

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Exploring John Wesley's Theology



SESSION 10

The Way of Salvation, Part 1

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**NOTES**

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She has published articles in the Wesleyan Theological Journal and has contributed to two books, including *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*. Her full-length book, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective*, won the Wesleyan Theological Society Book of the Year Award in 2002. Leclerc is an active member of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Association. She resides in Nampa, Idaho, with her husband and son.

The Way of Salvation, Part 1

SESSION OVERVIEW

Atonement Theories

Prevenient Grace

Repentance

Faith

Witness of the Spirit

Concomitants of Salvation

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- differentiate between the way of salvation versus the order of salvation.
- identify the various theories of Atonement.
- understand the roles of awakening, faith, and repentance in salvation.
- understand Wesley's doctrine of assurance.
- describe the seven concomitants of salvation.

The Way of Salvation, Part 1

INTRODUCTION



Wesley:

“And, first, let us inquire what is *salvation*? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word: the going to heaven, eternal happiness. It is not the soul’s going to paradise . . . It is not a blessing which lies on the other side of death . . . The very words of the text itself put this beyond all question, ‘Ye *are* saved.’ It is not something at a distance. It is a present thing, a blessing which through the free mercy of God ye are now in possession of. Nay, the words may be rendered, and that with equal propriety, ‘Ye *have been* saved.’ So that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory” (Sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Outler, p 273).

Wesley’s doctrine of sin affected his doctrine of salvation. Again following Eastern theology, he conceptualized sin as a disease that needed the healing touch of God as Physician. His understanding of salvation, then, can be termed therapeutic (Maddox, p. 144).

Western, Reformed theology focuses on the need for the forgiveness of guilt found in justification and on God as Judge and Justifier. Wesley is deeply indebted to this tradition, as expressed particularly by the Moravians, in his understanding of *sola fide*. However, Wesley went further and envisioned the whole of the work of God to include justification and sanctification. In this session we will look at the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the initial work of salvation, which Wesley preferred to call the New Birth.

ATONEMENT THEORIES



NOTES

The work of Christ on the Cross has been interpreted in many different ways. These are known as Atonement theories.

The Ransom Theory

This theory envisions humanity being held captive by Satan. Christ's death is the ransom, or payment given in order to free us from Satan's imprisonment. The resurrection of Jesus, however, is God's way of taking back the ransom from Satan.

The Satisfaction Theory

This theory is concerned that sin has been an affront to God's sense of honor. This honor must be vindicated or justified, thus God sends Jesus to die on the Cross as a means of atoning for sin and of restoring God's sense of satisfaction that sin has been paid for.

The Penal Satisfaction Theory

This is very similar to the satisfaction theory, but instead of God's honor needing vindication God's justice does. It is just that sin be punished. Christ thus takes the punishment upon himself, thus maintaining God as a just God.

The Christus Victor Theory

This theory was developed in the Early Church period. It affirms simply that Christ has been victorious over sin by taking sin upon himself innocently and by being raised from the dead by the power of God. This same power can defeat sin within us.

The Recapitulation Theory

This theory was also developed early in the history of the Church. It focuses on Jesus Christ as the Second Adam. This theory focuses on more than the Cross; it envelops all of Christ's life, lived obediently for God. What Adam did wrong through disobedience, Jesus does right through obedience. The Cross is the greatest expression of that obedience. Jesus in a sense redeems human life by giving us a model for living the life fully committed to the will of God.

NOTES*The Governmental Theory*

This theory is most often associated with Arminianism, formally developed by a student of James Arminius, Hugo Grotius. Christ's death allowed God to offer forgiveness to all who repented while at the same time retain governmental control. An important distinction must be made from the satisfaction theory in that Christ did not pay the penalty for our sin but instead suffered for us.

Such a distinction is crucial for Arminians because this atonement is unlimited. Thus, if Christ had paid the penalty for all then no one would be in need of redemption because Christ would have already taken the punishment. Instead the governmental theory insists that Christ's suffering was a substitute for penalty so persons could receive forgiveness yet at the same time understand the seriousness of their sin as to not return to it.

The Moral Influence Theory

This theory was established by Abelard (1079-1142) and attempts to deal with some of the flaws in the penal satisfaction theory. For the moral influence theory the Atonement is found in the Incarnation instead of in the Crucifixion and Resurrection. Christ came to set the perfect example of love and only died as another demonstration among many of that love. Salvation is experienced as an act of recognition of this ultimate example of love as a lifestyle.

Wesley was interested in the objective reality of the Atonement, but also equally interested in the subjective influence on us. He borrowed from several different theories on different occasions to make his point. Atonement theories primarily speak to what Christ accomplished for us, but the doctrine of soteriology goes much deeper. It asks the question: "How is Christ's atonement applied to us personally?" Randy Maddox suggested rather than fitting Wesley into the traditional model of *ordo salutis*, it is more appropriate to talk about Wesley as having a *via salutis*. That is to say rather than envisioning the Christian life as a series of steps, an order of salvation, it should be conceptualized as a way of salvation, as a moment by moment process that involves God's action and our response. For our purposes here, we will talk about certain salvific steps; but this is for the sake of clarity only. In Wesley's way, the steps flow fluidly into each other.

PREVENIENT GRACE



NOTES

Salvation begins with God's free gift of prevenient grace, given from the moment we are born. Prevenient grace is the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. It is prevenient grace that draws or woos us to God, awakening our souls for the need of God. This grace, as all grace, can be resisted, but if it is allowed to do its work, prevenient grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit will bring a person to the place of awakening. This is the place where we are convicted and convinced of our own sinfulness and helplessness apart from God. This awareness of need can be the result of events, sermons, the witness of others, or even something more internal as the Spirit does His work. If we allow ourselves to be awakened, the next step is the step of repentance.

Before we move on to repentance, there are three other functions of prevenient grace that should be noted here.

First, the Holy Spirit is so active in the world we can say—all truth is God's truth. A person does not need to be a Christian in order to be a brilliant brain surgeon. In fact, most of us would choose to be operated on by an excellent brain surgeon who is an atheist rather than a Christian brain surgeon who is not as good of a surgeon.

Second, prevenient grace, which is given to every human being, will provide saving grace in situations where full acceptance of Jesus Christ is not possible. These situations would include children who die before the age of accountability, the mentally infirm, and persons who have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel, such as a sixth century, BC, Hindu woman. Persons who have not heard the gospel will be judged according to their response to the light—the prevenient grace—they have been given (Romans 1 and 2). Wesley spent a great deal of time contemplating this aspect of the Spirit's work.

Third, according to Wesleyans, prevenient grace makes us accountable before God for our sin. If we are born into a condition of original sin that makes us so depraved we cannot help but choose evil, and that continually, how can a just God hold us accountable for what we cannot help? Prevenient grace restores to us a graced-free-will so God's justice is preserved as justifiable.

REPENTANCE



NOTES

Awakening is closely connected to repentance in Wesley's scheme. In a sense, it is hard to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. It can be equated with godly sorrow—the sense because of our sin, we are not in right relationship with God and yet deeply wish to be. The second meaning of repentance is the actual relinquishing of sin and amending our ways. It is key for Wesley that this second aspect of repentance is possible only after faith. Otherwise, we would be inappropriately connecting salvation to our own efforts at righteousness. It is only grace, through faith, that enables us to repent in this second sense.

FAITH



NOTES

Wesley's debt to the Moravians and the Lutheran tradition on the nature of faith cannot be overestimated. However, Wesley did not simply accept such an understanding without modification. He developed his thought over time. Wesley's initial encounter with the Moravians changed Wesley's understanding of salvation. Put simply, before 1737 Wesley believed sanctification preceded justification, after 1738 Wesley reversed the order.

We are justified by faith alone, *sola fide*. We do not make ourselves righteous in order to make ourselves worthy of God's justification. Justification is a free gift of God, as is faith itself. Then, in light of Wesley's primary interest in the therapeutic and sanctifying aspect of salvation (rather than in the Western emphasis on forgiveness of guilt) and in light of Wesley's understanding of the dynamic, cooperative relationship we have with God in our own salvation (rather than the Reformed emphasis on the irresistibility of grace); Wesley's very definition of faith broadened.

Faith only as an agreement to a set of truthful claims would never be true faith in Wesley's experiential religion. Also, faith extends beyond justification and becomes the essence of trust in Christ for every moment along the way of salvation. Faith is the cooperative relationship we have with God. This is known as synergism—as opposed to monergism—and is foundational to all of Wesleyan theology.

WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT



NOTES

Key to Wesley's understanding of the Christian experience is his doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, also known as the doctrine of assurance. As with many of his doctrines, Wesley's doctrine of assurance developed over time. The early, pre-Aldersgate Wesley connected assurance with faith. However, at this point faith for Wesley was a rational expression of agreement to the basic statement of opinion of the Christian, particularly Anglican tradition. His own spiritual struggles and his lack of assurance, despite his orthodoxy, soon led him to question the validity of this type of rationalistic assurance.

Wesley's contact with the Moravians moved his understanding on the doctrine of assurance to a place where Wesley expected all Christians could perceive the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. His understanding was based on Romans 8:15-16, which reads, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba,' Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Wesley believed, with the Moravians, we should anticipate this experience to such a degree that if we do not have it, it is appropriate to question our faith in Christ.

The Moravian insistence that following an experience of assurance Christians should continually experience joy, peace, and certainty eventually soured in Wesley's mind. The mature Wesley came to believe while we should expect the assurance found in Romans, it is possible to have saving faith without it. It is also possible to lose one's assurance without in fact losing one's salvation.

CONCOMITANTS OF SALVATION



NOTES

Each of the following is a designator for a different aspect of the moment of salvation.

Justification

To be justified by God implies our sins are forgiven. The guilt of our sins is taken away. God no longer condemns us for our transgressions against Him. Wesley affirmed justification. However, he believed fuller salvation goes beyond justification to address the underlying problem or disease. Wesley's therapeutic model takes him further.

Regeneration

Wesley's favorite term for salvation was the New Birth. This concept implies we are regenerated, born again, and are new creations in Christ. Wesley never wanted his doctrine of sanctification to minimize the power and significance of new birth.

Adoption

As stated above in the section on assurance, Wesley strongly affirms the significance of being a child of God and co-heir with Christ. This aspect of salvation also implies we are born into a family, a community of brothers and sisters in Christ. This prevents us from imagining salvation as a purely privatistic event and life.

Redemption

Redemption implies liberation from sin. Exodus acts as a metaphor for redemption. Redemption also implies receiving a new purpose, namely, to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. Our lives are redeemed from sin and for love.

Reconciliation

We are reconciled to God. This is a theme we find in Wesley's writing, and also in Charles's hymns. This is the sense the alienation and estrangement from God implicit in sin is overcome when we come into a new relationship with God.

Initial Sanctification

Wesley never used this term, but it signifies his belief the moment of salvation begins the process of being made righteous.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

1. Write a reflection paper chronicling your salvation and sanctification.
2. Define prevenient grace and how you sensed God's Spirit working in your life prior to your conversion experience.
3. Journal your understanding of assurance and how it does or does not align with Wesley's understanding.

EXAM



NOTES

1. The _____ theory envisions humanity being held captive by Satan. Christ's death is the payment given in order to free us from Satan's imprisonment.
 - A. ransom
 - B. satisfaction
 - C. penal satisfaction
 - D. *Cristus Victor*
2. The _____ theory is concerned that sin has been an affront to God's sense of honor. This honor must be vindicated, and thus God sends Jesus to die on the Cross as a means of atoning for sin.
 - A. ransom
 - B. satisfaction
 - C. penal satisfaction
 - D. *Cristus Victor*
3. The _____ theory says God's justice must be vindicated.
 - A. ransom
 - B. satisfaction
 - C. penal satisfaction
 - D. *Cristus Victor*
4. The _____ theory affirms Christ has been victorious over sin by taking sin upon himself innocently and by being raised from the dead by the power of God.
 - A. ransom
 - B. satisfaction
 - C. penal satisfaction
 - D. *Cristus Victor*
5. The recapitulation theory says what Adam did wrong through disobedience, Jesus does right through obedience.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. The _____ theory insists Christ's suffering was a substitute for penalty so persons could receive forgiveness yet at the same time understand the seriousness of their sin as to not return to it.
 - A. governmental
 - B. satisfaction
 - C. penal satisfaction
 - D. *Cristus Victor*

 **NOTES**

7. Preventive grace is _____.
 - A. given from the moment we are born
 - B. the presence and work of the Holy Spirit
 - C. what draws or woos us to God, awakening our souls for the need of God
 - D. all of the above

8. For the moral influence theory, the Atonement is found in the Incarnation instead of in the Crucifixion and Resurrection.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. _____ is the place in preventive grace where we are convicted and convinced of our own sinfulness and helplessness apart from God.
 - A. Awakening
 - B. Salvation
 - C. Sanctification
 - D. None of the above

10. Which one of the following is a function of preventive grace?
 - A. The Holy Spirit is so active in the world we can say "all truth is God's truth."
 - B. It provides saving grace in situations where full acceptance of Jesus Christ is not possible.
 - C. It restores to us a graced-free-will so God's justice is preserved as justifiable.
 - D. All of the above

11. Repentance is the actual relinquishing of sin and amending of our ways.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. Faith is the cooperative relationship we have with God.
 - A. True
 - B. False

13. The mature Wesley came to believe that while we should expect the assurance found in Romans, it is possible to have saving faith without it. It is also possible to lose one's assurance without in fact losing one's salvation.
 - A. True
 - B. False

**NOTES**

14. _____ means our sins are forgiven, guilt is taken away, and God no longer condemns us.
- A. Regeneration
 - B. Adoption
 - C. Redemption
 - D. Justification
15. _____ means born again.
- A. Regeneration
 - B. Adoption
 - C. Redemption
 - D. Justification
16. _____ means a believer has assurance of being a child of God.
- A. Regeneration
 - B. Adoption
 - C. Redemption
17. _____ implies liberation from sin.
- A. Regeneration
 - B. Adoption
 - C. Redemption
 - D. Justification
18. _____ means the relationship between God and man has moved from alienation and estrangement to new relationship.
- A. Redemption
 - B. Regeneration
 - C. Reconciliation
 - D. Initial Sanctification
19. _____ means the moment of salvation begins the process of being made righteous.
- A. Initial sanctification
 - B. Reconciliation
 - C. Redemption
 - D. Adoption

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Your reflection paper chronicling your salvation and sanctification.
2. Your definition of prevenient grace and how you sensed God's Spirit working in your life prior to your conversion experience.
3. Your journal entry of your understanding of assurance and how it does or does not align with Wesley's understanding.