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Communicating the Gospel
in a Pluralistic World



SESSION 6

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

CLT Bible Study

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

Certificate of Lay Ministry
Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World
Dr. David Ackerman, editor
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The Wesleyan-Holiness 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

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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-Holiness way of salvation.

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

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.”

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PREVENIENT GRACE, JUSTIFICATION, AND THE GIFT OF FAITH



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The Bible tells the story of the God who is holy Love. Compared to idols made of silver and gold, which are nothing but “blocks of wood” (Isaiah 44:19), “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases” (Psalm 115:3). God’s freedom is unique and special. Unlike humans and any powers in this world, no one can limit God or set boundaries for him. He is above and beyond all things.

Some creatures, including humans, have some freedom. But their freedom is limited, finite, and comes with many restrictions. These restrictions cannot be avoided and are part of our existence. In contrast, if God has any limitations, he sets them for himself because of his love.

God’s freedom is about being consistently loving to himself and his creation. His freedom is shown in how he is faithful in holy Love to himself and his creation. “His steadfast love endures forever” (Ps. 118:4). God freely acts in love and loving freedom.

When discussing God’s freedom, we first think about the relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the one God—and how he creates and saves. As the psalmists testify, God’s ways are marvelous to behold. “Who is like the Lord our God, the one who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes, with the princes of his people. He settles the childless woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the LORD” (Psalm 113:5-9).

In his sovereign freedom, God acts in history and “fulfills the predictions of his messengers” (Isaiah 44:26). In his freedom, God takes people seriously—their personalities, their personal histories, their religious histories, and so on. No one can tell God how he needs to save creation. For example, in 537 BC, God surprised the Hebrews by using Cyrus, the king of Persia, to free the captives. Or consider how God freely chose a simple virgin girl to give birth to our Lord.

When the time was right, God freely sent his Son in a way that shocked both the Jews and the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:20-31). One thing is for sure: in his freedom, God will always be faithful to himself and, hence, faithful to us.

The Wesleyan-Holiness tradition agrees with the idea of a free God. Because of its study of the Scripture, tradition, and our experience of faith, the Wesleyan tradition


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has a distinctive way of understanding how God works in terms of salvation. We call it “the Wesleyan way of salvation.” We will now look at the parts of the Wesleyan way, sometimes called the “order” of salvation.

PREVENIENT GRACE

The doctrine of prevenient grace in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is one of its strongest features. The doctrine is in no way unique to Wesleyans. But Wesleyan theology does provide special nuances. Prevenient grace describes how God always makes the first move to save his creation. Prevenient grace is “the grace that goes before.” It prepares people to hear and receive the gospel. This grace reaches its goal when a person comes to believe in and follow Christ. The Holy Spirit works in people’s lives, drawing them toward Christ and leading them to repentance and “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5).

Even the smallest curiosity or basic knowledge about God comes from the Spirit’s prevenient activity. The Spirit makes us wonder about God, no matter how small that wonder might 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 any human evangelist or witness of the gospel appears on the scene, the gracious God has already been there. He is already working in surprising ways and is only guided by his own plans. For some people like this author, it is easier to say this than to really live it out.

Even now, God keeps his creation going by his powerful word. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm and celebrate this. “You have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand today, for all things are your servants” (Psalm 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” (Colossians 1:15-17). His constant faithfulness to creation is one reason we believe that all creation can trust in him with unbroken love and confidence.

Wesleyans do not agree with the idea that some denominations accept that we should separate God as Creator and God as Redeemer. They believe that while God creates and cares for everyone, he only chooses to save some people. God

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chooses or “elects” some people to be saved for his glory and out of his undeserved grace. Others are condemned. It is correct that everyone is dead in their sins and deserves condemnation. But this perspective says that God chooses to forgive, reconcile, and give eternal life to only some people, not everyone. Wesleyans reject this doctrine!

Wesleyans believe that God’s grace is present in both creation and redemption. Based on the New Testament, John Wesley taught that God still cares for His creation by his grace (Colossians 1:15-17). If he did not, the world would cease to exist. This is also true for all people. Everyone depends on God’s grace for existence (Acts 17:22-28; Colossians 1:15-20).

Wesleyans think that trying to separate God as Creator and Redeemer is wrong. This idea is based on certain theological presuppositions and views and is not necessary according to the Bible. We believe that wherever God is, he is there as both Creator and Redeemer. Acts of creation and redemption are the gracious work of God. An important idea found in the New Testament is that God revealed himself in the Son as Redeemer. It is also through the Son that the Father created and sustains creation. For example, the Epistle to the Hebrews 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” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

John Wesley believed that the idea of a new creation in the New Testament shows the connection between creation and redemption. With Paul, Wesley understood the fruit of the gospel to be “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). New creation includes individuals and the whole universe. Wesleyan theologian Theodore Runyon says that Christ’s work as the Creator-Redeemer involves “nothing less than a new creation transforming all dimensions of human existence, both personal and social.”

To understand Wesleyan theology, it is important to understand two ideas. One is the crucial relationship between creation, redemption, and new creation. The other is Wesley’s concept of salvation. For him, like for the apostle Paul (Romans 8:18-25), the gospel will not have reached its goal until all creation is saved. Wesley calls this “a general deliverance of creation.” All creatures will share in the deliverance that the Redeemer has won. Wesley linked the redemption of creation with the redemption of humanity. He wrote that creation “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.’”

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At the heart of Wesleyan theology is the gracious relationship between creation and redemption. “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).

God sustains creation by his nearness, but he does more than just preserve creation. His nearness is Christological, gracious, and redemptive. What this means is that God is close because of and through Christ. He is near because of his grace. And the result of his nearness is redemption.

Christ, as the Creator and Redeemer, is closer to the creation, including humanity, than the creation is to itself. As Paul wrote in Colossians 1:17, Christ is the center of everything and the one by whom all things hold together. This is true for everyone.

So Wesleyans believe that according to the Father’s purposes shown in Jesus Christ, all people are meant to be re-created (Ephesians 1:3-10). If anyone is left out of the plan of redemption, it would be like taking away God’s creative and re-creative presence from them. We believe that all people are potentially included in Christ’s forgiveness.

In everyone’s very existence, through the Holy Spirit, the Redeemer is present as Creator and wants to be Redeemer. God does not want anyone to perish but for everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). At the most basic levels of existence, and in creative ways that no human can fully understand, the Creator-Redeemer seeks to bring all people to faith and reconciliation.

This is why Wesleyans believe in the doctrine of prevenient grace. The whole doctrine of God with his world supports it. The doctrine is the foundation for everything that follows. Wesley said, “God is not a respecter of persons. [He] is not partial in his love.” God’s love is unconditional for all, not just for one nation or group. God loves everyone and wants all people to be saved.

We in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition are optimistic about the gospel because we believe the Holy Spirit works in people’s lives before the gospel is ever shared. The Holy Spirit has been drawing them to Christ and preparing them to hear the gospel and be saved. We believe this happens both inside and outside the Church.

Children in the church are being drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit working through the Christian examples of their parents, godly teachers and pastors, Bible stories, the sacraments, and through prayer and sacred music. The Spirit also draws adults in the church who have not yet confessed their faith in Christ.


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Outside the church, the Holy Spirit is also active. The Spirit works in many ways as he chooses in those who have never heard the gospel. He works through one's conscience, religious feelings, and awareness, what could be called one's God-given capacity for God.

Through prevenient grace, God, through the Holy Spirit, restores a sense of right and wrong and gives freedom to respond to the Spirit's leading. Prevenient grace prompts a person to have "the first wish to please God." As Wesley argued, this grace brings the first understanding of God's will and the first small feeling of conviction of having sinned against God. All these show a move toward life and a start of being saved from a heart that does not feel anything for God. As we shall see, the doctrine of prevenient grace prepares us well to bear witness to Christ 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

Many important theological words are associated with salvation. Sanctification includes regeneration, which is the "immediate fruit of justification." We can create one long, hyphenated word to describe God's saving work in us: justification-regeneration-sanctification. God's goal is to transform the whole person, and justification is the foundation for this.

Paul connected justification and regeneration in his teaching about Christ's death and resurrection. He described justification as being buried with Christ in baptism into a death like his (Romans 6:4). Regeneration is being "united with him in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:5). This is what it means to be born again by the Spirit. Being raised with Christ, we now "live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

Repentance

Mark 1:15 and Matthew 4:17 record how Jesus started his public ministry with a call to repentance. Mark connects repentance with hearing the good news. Matthew connects repentance with the nearness of the Kingdom. After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached to all nations in his name (Luke 24:47).


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In the New Testament, repentance is closely connected with hearing, believing, and receiving the gospel. Repentance and forgiveness of sins, and repentance and faith cannot be separated. The most common word for repentance in the New Testament is the Greek word *metanoia*. This word usually means a change of mind and feeling sorry. Both of these meanings are included in the repentance that comes with receiving the gospel.

Repentance also means turning away from something (Mark 1:4). More completely, it means turning around completely and going in a different direction. By the power of the Holy Spirit, persons who repent and feel sorry for their sins confess their sins against God and others. They reject and turn away from the old way of life against God and turn to accept the new reality found in the kingdom of God.

A readiness to obey must be joined to repentance. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called repentance the first concrete step of obedience. Repentance is an act of faith the Spirit makes possible. A repentant sinner must believe that salvation comes only from Christ. If one thinks more highly of oneself than that, then for him or her, the gospel will not be good news. Repentance shows our humility before God and willingness to trust in him.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation with the Father comes through faith in his obedient and faithful Son (Romans 5:15-21; Hebrews 10:7-10). Jesus always did what was right. In all things, even to death on the cross, the New Adam lived in unbroken faithfulness to his Heavenly Father's will by the power of the Spirit. He is the faithful and righteous one (1 John 2:1). He is 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" (Hebrews 12:2). We are saved because of his faithfulness of going to the cross and not by anything we do. Our faith is in the faithful one. Because of his faithfulness in all things, we call him Savior and Redeemer. God justifies the one who believes in Jesus (Romans 3:26).

Justification is when God, who is full of love, gives us what he asks for—friendship. God justifies because he is holy Love and freely gives righteousness to others as a gift. God's law says that we should love and obey him and also love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. But because we are slaves to sin and dead in our trespasses, we cannot love as we should.

Justification also means being forgiven for our sins, the removal of guilt, and becoming friends with God again. God pardons, and we are reconciled. The "plain

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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.’”

Trying to earn God’s favor by our own efforts only shows that we want to be independent from God. We are acting like our ancestors, Adam and Eve.

But through Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit, God reconciles all who will stop relying on their own goodness and start depending on his grace. Justification means being pardoned or forgiven of our sins. Our guilt is removed, and we are reconciled with God.

Adoption

Justification is like the start of our Christian journey. When we are justified, we are also adopted 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.”

Theodore Runyon says that when we repent of our sins and accept the good news of Jesus, we move from being aware of God’s grace to being justified and born again. We “advance from the porch of prevenient grace to the door of justification and new birth.” This happens because of the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit helps us understand the truth of the good news. He calls us to repent and believe. He keeps us connected with him through fellowship with his people.

THE SPIRIT'S GIFT OF FAITH AND HUMAN RESPONSE



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John Wesley completely agreed with the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century, who said that we are justified by God's grace through faith alone. Saving faith means completely depending on Christ to make things right with God. Forgiveness is given to those who repent of their sins through the faith the Spirit gives. Wesley said that faith 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 us the power to believe because "no man is able to work such saving faith in himself." If saving faith was something we could achieve, then salvation would be partly our own doing. To receive the gift of faith and the Spirit of adoption means to be given a restored relationship with God.

Sometimes, people who say they represent the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition make a big mistake by abandoning the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. They end up straying into sem-Pelagianism or even Pelagianism. They teach that we can turn to Christ in faith by our own free will, like what Pelagius taught.

The truth is that we do not have free will. If we did have free will, the idea of original sin would not make sense and would have to be rejected. We can only respond to God's offer of salvation if the Holy Spirit makes it possible. The offer of faith and the ability to accept and use it are all God's work. Though our response is important, it is only possible because of the Holy Spirit.

Faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life is a gift from God. We can do nothing to earn our salvation. Faith is both a gift and a response that the Spirit empowers. We call this combination of God's action and our response "evangelical synergism." This term means that faith is not only a gift from God but also includes our active response, which is powered by the Spirit. This idea defends the Wesleyan-holiness understanding of grace against those who say that including an active response is like trying to earn righteousness through our works. In the following sermon, John Wesley lays out his doctrine of justification. It will help explain the ideas given above more.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH



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

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 [passionately] 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 [assumption] 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 [essentially] 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 [habit]—but all such as were evil and abominable [detestable]—pride, anger, love of the world—the genuine fruits of that "carnal mind" which is "enmity


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against God.”

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


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Father) is not in us; and this love can 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 [atonement], 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 [forgiven] 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


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ur sins, that he hath accepted us again into his favour, for the merits of Christ's death and passion. — But here we must 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

"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 [before] to this, not so much as negative righteousness, or innocence. But "faith is imputed [counted] 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.
6. Surely the difficult of assenting [agreeing] to this proposition, that "faith is the


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“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 [necessary] in order to pardon. As, on the one hand, though a man should have everything 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 [suitable] 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 [proper] 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.

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,”


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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 [atonement] 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 [remorse], 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.

[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>).]



This document is from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library server (www.ccel.org). This version has been designed for the Wesley homepages on the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church Web Server. Words inserted in [] are modern words that capture Wesley's ideas.

APPLICATION

**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 a human response?
 - Discuss the selection from John Wesley’s sermon, “Justification by Faith.”
 - What was new or helpful in this sermon? 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 before conversion is _____.
 - A. repentance
 - B. the new creation
 - C. prevenient grace
 - D. sanctification
6. By exercising our own will, we are able to turn to Christ in faith.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. God's vision of salvation for the cosmos 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

EXAM

**NOTES**

9. Turning away (from sin) and turning toward (God) is _____.
- A. repentance
 - B. the new creation
 - C. prevenient grace
 - D. sanctification
10. Saving faith is a radical dependence upon Christ for reconciliation with God
- A. True
 - B. False
11. The grace that flows from God's acts of creation and redemption is continuous and unbroken.
- 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. prevenient grace
 - D. 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

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Review the exam questions and answers. Discuss any issues or questions the participant raises 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 a human response?
4. Discuss the selection from John Wesley's sermon, "Justification by Faith." What was new or helpful? What was not clear?