Justification by Faith." What was new or helpful? What was not clear?