

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Communicating the Gospel
in a Pluralistic World



SESSION 5

The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

CLT Bible Study

The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

Certificate of Lay Ministry
Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World
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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

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INTRODUCTION

The New Testament hints at the complex religious context of the time. There were many religions available to people and calling for attention. Often, these religions blurred together and borrowed from one another. In many ways, what the early church faced is similar to our day. In this pluralistic atmosphere, the early church proclaimed, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

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 present in their 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; and
- 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

The New Testament hints at the complex religious context of the time. There were many religions available to people and calling for attention. Often, these religions blurred together and borrowed from one another. In many ways, what the early church faced is similar to our day. In this pluralistic atmosphere, the early church proclaimed, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (2 Corinthians 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” (Ephesians 1:9-10).

Acts and the Epistles show that in the first-century Greco-Roman world, people believed in many “so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth” (1 Corinthians 8:5). Luke tells the story of when Paul visited the city of Athens. What he found was a city full of idols. One altar had the inscription dedication “to an unknown god” (Acts 17:16-23).

In Ephesus, Paul’s message about Jesus caused a big disturbance. The people of Ephesus rioted because they felt Paul threatened their way of life. Many people stopped worshipping the goddess Artemis. The sale of her silver idols had declined so much that the silversmiths’ business was ruined. One of them, Demetrius, said that Paul had preached that “gods made by human hands are no gods at all” (Acts 19:23-27). John of Patmos challenged the emperor’s claim to be a god. He proclaimed that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega and Lord of all. He wrote that Jesus is “the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

This session is based on the conviction that the New Testament is our standard and guide for how to deal with other religions. It will show us how to speak as Jesus’ followers to those who believe in these religions. The Church of the Nazarene joins with Christians throughout history in our core convictions about Christ. Without embarrassment or compromise, we confess Christ as “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 made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 6:51; 1:14).

The book *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick, is influential in discussions about religious pluralism. This book disagrees with the idea in the New Testament that God became human in the form of Jesus. It suggests a different way to think about religious diversity. But will the New Testament allow Hick's idea?

This book claims that those who lived during that time believed that supernatural forces caused everything. They did not question claims that a divine or spiritual being had visited people. But people today do not accept this. The Western world today is influenced by human thinking and the natural sciences. Most people cannot even imagine supernatural events or divine intervention. Are the claims of this book true?

RESPONSE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS TO RELIGIOUS PLURALISM



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The writers of the New Testament lived in a time when people believed in many different gods and religions. How did they respond to this pluralism? Did they try to make room for Jesus in this crowded religious world? Did they try to make Jesus fit in with the other gods? Was he just another one of the deities in the pantheon of many deities? Did they make him like one of the gods so people would more easily accept him? Did they do like what some did in Colossae: treat Christ as one of the many deities who all together made up God's fullness?

Actually, none of these things happened. Instead, the writers of the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation, all said that God, who created everything, acted decisively in history through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to redeem the world. In Christ Jesus, the kingdom of God came in power. God's kingdom will grow and one day be fulfilled when he comes again. In him, all God's promises to Israel, all people, and even creation itself are being fulfilled.

Jesus is God's "YES!" (2 Corinthians 1:15-22). He is the story of God. The New Testament proclaims from beginning to end that Jesus is the revelation of God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the writers show us who God is in Jesus. Not only does Jesus show us who God is, but he also shows us who we are and what creation is to be. He shows us God's truth and will for both humanity and creation. The apostle Paul tells us that God's plan for the fullness of time has been determined in Jesus Christ. He says that Jesus is the new and true human. Paul declares that Jesus is the new and true humanity (Romans 5:15-21).

One day, the whole creation will be restored. Through Christ, it will be "brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). The New Testament is very clear about the completeness of the work of Christ. The person and power of Christ are 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." He was the Mount of Transfiguration when the God of Israel said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17).

In the Son of God, ancient Israel's most important statement of faith remains secure. Believing in Jesus does not change the confession known as the Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all

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your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

This God, who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, shows all other lords and gods to be nothing but human-made objects. Their influence is limited, and their time is short. The New Testament clearly confirms what the Old Testament claims.

THE COMPLETENESS OF THE GOSPEL

The New Testament affirms that the gospel of God is unique. God’s plan and purpose for the nations and all creation are fulfilled in Jesus. The healing of all things in the end is made possible because of Jesus’ death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All other elementary principles (in Greek, *stoicheion tou kosmou*, Galatians 4:3) of human experience, including the Law (Torah), cannot define God’s relationship with people and the world. Only Jesus Christ is God’s complete message and method of fulfilling his plan of redemption.

The New Testament denies the claims of historicism and postmodernism (see previous sessions) that humans create all religious stories. The New Testament says that Jesus Christ is God’s action in history, not an action of humans. The New Testament focuses first on what God has done. God acted through Christ to free humanity, nations, and all creation from the powers that enslave and oppose God’s plans and purposes.

THE GOSPEL IS FIRST A DECLARATION ABOUT GOD AND HIS DEEDS

Many of us talk about the gospel as if it is mainly news about people. The gospel is indeed good news for everyone. It has the power to reconcile and help people get right with God, themselves, others, and God’s creation. The gospel of God sees all the ways people are hurt and broken and promises to bring healing to them (Revelation 22:2).

For Wesleyans and many other Christians, the gospel of God does something amazing: it creates something new. The gospel brings new creation and transforms every part of a person’s personal and social life. But the gospel is good news first because it is news about God and what he has done and is doing through Christ.

The argument between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes in Luke 21 was over what God is like. The tax collectors and sinners listened to every word Jesus said because he told them something about God they had not heard before. The Pharisees and scribes never taught with the power and authority of Jesus. Instead

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of leaving the lost to stay lost, God goes out into the night to find them. Like a good shepherd, God carefully looks for the lost and then carries them on his shoulders or puts a robe on them out of his love, seeking their reconciliation. He does all this because he loves them and wants to make things right with them. 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.

Those who desire to witness about the gospel of God must make sure they tell it properly. We begin with God and the story of his being for and with us and being for and with the creation. We start with his plans and promises and how they came true in Jesus Christ. What about the human condition? Should we think about that also? Yes, definitely! This condition does not define itself. One of the main jobs of a Christian minister is to make sure his or her telling of the gospel matches the real meaning and purpose of the gospel. We should not blur the meaning of the gospel and let it be shaped by culture, what consumers want, national plans, class and gender privileges, or political power. Otherwise, the gospel will lose the power of God.

We start by talking about what God has done. If we do not start there, we might be tempted to think of the gospel as just one of many religious stories. The pluralistic atmosphere we live in may influence us to make the gospel pluralistic, just one story among many.

This is what happened to John Hick. Influenced by modern thinking, Hick decided that the Incarnation (God becoming human in Jesus) is just a myth. He concluded that most people find the idea that something supernatural can interfere with our world or cause something to happen simply unbelievable.

Christian ministers should be like reporters, not authors. The church is often tempted to make people—their interests, institutions, and culture—the main focus of the gospel of God. Of course, the gospel speaks to all these things. But it does not start or get its meaning from any of them.

WHO IS THIS GOD?

Who is this God about whom the gospel speaks? He is the God that the Old Testament talks about—Yahweh. He is the one who spoke all creation into existence. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He is the one who made big promises through his prophets of saving his people. Now, he has shown himself ultimately through Jesus of Nazareth.


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After the Holy Spirit enabled Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, to speak again, Zechariah said, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us—to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant” (Luke 1:68-72).

The God who promises is ever faithful. He has now fulfilled his promises, not through another prophet, but through his Son, the only begotten of the Father (Romans 15:8; Galatians 3:15-18; Hebrews 10:23).

What God has done in Jesus Christ is so significant that it should be talked about as a new creation. Paul says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come” (2 Corinthians 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 writes, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation” (Galatians 6:14-15). The beginning 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

The New Testament says that Jesus Christ is not just another religion. All other supposed ways to reach God will end one day. Even if other religions have helped people think about God (Acts 14:8-18), they will eventually yield to Jesus, who is the King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

Before Jesus came, God was already in the world, giving people a basic understanding of himself. He used many ways to do this, like the Torah, nature, philosophy, culture, and religion. For example, Paul wrote that the Law was like a teacher (Greek *paidagogos*—a custodian) who helped people come to believe in Jesus (Galatians 3:23-25).

In Lystra, Paul used the citizens’ worship of Zeus to introduce them to “the living

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God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” God “has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:15-17).

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 is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands” (Acts 17:24). “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (vv. 30-31).

Jesus showed us who God is by being completely loyal, even to the point of dying on the cross. “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8-11).

The apostle Paul gives a brief glimpse at how God will conclude all his plans through his Son. When Jesus comes again, he will hand over “the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, 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 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Douglas Harink’s thoughts about Galatians can apply to the whole New Testament. He says that nothing is greater or more important than what happened in Jesus Christ’s life. No person, idea, or anything else is more real or significant than Jesus Christ. This is because God’s actions and Jesus Christ’s life are the same thing. According to Harink, the good news about Jesus Christ shows that every part of space, time, and creation is influenced by what God did through Jesus Christ. Nothing is left out or unaffected by God’s final and decisive action in Jesus Christ.

CONFRONTING THE CHARGE THAT ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN FAITH IS OPPRESSIVE



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In our previous session, we learned that in our postmodern climate, some people are critical of those who think their religious story should be everyone's story. They view as oppressors anyone who does not recognize that religious experiences are made real only to those who believe in the particular religion. The postmodern criticism is that such people are not being fair because they use their own religious beliefs to control others. This form of oppression is called "totalizing." It is when one religion or culture thinks it has all the total knowledge and the answers for everyone else. In today's postmodern world, totalizing is seen as wrong and exploits others, and it should be condemned and stopped.

It may seem that what this session has presented does the same thing. It could be interpreted as oppressive and totalizing. This is a serious critique of what has been said. We cannot ignore this charge but address it carefully. Any religion that tries to force itself on others and acts unjustly can be seen as bad, including Christianity.

But Douglas Harink warns us that if we try to remove anything from the Christian faith that might make it seem "totalizing," we would go against the New Testament. He says that making judgments and claims is part of the nature of the Christian faith. The exclusive claims of Christianity are core to its belief in God's plan for creation and how God has revealed this plan to humanity. If he is right, and if what this session argues for agrees, then we cannot avoid upsetting some people who accept the postmodern belief that there are many different religious stories.

In his time, the apostle Paul chose to accept that God's wisdom and power are shown through Jesus's death on the cross, even though this seemed foolish to Jews and Greeks. He chose to go with God's view and not that of the people around him. He wrote, "Jews want miracles and Greeks want wisdom, but we preach about Christ's death on the cross. This is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

In his day, the apostle Paul had to decide between embracing the wisdom and power of God as shown on the cross or compromising and being acceptable to the Jews and Greeks around him. With all his being, he chose the former. "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

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Even though the message of the foolishness of the cross is nonnegotiable, we have to figure out how to proclaim it. There are ways of sharing about Jesus that can make the good news sound like bad news. Everyone should stand up and defend justice, human dignity, and decency and oppose exploitation, modern slavery, intimidation, and disrespect. Paul did this (2 Corinthians 4:1-6), and so should we. People need to hear the good news as something that brings healing, not harm.

The book of Revelation summarizes what the New Testament writers said about Christ. Its themes have been proclaimed throughout the New Testament in one way or another.

- God is the holy and transcendent God. Everything in heaven and on earth relies on him. He is the Creator (Revelation 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 firmly based on the decisive and total victory already won through Jesus' death and resurrection. He is the Lamb who 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 the Lamb.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH



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

“To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 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 [quarreling] 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


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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 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 [break], 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 forever, 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


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disobedience," all "were made sinners;" so, by that offence of one, "judgment came upon all men to condemnation." (Romans)

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 [offering] 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 [counting] 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 [grants], 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


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justification, but, nevertheless, is a distinct gift of God, and of a totally different nature. The one implies what God does for 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 cannot 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 [bias]; 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 [atonement] 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 given by St. Paul, throughout this whole epistle. So he explains it himself, more

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particularly in this and 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 [count] 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.”

Words inserted in [] are modern words that capture Wesley’s ideas.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

1. Spend some time exploring various internet sites about the topic of “biblical thinking about Jesus and Christian Faith.”
2. Write a reflection paper based on the following questions. Be prepared to share the paper with your mentor.
 - What is the New Testament’s response to the idea that there are many paths to God?
 - Does the Christian gospel have to be viewed as oppressive in a pluralistic culture? Is there anything we can do to address this criticism 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. The conviction of this module is that the New Testament must be our standard for speaking in Christian terms.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. The New Testament is unclear concerning the centrality of the person and work of Jesus.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. The gospel of Jesus Christ not only reveals what God provides for us, but 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. Proclaiming the message of the Christian Faith to 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 idea of justification is pardon and forgiveness.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Review the exam questions and answers. Discuss any issues or questions a participant raises for you.
2. What is the New Testament's response to the idea that there are many paths to God?
3. Does the Christian gospel have to be viewed as oppressive in a pluralistic culture? Is there anything we can do to address this criticism 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?