Exploring John Wesley’s Theology

Lessons 5-8  October 8th

Clergy Development
Church of the Nazarene
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Exploring John Wesley’s Theology

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These sermons by John Wesley are available in full text on the Wesley Center website at Northwest Nazarene University <http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons/alpha.htm>. The sermon titles are listed in alphabetical order.

“The Catholic Spirit” (Sermon 39)

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“The Unity of Divine Being” (Sermon 114)

These works by John Wesley may be found on the Wesley Center website at Northwest Nazarene University, refer to <http://wesley.nnu.edu/>:

• “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge”
• “Plain Account of Christian Perfection”
• “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist”

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Due for October 8th class

1. Read lessons 5-8
2. Read & Critique the following sermons: Use Resource form 5-6 on PG 27 for all sermon critique
   
   “The Almost Christian.” (Resource 5-5, PG 19)
   “The Lord Our Righteousness.” (Resource 7-2, PG 41)

*Be prepared to share with class*

*3. Choose one of the following:

- Write a 1-2 pg essay on this question: Are Reason and Faith Compatible?
- Write a 1-pg response to this question: What is God’s most important attribute? (Defend your decision)

5. List some Scripture passages you would use to support:
   
   a doctrine of Jesus Christ
   a doctrine of the Holy Spirit

6. Write in your journal. This assignment is ongoing. Include your reflections, reactions, and insights on the material presented in the lesson and class.

7. Read a portion of John Wesley’s journal and reflect on your reading. His journal can be found at: http://wesley.nnu.edu/

8. Read all Resource pages that are included with the lessons.
Lesson 5: The Quadrilateral: Scripture and tradition

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants should:

- Appreciate the meaning and function of Wesley’s quadrilateral
- Understand the doctrine of inspiration
- Define Wesley’s “analogy of faith” as a hermeneutical principle
- Explore Wesley’s preference for Early Church and Anglicanism as “the” tradition

Motivator From Albert Outler, p 88.

What is the nature of Wesley’s famous quote, in light of the fact that Wesley valued thousands of books? God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius [a man of one book]. Preface to Sermons on Several Occasions
Scripture and Tradition

Why a Quadrilateral?

Wesley himself never used the phrase “quadrilateral.” It was a Wesley scholar, Albert Outler, who coined the phrase as a way of explaining Wesley’s understanding of religious truth.

There are four parts of the quadrilateral. But we must not view them as equal parts. Scripture is primary to Wesley. It would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of Scripture as authoritative, with a trilateral supporting it. The supporting parts are tradition, reason, and experience. Refer to Resource 5-1, pg 15.

The purpose of the quadrilateral is that it acts as a type of check-and-balance. To use a strong example, if someone were to say that they had an experience where God told them to have an affair, this would obviously be checked—stopped short—by Scripture, in the Ten Commandments.

But in a similar way, if I interpret Scripture in isolation from community, from reason, or from what others have experienced, my interpretation should be checked and perhaps corrected by these other sources as well.

Scripture, then, is rightly interpreted in dialogue with the other sources, just as Scripture serves as the ultimate check of the other three. Again, Wesley never laid this out directly, but it was his “theological method”; it was his way of doing theology and biblical interpretation.

Be Prepared to discuss: Can you think of other examples where the quadrilateral “works”? 

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The Bible

The Bible is the primary source of religious truth because it is a special revelation of God, which witnesses to the final revelation of God in Christ. The issue of the Bible’s authority should be raised at this point? Why is the Bible authoritative?

There are traditions that state and believe that the source of the Bible’s authority is found in its being inspired (dictated) directly from God; it is inerrant, and therefore trustworthy and authoritative. (groups that are fundamentalist)

We should note that the whole issue of “inerrancy” is a debate that began toward the first part of the 20th century. To ask Wesley himself, then, about the Bible’s inerrancy is anachronistic. But it is not an irrelevant question to ask Wesleyans.

Be prepared to discuss the following questions:

In what sense is the Bible inerrant for a Wesleyan?

What did the early founders of the Church of the Nazarene believe when they used the word "plenary"? Read Manual paragraph IV

What is our doctrine of inspiration?

While more conservative traditions would argue that the Bible is inerrant in all things, those following Wesley qualify such a statement: the Bible is inerrant in all things pertaining to our salvation. Refer to Resource 5-2, pg 16

Those in more conservative—fundamentalist—churches embrace a dictation theory of inspiration. This implies that God gave the authors of Scripture each word to write down. And if God wrote every word, then the Bible is without error in every respect—in its science, history, and cosmology.

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At the opposite end of the continuum on inspiration would be an understanding of Scripture as a purely human book. There is no claim at all about inerrancy at this extreme. Those who hold this position would say that the Bible is a production of only human writers.

In the middle, in the *via media*, is the doctrine of “plenary” inspiration. God inspired the authors of Scripture in such a way that their human, historical, cultural situation is not set aside, but utilized. Not just their hands—as in a dictation theory—but also each writer’s mind and experiences are used by God in order to convey God’s love, purposes, and plan of redemption for humankind.

God’s salvation is perfectly revealed to us. It is perfectly trustworthy in the purposes for which it was inspired: salvation and holy living, according to Wesley and his followers. In a way, this is freeing. If, for example, the Bible seems to contradict itself when listing some historical chronology, its authority does not fall for Wesleyans. Those who are more conservative need to preserve and defend the Bible as perfect in every respect, for if it seems contradictory even in a minute detail, its authority falls.

Wesley had a great deal of advice about how to interpret Scripture. He was very aware of the crucial necessity of finding the context of a passage, and avoiding “proof-texting.” He used the original languages. He investigated the historical and cultural situation in a text.

Ultimately, Wesley developed what is called the “analogy of faith.” This phrase refers to a connection of biblical doctrines that arise out of the “whole tenor of Scripture.” We should ask of every passage in the Bible: what does it add to our understanding of human sin, justification by faith, new birth, and present inward and outward holiness? Refer to Resource 5-3, pg 17

As Maddox states, “He believed that it was the shared articulation of these truths that gave the diverse components of Scripture their unity. Accordingly, he required that all passages be read in light of these truths.” From Maddox, p. 38
But doesn’t the Bible deal with other issues, we might reasonably ask? Wesley would answer, of course. But issues that do not address the essential doctrines of sin, salvation, and sanctification should be seen as nonessentials. Why was Wesley concerned to draw a distinction between essentials and nonessentials? His concern was for Christian unity.

Christians often disagree and even argue over nonessentials, dividing the Body of Christ. He believed that we should “think and let think”—we should humbly allow other Christians to hold other opinions—on issues that are not essential to our salvation. This principle should inform our Wesleyan-holiness, Nazarene worldview.

For example, the Church of the Nazarene has resolutely resisted binding its members to a certain view of how the world began or how the world will end, believing these to be in the realm of speculation, and ultimately nonessential to our life in God and our quest for holiness. Ultimately then, the Bible finds its authority in its faithful witness of Christ, and in the fact that its truth of salvation through Christ has been experienced and verified by believers through the centuries.

**Tradition**

Through the centuries, the community of faith has interpreted Scripture. The Roman Catholic branch of Christianity has put great weight on the Church’s interpretation of Scripture to such a degree that we can legitimately say that Scripture and tradition have equal authority in Catholicism. On the other extreme, parts of the Protestant Reformation were so adamant that tradition had been corrupted, that a pronouncement of *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone, became a battle cry.

Once again, Wesley takes a middle position. Tradition is not on par with Scripture’s authority. But tradition can aid in a faithful, corporate interpretation of the Bible. But which tradition? Wesley held two points on the time line of Christian history as most significant. *Refer to Resource 5-4, pg 18*
First, he held the Early Church writers in very high esteem. As stated in a previous lesson, Wesley preferred the Pre-Nicene period, and the works of Eastern writers.

Second, Wesley saw Anglicanism itself as a new embodiment of the Early Church ethos. Was Wesley biased at this point? Of course. Each of us would want to hold that our denomination, whatever it may be, is the clearest expression of the Christian faith; otherwise, we would seek it elsewhere.

Wesley was not static or rigid, however, in his appropriation of Anglican thought. He had a more dynamic relationship with Anglicanism, particularly with its Articles of Religion, and even edited them at will for his Methodist people. Ultimately, tradition was not a static entity for Wesley but rather the truth of the gospel in the hands of people. This is found in Wesley’s understanding of apostolicity. It is not a lineage from the apostles that assured truth. It is the faith of the apostles, expressed in new ways for new generations, that gives tradition its dynamic and authoritative quality.

Be prepared to discuss:

How dynamic or static are the Nazarene Articles of Faith?
Wesley Quotes

On tradition, Wesley writes, “The Scriptures are a complete rule of faith and practice; and they are clear in all necessary points. And yet their clearness does not prove that they need not be explained; nor their completeness, that they need not be enforced . . . The esteeming the writings of the first three centuries, not equally with, but next to the Scriptures, never carried any man yet into dangerous errors, nor probably ever will.” Quoted in Oden, p. 67

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Scripture, then, is rightly interpreted in dialogue with the other sources, just as Scripture serves as the ultimate check of the other three. Again, Wesley never laid this out directly, but it was his “theological method”; it was his way of doing theology and biblical interpretation.
The Bible

While more conservative traditions would argue that the Bible is inerrant in all things, those following Wesley qualify such a statement: the Bible inerrant in all things pertaining to our salvation.*

In the middle, in the via media, is the doctrine of “plenary” inspiration. God inspired the authors of Scripture in such a way that their human, historical, cultural situation is not set aside, but utilized. Not just their hands—as in a dictation theory—but also each writer’s mind and experiences are used by God in order to convey God’s love, purposes, and plan of redemption for humankind.

*We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, by which we understand the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation, so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith. Article of Faith IV Manual 2013-17
Analogy of Faith

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Issues that do not address the essential doctrines of sin, salvation, and sanctification should be seen as nonessentials. Wesley’s concern was for Christian unity.

Christians often disagree, and even argue over nonessentials, dividing the Body of Christ. He believed that we should “think and let think”—we should humbly allow other Christians to hold other opinions—on issues that are not essential to our salvation. This principle should inform our Wesleyan-holiness, Nazarene worldview.

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Tradition
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The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 2

The Almost Christian

Preached at St. Mary's, Oxford, before the university, on July 25, 1741.

"Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Acts 26.28.

AND many there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was in the world, there have been many in every age and nation who were almost persuaded to be Christians. But seeing it avails nothing before God to go only thus far, it highly imports us to consider,

First. What is implied in being almost,

Secondly. What in being altogether, a Christian.

I. (I.) 1. Now, in the being almost a Christian is implied, First, heathen honesty. No one, I suppose, will make any question of this; especially, since by heathen honesty here, I mean, not that which is recommended in the writings of their philosophers only, but such as the common heathens expected one of another, and many of them actually practised. By the rules of this they were taught that they ought not to be unjust; not to take away their neighbour's goods, either by robbery or theft; not to oppress the poor, neither to use extortion toward any; not to cheat or overreach either the poor or rich, in whatsoever commerce they had with them; to defraud no man of his right; and, if it were possible, to owe no man anything.

2. Again: the common heathens allowed, that some regard was to be paid to truth, as well as to justice. And, accordingly, they not only held him in abomination who was forsworn, who called God to witness to a lie; but him also who was known to be a slanderer of his neighbour, who falsely accused any man. And indeed, little better did they esteem wilful liars of any sort, accounting them the disgrace of human kind, and the pests of society.

3. Yet again: there was a sort of love and assistance which they expected one from another. They expected whatever assistance any one could give another, without prejudice to himself. And this they extended not only to those little offices of humanity which are performed without any expense or labour, but likewise to the feeding the hungry, if they had food to spare; the clothing the naked with their own
superfluous raiment; and, in general. the giving, to any that needed, such things as they needed not themselves. Thus far, in the lowest account of it, heathen honesty went; the first thing implied in the being almost a Christian.

(II.) 4. A second thing implied in the being almost a Christian, is, the having a form of godliness; of that godliness which is prescribed in the gospel of Christ; the having the outside of a real Christian. Accordingly, the almost Christian does nothing which the gospel forbids. he taketh not the name of God in vain; he blesseth, and curseth not; he sweareth not at all, but his communication is, yea, yea; nay, nay. he profanes not the day of the Lord, nor suffers it to be profaned, even by the stranger that is within his gates. he not only avoids all actual adultery, fornication, and uncleanness, but every word or look that either directly or indirectly tends thereto; nay, and all idle words, abstaining both from detraction, backbiting, talebearing, evil speaking, and from "all foolish talking and jesting"--eutrapelia, a kind of virtue in the heathen moralist's account; --briefly, from all conversation that is not "good to the use of edifying,' and that, consequently, "grieves the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.'

5. He abstains from "wine wherein is excess'; from revellings and gluttony. he avoids, as much as in him lies, all strife and contention, continually endeavouring to live peaceably with all men. And, if he suffer wrong, he avengeth not himself, neither returns evil for evil. he is no railer, no brawler, no scoffer, either at the faults or infirmities of his neighbour. he does not willingly wrong, hurt, or grieve any man; but in all things act and speaks by that plain rule, "Whatsoever thou wouldest not he should do unto thee, that do not thou to another."

6. And in doing good, he does not confine himself to cheap and easy offices of kindness, but labours and suffers for the profit of many, that by all means he may help some. In spite of toil or pain, "whatsoever his hand findeth to do, he doeth it with his might;" whether it be for his friends, or for his enemies; for the evil, or for the good. For being "not slothful" in this, or in any "business," as he "hath opportunity" he doeth "good," all manner of good, "to all men;" and to their souls as well as their bodies. he reproves the wicked, instructs the ignorant, confirms the waver ing, quickens the good, and comforts the afflicted. he labours to awaken those that sleep; to lead those whom God hath already awakened to the "Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," that they may wash therein and be clean; and to stir up those who are saved through faith, to adorn the gospel of Christ in all things.
7. He that hath the form of godliness uses also the means of grace; yea, all of them, and at all opportunities. He constantly frequents the house of God; and that, not as the manner of some is, who come into the presence of the Most High, either loaded with gold and costly apparel, or in all the gaudy vanity of dress, and either by their unseasonable civilities to each other, or the impertinent gaiety of their behaviour, disclaim all pretensions to the form as well as to the power of godliness. Would to God there were none even among ourselves who fall under the same condemnation! Who come into this house, it may be, gazing about, or with all the signs of the most listless, careless indifference, though sometimes they may seem to use a prayer to God for his blessing on what they are entering upon; who, during that awful service, are either asleep, or reclined in the most convenient posture for it; or, as though they supposed God was asleep, talking with one another, or looking round, as utterly void of employment. Neither let these be accused of the form of godliness. No; he who has even this, behaves with seriousness and attention, in every part of that solemn service. More especially, when he approaches the table of the Lord, it is not with a light or careless behaviour, but with an air, gesture, and deportment which speaks nothing else but "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

8. To this, if we add the constant use of family prayer, by those who are masters of families, and the setting times apart for private addresses to God, with a daily seriousness of behaviour; he who uniformly practises this outward religion, has the form of godliness. There needs but one thing more in order to his being almost a Christian, and that is, sincerity.

(III.) 9. By sincerity I mean, a real, inward principle of religion, from whence these outward actions flow. And, indeed if we have not this, we have not heathen honesty; no, not so much of it as will answer the demand of a heathen Epicurean poet. Even this poor wretch, in his sober intervals, is able to testify,

Oderunt peccare boni, virtutis amore;
Oderunt peccare mali, formidine poenae.

[Good men avoid sin from the love of virtue; Wicked men avoid sin from a fear of punishment.]

So that, if a man only abstains from doing evil in order to avoid punishment, Non pasces in cruce corvos, [Thou shalt not be hanged.], saith the Pagan; there, "thou hast thy reward." But even he will not allow such a harmless man as this to be so much as a good heathen. If, then, any man, from the same motive, viz., to avoid
punishment, to avoid the loss of his friends, or his gain, or his reputation, should not only abstain from doing evil, but also do ever so much good; yea, and use all the means of grace; yet we could not with any propriety say, this man is even almost a Christian. If he has no better principle in his heart, he is only a hypocrite altogether.

10. Sincerity, therefore, is necessarily implied in the being almost a Christian; a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will. It is necessarily implied, that a man have a sincere view of pleasing God in all things; in all his conversation; in all his actions; in all he does or leaves undone. This design, if any man be almost a Christian, runs through the whole tenor of his life. This is the moving principle, both in his doing good, his abstaining from evil, and his using the ordinances of God.

11. But here it will probably be inquired, "Is it possible that any man living should go so far as this, and, nevertheless, be only almost a Christian What more than this, can be implied in the being a Christian altogether I answer, First, that it is possible to go thus far, and yet be but almost a Christian, I learn, not only from the oracles of God, but also from the sure testimony of experience.

12. Brethren, great is "my boldness towards you in this behalf." And "forgive me this wrong," if I declare my own folly upon the house-top, for yours and the gospel's sake. --Suffer me, then, to speak freely of myself, even as of another man. I am content to be abased, so ye may be exalted, and to be yet more vile for the glory of my Lord.

13. I did go thus far for many years, as many of this place can testify; using diligence to eschew all evil, and to have a conscience void of offence; redeeming the time; buying up every opportunity of doing all good to all men; constantly and carefully using all the public and all the private means of grace; endeavouring after a steady seriousness of behaviour, at all times, and in all places; and, God is my record, before whom I stand, doing all this in sincerity; having a real design to serve God; a hearty desire to do his will in all things; to please him who had called me to "fight the good fight," and to "lay hold of eternal life." Yet my own conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost, that all this time I was but almost a Christian.

II. If it be inquired, "What more than this is implied in the being altogether a Christian" I answer,
(I.) 1. First. The love of God. For thus saith his word, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Such a love is this, as engrosses the whole heart, as rakes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties. He that thus loves the Lord his God, his spirit continually "rejoiceth in God his Saviour." His delight is in the Lord, his Lord and his All, to whom "in everything he giveth thanks. All his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name." His heart is ever crying out, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Indeed, what can he desire beside God Not the world, or the things of the world: for he is "crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him." He is crucified to "the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life." Yea, he is dead to pride of every kind: for "love is not puffed up" but "he that dwelling in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him," is less than nothing in his own eyes.

(II.) 2. The Second thing implied in the being altogether a Christian is, the love of our neighbour. For thus said our Lord in the following words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" If any man ask, "Who is my neighbour" we reply, Every man in the world; every child of his who is the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Nor may we in any wise except our enemies or the enemies of God and their own souls. But every Christian loveth these also as himself; yea, "as Christ loved us." He that would more fully understand what manner of love this is, may consider St. Paul's description of it. It is "long-suffering and kind." It "envieth not." It is not rash or hasty in judging. It "is not puffed up;" but maketh him that loves, the least, the servant of all. Love "doth not behave itself unseemly," but becometh "all things to all men." She "seeketh not her own;" but only the good of others, that they may be saved. "Love is not provoked." It casteth out wrath, which he who hath is wanting in love. "It thinketh no evil. It rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. It covereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

(III.) 3. There is yet one thing more that may be separately considered, though it cannot actually be separate from the preceding, which is implied in the being altogether a Christian; and that is the ground of all, even faith. Very excellent things are spoken of this throughout the oracles of God. "Every one, saith the beloved disciple, "that believeth is born of God." "To as many as received him, gave he power to become the sons of God. even to them that believe on his name." And "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Yea, our Lord himself declares, "He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; and cometh not into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life."
4. But here let no man deceive his own soul. "It is diligently to be noted, the faith which bringeth not forth repentance, and love, and all good works, is not that right living faith, but a dead and devilish one. For, even the devils believe that Christ was born of a virgin: that he wrought all kinds of miracles, declaring himself very God: that, for our sakes, he suffered a most painful death, to redeem us from death everlasting; that he rose again the third day: that he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father and at the end of the world shall come again to judge both the quick and dead. These articles of our faith the devils believe, and so they believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament. And yet for all this faith, they be but devils. They remain still in their damnable estate lacking the very true Christian faith." [Homily on the Salvation of Man.]

5. "The right and true Christian faith is (to go on in the words of our own Church), "not only to believe that Holy Scripture and the Articles of our Faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ. It is a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that, by the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God; whereof doth follow a loving heart, to obey his commandments."

6. Now, whosoever has this faith, which "purifies the heart" (by the power of God, who dwelleth therein) from "pride, anger, desire, from all unrighteousness" from "all filthiness of flesh and spirit;" which fills it with love stronger than death, both to God and to all mankind; love that doeth the works of God, glorying to spend and to be spent for all men, and that endureth with joy, not only the reproach of Christ, the being mocked, despised, and hated of all men, but whatsoever the wisdom of God permits the malice of men or devils to inflict, --whosoever has this faith thus working by love is not almost only, but altogether, a Christian.

7. But who are the living witnesses of these things I beseech you, brethren, as in the presence of that God before whom "hell and destruction are without a covering--how much more the hearts of the children of men" --that each of you would ask his own heart, "Am I of that number Do I so far practise justice, mercy, and truth, as even the rules of heathen honesty require If so, have I the very outside of a Christian the form of godliness Do I abstain from evil, --from whatsoever is forbidden in the written Word of God Do I, whatever good my hand findeth to do, do it with my might Do I seriously use all the ordinances of God at all opportunities And is all this done with a sincere design and desire to please God in all things"
8. Are not many of you conscious, that you never came thus far; that you have not been even almost a Christian; that you have not come up to the standard of heathen honesty; at least, not to the form of Christian godliness --much less hath God seen sincerity in you, a real design of pleasing him in all things. You never so much as intended to devote all your words and works, your business, studies, diversions, to his glory. You never even designed or desired, that whatsoever you did should be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and as such should be "a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.

9. But, supposing you had, do good designs and good desires make a Christian By no means, unless they are brought to good effect. "Hell is paved," saith one, "with good intentions." The great question of all, then, still remains. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart Can you cry out, "My God, and my All" Do you desire nothing but him Are you happy in God Is he your glory, your delight, your crown of rejoicing And is this commandment written in your heart, "That he who loveth God love his brother also" Do you then love your neighbour as yourself Do you love every man, even your enemies, even the enemies of God, as your own soul as Christ loved you Yea, dost thou believe that Christ loved thee, and gave himself for thee Hast thou faith in his blood Believeth thou the Lamb of God hath taken away thy sins, and cast them as a stone into the depth of the sea that he hath blotted out the handwriting that was against thee, taking it out of the way, nailing it to his cross Hast thou indeed redemption through his blood, even the remission of thy sins And doth his Spirit bear witness with thy spirit, that thou art a child of God

10. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who now standeth in the midst of us, knoweth, that if any man die without this faith and this love, good it were for him that he had never been born. Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and call upon thy God: call in the day when he may be found. Let him not rest, till he make his "goodness to pass before thee;" till he proclaim unto thee the name of the Lord, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Let no man persuade thee, by vain words, to rest short of this prize of thy high calling. But cry unto him day and night, who, "while we were without strength, died for the ungodly," until thou knowest in whom thou hast believed, and canst say, "My Lord, and my God!" Remember, "always to pray, and not to faint," till thou also canst lift up thy hand unto heaven, and declare to him that liveth for ever and ever, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee."
11. May we all thus experience what it is to be, not almost only; but altogether Christians; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus; knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ; rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto us!

Edited anonymously at the Memorial University of Newfoundland with corrections and other modifications by Ryan Danker and George Lyons of Northwest Nazarene University.

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Sermon Critique Form

Sermon Title:

Text: Thesis Statement:

Key Points:

Relevance for Today:

Call for Response:

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Lesson 6
The Quadrilateral: Experience and Reason

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants should

- Recognize the use of reason as a tool, not a source
- Discuss Wesley’s view of experience as communal, not individualistic

Motivator

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn that shows the relationship between knowledge and spirituality.

Unite the pair so long disjoined, Knowledge and vital piety; Learning and holiness combined, And truth and love, let all see In those whom up to thee we give, Thine, wholly thine, to die and live. “A Prayer”
Experience and Reason

Experience

**Be prepared to Discuss:** What role should experience play in our understanding of religious truth?

Should our experience ever impact the way we interpret Scripture?

Before Wesley, we see both the Early Church and Anglicanism using what we might call a “trilateral” of Scripture, tradition, and reason. It is Wesley’s unique contribution of experience that expands the methodology to a quadrilateral.

How did Wesley use experience? First of all, Wesley believed strongly in “heart religion.” Christians can experience the assurance of God’s saving love in their lives. The doctrine of assurance—also known as the “witness of the Spirit”—is taken by Wesley from Romans 8:16, where Paul states, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” *Refer to Resource 6-1, pg 32*

Wesley was also influenced by his own experience at Aldersgate when formulating and discussing the doctrine of assurance. Christian faith, for Wesley, is experiential. He believed that a person might affirm all the creeds, and believe all the right doctrines, but still be dead spiritually. The grace of God must be appropriated individually, resulting in assurance and a changed heart and life.

But did Wesley ever use experience as a source for doctrinal formulations themselves? Yes, and no. If by that question we mean that he reached conclusions based on experiences, *independent* from Scripture, then *no!* Wesley never used experience in this manner. Some have argued that he did in fact develop his doctrine of original sin from experience alone. However, what he was in fact doing was putting forth original sin as self-evident, obvious to all. Our experiences “prove” that humankind is corrupt. But Wesley never set aside Scripture, as if original sin was an extrabiblical concept.
The yes was Wesley’s willingness to adapt his interpretation of Scripture when confronted by the experiences of his Methodist people. This is most obvious when considering two specific issues.

**First**
Wesley developed his understanding of sanctification over time. The question of whether sanctification is instantaneous or a progressive process arose as Methodism developed through the decades. Wesley believed that the Bible was silent on the specific issue; it had much to say about sanctification and the life of holiness, but not about how or when it is achieved. *Refer to Resource 6-2, pg 33*

Wesley began to hear testimonies, many, many testimonies, to an instantaneous experience of grace after an initial conversion experience. These testimonies led Wesley to affirm that this deeper experience of sanctification can, in fact, be instantaneous, and thus expected now on the Christian journey. This modified Wesley’s view. His mature position, according to Nazarene interpretation, is that sanctification is both progressive growth and an instantaneous experience.

This example points to a very important aspect of Wesley’s use of experience. He saw legitimate experiences as communal in nature and consistent over time. In other words, Scripture should not be re-interpreted on the basis of individualistic “feelings,” but rather on the basis of a whole community of faith testifying to a reality that has had lasting impact.

**Second**
Wesley applied this concept of experience being communal, also to women’s leadership in the church. While early in his career, Wesley held to a traditional view of women, the reality that many Methodist women were sensing God’s call to preach, finally led Wesley to affirm these “extraordinary” instances of God’s direction as biblically based. He thus officially sanctioned women preachers and leaders in his Methodist societies.
Lesson 6: The Quadrilateral: Experience and Reason

Reason

Like experience, Wesley never used reason as an independent source of truth. As Rebekah Miles states, “reason is a tool, not a source.” As discussed in our lesson on epistemology, we cannot reason our way to God without special revelation. But this is not to say that faith is unreasonable. Wesley was skeptical of a faith that had too much “enthusiasm” and not enough rationale. A true Christian is reasonable.

Reason is essential. *From Gunter, p. 77. Refer to Resource 6-3. Pg 34*

Once again, Wesley finds a *via media* between those who discount reason and those who think too highly of it. What does Wesley believe reason does? Like the British empiricists at the time, Wesley believed that experiences, gained through sense perception, are the primary source for human knowledge. What reason does is help us process those experiences—to make sense of them, to organize them, and finally to communicate them to others. Reason also helps us to understand, analyze, structure, and communicate issues of faith and biblical truth. But ultimately, reason cannot produce a faith-filled life that expresses itself in the virtues—specifically in faith, hope, and love.
Experience

Wesley believed strongly in “heart religion.” Christians can experience the assurance of God’s saving love in their lives. The doctrine of assurance—also known as the “witness of the Spirit”—is taken by Wesley from Romans 8:16. Wesley believed that a person might affirm all the creeds, and believe all the right doctrines, but still be dead spiritually. The grace of God must be appropriated individually, resulting in assurance and a changed heart and life.
Impact of Experience on Wesley’s Sanctification Position

Wesley developed his understanding of sanctification over time. The question of whether sanctification is instantaneous or a progressive process arose as Methodism developed through the decades. Wesley believed that the Bible was silent on the specific issue; it had much to say about sanctification and the life of holiness, but not about how or when it is achieved.

His mature position, according to Nazarene interpretation, is that sanctification is both progressive growth and an instantaneous experience.

Scripture should not be reinterpreted on the basis on individualistic “feelings” but rather on the basis of a whole community of faith testifying to a reality that has had lasting impact.
Reason

Wesley was skeptical of a faith that had too much “enthusiasm” and not enough rationale. A true Christian is reasonable. Reason is essential.

Wesley believed that experiences, gained through sense perception, are the primary source for human knowledge. What reason does is help us process those experiences—to make sense of them, to organize them, and finally to communicate them to others.
Lesson 7 - The Creative Triune God

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants should

- Explain Wesley’s doctrine of God
- Define Wesley’s view of creation and its relevance for ecology
- Understand Wesley’s view of the Trinity

Motivator

All other doctrines start with the doctrine of God: “Ye know that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God.” Sermon, “Original Sin,” Works 2:185
Lesson 7: The Creative Triune God

**The Creative Triune God**

General revelation can raise the question of God, but only special revelation answers the question, “What is God like?” John Wesley believed that God revealed himself to us most fully and finally in the person of Jesus Christ, to which Scripture gives witness.

And yet, if pushed Wesley would also say that God gives enough preening grace in the world, not only to impress upon the human heart the reality of God as eternal, infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing, etc., but also, to give some even more specific characteristics of this divine being, such as goodness, justice, and mercy. Wesley would say that the biblical witness makes these characteristics even clearer.

These two types of attributes are usually denoted as “natural” and “moral” attributes. **Natural attributes** are those attributes of God that cannot be removed; without them God would cease to be God. These would be God’s eternal, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent qualities. According to Wesley, these are essential, unchanging characteristics of God; they express God’s nature. Refer to Resource 7-1. Pg 40

The **moral attributes** are those qualities that give us more insight into the goodness of God, such as His love, grace, and mercy; the moral attributes express God’s activity toward humankind.

The most important characteristic of God is that God is love.

**Be prepared to discuss: Is love a natural or a moral attribute?**

Wesley’s concern about the character of God was not just a speculative concern. He came to believe that a person’s understanding of who God is, is crucial to that person’s Christian life. If people misunderstand God, they will misunderstand faith and Christian practice.

The fact that God is love is the overarching principle of Wesley’s theology. He will maintain God’s love at any cost.
By way of contrast, one could say that if pressed, a Calvinist would need to maintain God’s sovereignty as the primary characteristic of God. This foundational premise, either of love or power, would go on to shape Wesley and Calvin’s whole theological vision, which moved Wesley and Calvin, then, in different directions.

The love of God is paramount and foundational for Wesley. And this love is personal, for Wesley. God is a personal God. Of course, the very word “personal” is an anthropomorphism—applying a human analogy to God, because God, in His essence, is beyond our understanding. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that God is relational.

One of the most important evidences of God’s relational character is that God created human beings for relationship with Him. God is Creator and Sustainer, in Wesley’s thought. This implies that all things originate from God (creatio ex nihilo, creation out of nothing), but also that the world only continues to exist and function because God presently sustains the world. God is intricately involved in life. Without God’s sustaining work, nothing would continue to exist.

For the most part, Wesley adopted the scientific knowledge and religious belief structure about creation that was popular in his day. What is of interest is Wesley’s persistent claim that there will be a new creation—earth itself will be renewed at the end of time.

Overall, Wesleyans have been interested in the question of ecology. Wesley’s deep respect for the earth has influenced some to connect Wesleyan theology and ecological issues. Wesleyans should be careful about a cavalier attitude found in more fundamentalist traditions—the erosion of the earth evidences that the world will end soon. Why preserve it?

**Be prepared to discuss:**

*Is Creator a natural or moral attribute of God?*

*Could God have not created and still been God?*

*Is ecology a religious issue?*
Wesley would also maintain the relational character of God when talking about the Godhead, or the Trinity. It had been common in the “Western” part of Christendom—both in its Protestant and Catholic form—to emphasize the unity of the Godhead, and to subordinate the work of the Spirit to the work of the Father and the Son. But Wesley, more influenced by Eastern sources of the Early Church than by Western Christianity, gave emphasis to the distinctiveness of the three Persons and gave the Spirit a great deal of attention in his thought. He is thoroughly Trinitarian, but his foci are different from his Western contemporaries.

What mattered most to Wesley was that God’s characteristics, even His Trinitarian nature, influence how Christians experience and respond to God. If we love and worship the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, than we will grow in love and virtue.

**Be prepared to discuss:**

*What are some misconceptions of God that influence how persons respond to God?*

*Why is it important that our worship be Trinitarian?*

*How can we be sure that it is as we plan worship services?*
Wesley Quotes

All other doctrines start with the doctrine of God: “Ye know that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God.” Sermon, “Original Sin,” Works 2:185

Wesley had a very strong sense of the necessity of stewardship of creation. “We are now God’s stewards. We are indebted to him for all we have . . . A steward is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his master pleases . . . He is not the owner of any of these things but barely entrusted with them by another . . . Now this is exactly the case of everyone with relation to God. We are not at liberty to use what God has lodged in our hands as we please, but as God pleases, who alone is the possessor of heaven and earth and the Lord of every creature.” Sermon, “The Good Steward,” Works 2:283-84.
The Creative Triune God

Attributes are usually denoted as “natural” and “moral” attributes.

**Natural attributes** are those attributes of God that cannot be removed; without them God would cease to be God.

The **moral attributes** are those qualities that give us more insight into the goodness of God.

Wesley came to believe that a person’s understanding of who God is, is crucial to that person’s Christian life. If people misunderstand God, they will misunderstand faith and Christian practice.

The fact that God is love is the overarching principle of Wesley’s theology. He will maintain God’s love at any cost.

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Wesley gave emphasis to the distinctiveness of the Three Persons, and gave the Spirit a great deal of attention in his thought. He is thoroughly Trinitarian.
The Lord Our Righteousness

Preached at the Chapel in West-Street, Seven Dials, on Sunday, November 24, 1765

"This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." Jer. 23:6.

1. How dreadful and how innumerable are the contests which have arisen about religion! And not only among the children of this world, among those who knew not what true religion was, but even among the children of God; those who had experienced "the kingdom of God within them;" who had tasted of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." How many of these, in all ages, instead of joining together against the common enemy, have turned their weapons against each other, and so not only wasted their precious time, but hurt one another's spirits, weakened each other's hands, and so hindered the great work of their common Master! How many of the weak have hereby been offended! -- How many of the lame turned out of the way! How many sinners confirmed in their disregard of all religion, and their contempt of those that profess it! And how many of "the excellent ones upon earth" have been constrained to "weep in secret places!"

2. What would not every lover of God and his neighbour do, what would he not suffer, to remedy this sore evil; to remove contention from the children of God; to restore or preserve peace among them What but a good conscience would he think too dear to part with, in order to promote this valuable end And suppose we cannot "make" these "wars to cease in all the world," suppose we cannot reconcile all the children of God to each other, however, let each do what he can, let him contribute, if it be but two mites, toward it. Happy are they who are able, in any degree, to promote "peace and good-will among men" especially among good men; among those that are all listed under the banner of "the Prince of Peace;" and are, therefore, peculiarly engaged, "as much as lies in them," to "live peaceably with all men."

3. It would be a considerable step toward this glorious end, if we could bring good men to understand one another. Abundance of disputes arise purely from the want of this; from mere misapprehension. Frequently neither of the contending parties understands what his opponent means; whence it follows, that each violently
attacks the other, while there is no real difference between them. And yet it is not always an easy matter to convince them of this; particularly when their passions are moved: It is then attended with the utmost difficulty. However, it is not impossible; especially when we attempt it, not trusting in ourselves, but having all our dependence upon Him with whom all things are possible. How soon is he able to disperse the cloud, to shine upon their hearts, and to enable them both to understand each other, and "the truth as it is in Jesus!"

4. One very considerable article of this truth is contained in the words above recited, "This is his name whereby he shall be called, the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS;" a truth this, which enters deep into the nature of Christianity, and, in a manner, supports the whole frame of it. Of this, undoubtedly, may be affirmed, what Luther affirms of a truth closely connected with it: it is articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae: The Christian church stands or falls with it. It is certainly the pillar and ground of that faith, of which alone cometh salvation; of that Catholic or universal faith which is found in all the children of God, and which "unless a man keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly."

5. Might not one, therefore, reasonably expect, that, however they differed in others, all those who name the name of Christ should agree in this point But how far is this from being the case! There is scarce any wherein they are so little agreed; wherein those who all profess to follow Christ, seem so widely and irreconcilably to differ. I say seem; because I am thoroughly convinced, that many of them only seem to differ. The disagreement is more in words than in sentiments: They are much nearer in judgment than in language. And a wide difference in language there certainly is, not only between Protestants and Papists, but between Protestant and Protestant; yea, even between those who all believe justification by faith; who agree, as well in this, as every other fundamental doctrine of the gospel

6. But if the difference be more in opinion, than real experience, and more in expression than in opinion, how can it be, that even the children of God should so vehemently contend with each other on the point Several reasons may be assigned for this: The chief is, their not understanding one another; joined with too keen an attachment to their opinions, and particular modes of expression.

In order to remove this, at least in some measure; in order to our understanding one another on this head; I shall, by the help of God, endeavour to show,

I. What is the righteousness of Christ:
II. When, and in what sense, it is imputed to us:

And conclude with a short and plain application.

And, I. What is the righteousness of Christ It is twofold, either his divine or his human righteousness.

1. His divine righteousness belongs to his divine nature, as he is own, He that existeth; "over all, God blessed for ever;" the Supreme; the Eternal; "equal with the Father, as touching his Godhead, though inferior to the Father as touching his manhood." Now this is his eternal, essential, immutable holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth; in all which, he and the Father are One.

But I do not apprehend that the divine righteousness of Christ is immediately concerned in the present question. I believe few, if any, do now contend for the imputation of this righteousness to us. Whoever believes the doctrine of imputation, understands it chiefly, if not solely, of his human righteousness.

2. The human righteousness of Christ belongs to him in his human nature; as he is the "Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." This is either internal or external. His internal righteousness is the image of God, stamped on every power and faculty of his soul. It is a copy of his divine righteousness, as far as it can be imparted to a human spirit. It is a transcript of the divine purity, the divine justice, mercy, and truth. It includes love, reverence, resignation to his Father; humility, meekness, gentleness; love to lost mankind, and every other holy and heavenly temper; and all these in the highest degree, without any defect, or mixture of unholliness.

3. It was the least part of his external righteousness, that he did nothing amiss; that he knew no outward sin of any kind, neither was "guile found in his mouth;" that he never spoke one improper word, nor did one improper action. Thus far it is only a negative righteousness, though such an one as never did, nor ever can, belong to anyone that is born of a woman, save himself alone. But even his outward righteousness was positive too: He did all things well: In every word of his tongue, in every work of his hands, he did precisely the "will of Him that sent him." In the whole course of his life, he did the will of God on earth, as the angels do it in heaven. All he acted and spoke was exactly right in every circumstance. The whole and every part of his obedience was complete. "He fulfilled all righteousness."

4. But his obedience implied more than all this: It implied not only doing, but suffering; suffering the whole will of God, from the time he came into the world,
till "he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree;" yea, till having made a full atonement for them, "he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." This is usually termed the passive righteousness of Christ; the former, his active righteousness. But as the active and passive righteousness of Christ were never, in fact, separated from each other, so we never need separate them at all, either in speaking or even in thinking. And it is with regard to both these conjointly that Jesus is called "the Lord our righteousness."

II. But when is it that any of us may truly say, "the Lord our righteousness" In other words, when is it that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and in what sense is it imputed

1. Look through all the world, and all the men therein are either believers or unbelievers. The first thing, then, which admits of no dispute among reasonable men is this: To all believers the righteousness of Christ is imputed; to unbelievers it is not.

But when is it imputed When they believe. In that very hour the righteousness of Christ is theirs. It is imputed to every one that believes, as soon as he believes: Faith and the righteousness of Christ are inseparable. For if he believes according to Scripture, he believes in the righteousness of Christ. There is no true faith, that is, justifying faith, which hath not the righteousness of Christ for its object.

2. It is true believers may not all speak alike; they may not all use the same language. It is not to be expected that they should: we cannot reasonably require it of them. A thousand circumstances may cause them to vary from each other, in the manner of expressing themselves: But a difference of expression does nor necessarily imply a difference of sentiment. Different persons may use different expressions, and yet mean the same thing. Nothing is more common than this, although we seldom make sufficient allowance for it. Nay, it is not easy for the same persons, when they speak of the same thing at a considerable distance of time, to use exactly the same expressions, even though they retain the same sentiments: How then can we be rigorous in requiring others to use just the same expressions with us

3. We may go a step farther yet: Men may differ from us in their opinions, as well as their expressions, and nevertheless be partakers with us of the same precious faith. It is possible they may not have a distinct apprehension of the very blessing which they enjoy: Their ideas may not be so clear, and yet their experience may be as sound, as ours. There is a wide difference between the natural faculties of men,
their understandings in particular; And that difference is exceedingly increased by the manner of their education. Indeed, this alone may occasion an inconceivable difference in their opinions of various kinds; and why not upon this head, as well as on any other But still, though their opinions, as well as expressions, may be confused and inaccurate, their hearts may cleave to God through the Son of his love, and be truly interested in his righteousness.

4. Let us then make all that allowance to others, which, were we in their place, we would desire for ourselves. Who is ignorant (to touch again on that circumstance only) of the amazing power of education And who that knows it, can expect, suppose, a member of the Church of Rome, either to think or speak clearly on this subject And yet, if we had heard even dying Bellarmine cry out, -- when he was asked, "Unto which of the saints wilt thou turn" -- Fidere meritis Christi tutissimum; "It is safest to trust in the merits of Christ;" would we have affirmed that, not withstanding his wrong opinions, he had no share in his righteousness

5. But in what sense is this righteousness imputed to believers In this: all believers are forgiven and accepted, not for the sake of anything in them, or of anything that ever was, that is, or ever can be done by them, but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for them. I say again, not for the sake of anything in them, or done by them, of their own righteousness or works: "Not for works of righteousness which we have done, but of his own mercy he saved us." "By grace ye are saved through faith, -- not of works, lest any man should boast;" but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for us. We are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." And this is not only the means of our obtaining the favour of God, but of our continuing therein. It is thus we come to God at first; it is by the same we come unto him ever after. We walk in one and the same new and living way, till our spirit returns to God.

6. And this is the doctrine which I have constantly believed and taught, for near eight and twenty years. This I published to all the world in the year 1738, and ten or twelve times since, in those words, and many others to the same effect, extracted from the Homilies of our Church: -- "These things must necessarily go together in our justification; upon God's part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ's part, the satisfaction of God's justice; and on our part, faith in the merits of Christ. So that the grace of God doth not shut out the righteousness of God in our justification, but only shutteth out the righteousness of man, as to deserving our justification." "That we are justified by faith alone, is spoken to take away clearly all merit of our works, and wholly to ascribe the merit and deserving of our justification to Christ
only. Our justification comes freely of the mere mercy of God. For whereas all the world was not able to pay any part toward our ransom, it pleased Him, without any of our deserving, to prepare for us Christ's body and blood, whereby our ransom might be paid, and his justice satisfied. Christ, therefore, is now the righteousness of all them that truly believe in him."

7. The Hymns published a year or two after this, and since republished several times, (a clear testimony that my judgment was still the same,) speak full to the same purpose. To cite all the passages to this effect, would be to transcribe a great part of the volumes. Take one for all, which was reprinted seven years ago, five years ago, two years ago, and some months since: --

Jesu, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress:
'Midst flaming worlds in these array'd,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

The whole hymn expresses the same sentiment, from the beginning to the end.

8. In the Sermon on Justification, published nineteen, and again seven or eight, years ago, I express the same thing in these words: (P. 55) "In consideration of this, -- that the Son of God hath `tasted death for every man,' God hath now `reconciled the world unto himself, not imputing to them their' former `trespasses.' So that for the sake of his well-beloved Son, of what he hath done and suffered for us, God now vouchsafes, on one only condition, (which himself also enables us to perform,) both to remit the punishment due to our sins, to re-instate us in his favour, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, as the earnest of life eternal."

9. This is more largely and particularly expressed in the Treatise on Justification, which I published last year: "If we take the phrase of imputing Christ's righteousness, for the bestowing (as it were) the righteousness of Christ, including his obedience, as well passive as active, in the return of it, that is, in the privileges, blessings, and benefits purchased it; so a believer may be said to be justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed. The meaning is, God justifies the believer for the sake of Christ's righteousness, and not for any righteousness of his own. So Calvin: (Institut. 1.2, c.17) `Christ by his obedience, procured and merited for us grace or favour with God the Father.' Again: `Christ, by his obedience, procured or purchased righteousness for us.' And yet again: `All such expressions as these, -- that we are justified by the grace of God, that Christ is our righteousness, that righteousness was procured for us by the death and resurrection of Christ, import
the same thing; namely, that the righteousness of Christ, both his active and passive righteousness, is the meritorious cause of our justification, and has procured for us at God's hand, that, upon our believing, we should be accounted righteous by him.'" Page 5.

10. But perhaps some will object, "Nay, but you affirm that faith is imputed to us for righteousness. St. Paul affirms this over and over; therefore I affirm it too. Faith is imputed for righteousness to every believer; namely, faith in the righteousness of Christ; but this is exactly the same thing which has been said before; For by that expression I mean neither more nor less, than that we are justified by faith, not by works; or that every believer is forgiven and accepted, merely for the sake of what Christ has done and suffered.

11. But is not a believer invested or clothed with the righteousness of Christ? Undoubtedly he is. And accordingly the words above-recited are the language of every believing heart:

Jesu, thy blood and righteousness

My beauty are, my glorious dress. That is, "For the sake of thy active and passive righteousness, I am forgiven and accepted of God."

But must not we put off the filthy rags of our own righteousness, before we can put on the spotless righteousness of Christ? Certainly we must; that is, in plain terms, we must repent, before we can believe the gospel. We must be cut off from dependence upon ourselves, before we can truly depend upon Christ. We must cast away all confidence in our own righteousness, or we cannot have a true confidence in his. Till we are delivered from trusting in anything that we do, we cannot thoroughly trust in what he has done and suffered. First, we receive the sentence of death in ourselves: Then, we trust in Him that lived and died for us.

12. But do not you believe inherent righteousness? Yes, in its proper place; not as the ground of our acceptance with God, but as the fruit of it; not in the place of imputed righteousness, but as consequent upon it. That is, I believe God implants righteousness in every one to whom he has imputed it. I believe "Jesus Christ is made of God unto us sanctification," as well as "righteousness;" or, that God sanctifies, as well as justifies, all them that believe in him. They to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed, are made righteous by the spirit of Christ, are renewed in the image of God, "after the likeness wherein they were created, in righteousness and true holiness."
13. But do not you put faith in the room of Christ, or of his righteousness By no means: I take particular care to put each of these in its proper place. The righteousness of Christ is the whole and sole foundation of all our hope. It is by faith that the Holy Ghost enables us to build upon this foundation. God gives this faith; in that moment we are accepted of God; and yet, not for the sake of that faith, but of what Christ has done and suffered for us. You see, each of these has its proper place, and neither clashes with the other: we believe, we love, we endeavour to walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless; yet,--

While thus we bestow
Our moments below,
Ourselves we forsake,
And refuge in Jesus's righteousness take.
His passion alone,
The foundation we own;
And pardon we claim,
And eternal redemption in Jesus's name.

14. I therefore no more deny the righteousness of Christ, than I deny the Godhead of Christ; and a man may full as justly charge me with denying the one as the other. Neither do I deny imputed righteousness: This is another unkind and unjust accusation. I always did, and do still continually affirm, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to every believer. But who deny it Why, all Infidels, whether baptized or unbaptized; all who affirm the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to be a cunningly devised fable; all Socinians and Arians; all who deny the supreme Godhead of the Lord that bought them; they, of consequence, deny his divine righteousness, as they suppose him to be a mere creature; and they deny his human righteousness, as imputed to any man, seeing they believe everyone is accepted for his own righteousness.

15. The human righteousness of Christ, at least the imputation of it, as the whole and sole meritorious cause of the justification of a sinner before God, is likewise denied by the members of the Church of Rome; by all of them who are true to the principles of their own church. But undoubtedly there are many among them whose experience goes beyond their principles; who, though they are far from expressing themselves justly, yet feel what they know not how to express. Yea, although their conceptions of this great truth be as crude as their expressions, yet with their heart they Is believe: They rest on Christ alone, both unto present and eternal salvation
16. With these we may rank those even in the Reformed Churches, who are usually termed Mystics. One of the chief of these, in the present century, (at least in England,) was Mr. Law. It is well known that he absolutely and zealously denied the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, as zealously as Robert Barclay, who scruples not to say, "Imputed righteousness! -- imputed nonsense!" The body of the people known by the name of Quakers espouse the same sentiment. Nay, the generality of those who profess themselves members of the Church of England are either totally ignorant of the matter, and know nothing about imputed righteousness, or deny this and justification by faith together, as destructive of good works. To these we may add a considerable number of the people vulgarly styled Anabaptists, together with thousands of Presbyterians and Independents, lately enlightened by the writings of Dr. Taylor. On the last I am not called to pass any sentence: I leave them to Him that made them. But will anyone dare to affirm that all Mystics, (such as was Mr. Law in particular,) all Quakers, all Presbyterians or Independents, and all members of the Church of England who are not clear in their opinions or expressions, are void of all Christian experience -- that, consequently, they are all in a state of damnation, "without hope, without God in the world" However confused their ideas may be, however improper their language, may there not be many of them whose heart is right toward God, and who effectually know "the Lord our righteousness"

17. But, blessed be God, we are not among those who are so dark in their conceptions and expressions. We no more deny the phrase than the thing; but we are unwilling to obtrude it on other men. Let them use either this or such other expressions as they judge to be more exactly scriptural, provided their heart rests only on what Christ hath done and suffered, for pardon, grace, and glory. I cannot express this better than in Mr. Hervey's words, worthy to be wrote in letters of gold: "We are not solicitous as to any particular set of phrases. Only let men be humbled as repenting criminals at Christ's feet, and rely as devoted pensioners on his merits and they are undoubtedly in the way to a blessed immortality."

18. Is there any need, is there any possibility, of saying more Let us only abide by this declaration, and all the contention about this or that "particular phrase" is torn up by the roots. Keep to this, -- "All who are humbled as repenting criminals at Christ's feet, and rely as devoted pensioners on his merits, are in the way to a blessed immortality;" And what room for dispute Who denies this Do we not all meet on this ground What then shall we wrangle about A man of peace here proposes terms of accommodation to all the contending parties. We desire no better: We accept of the terms: We subscribe to them with heart and hand.
Whoever refuses so to do, set a mark upon that man! He is an enemy of peace, and a troubler of Israel, a disturber of the Church of God.

19. In the meantime what we are afraid of is this: -- lest any should use the phrase, "The righteousness of Christ," or, "The righteousness of Christ is imputed to me," as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have known this done a thousand times. A man has been reproved, suppose for drunkenness: "O", said he, "I pretend to no righteousness of my own; Christ is my righteousness." Another has been told, that "the extortioner, the unjust, shall not inherit the kingdom of God:" He replies, with all assurance, "I am unjust in myself, but I have a spotless righteousness in Christ." And thus, though a man be as far from the practice as from the tempers of a Christian; though he neither has the mind which was in Christ, nor in any respect walks as he walked; yet he has armour of proof against all conviction, in what he calls the "righteousness of Christ."

20. It is the seeing so many deplorable instances of this kind, which makes us sparing in the use of these expressions. And I cannot but call upon all of you who use them frequently, and beseech you in the name of God, our Saviour, whose you are, and whom you serve, earnestly to guard all that hear you against this accursed abuse of them. O warn them (it may be they will hear your voice) against "continuing in sin that grace may abound!" Warn them against making "Christ the minister of sin;" against making void that solemn decree of God, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," by a vain imagination of being holy in Christ! O warn them that if they remain unrighteous, the righteousness of Christ will profit them nothing! Cry aloud, (is there not a cause) that for this very end the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, that "the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us;" and that we may "live soberly, religiously, and godly, in this present world."

It remains only to make a short and plain application. And, First, I would address myself to you who violently oppose these expressions, and are ready to condemn all that use them as Antinomians. But is not this bending the bow too much the other way Why should you condemn all who do not speak just as you do Why should you quarrel with them, for using the phrases they like, any more than they with you for taking the same liberty Or, if they do quarrel with you upon that account, do not imitate the bigotry which you blame. At least, allow them the liberty which they ought to allow you. And why should you be angry at an expression "O, it has been abused!" And what expression has not However, the abuse may be removed, and, at the same time, the use remain. Above all, be sure to retain the important sense which is couched under that expression: "All the
blessings I enjoy, all I hope for in time and in eternity, are given wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ has done and suffered for me."

I would, Secondly, add a few words to you who are fond of these expressions. And permit me to ask, Do not I allow enough What can any reasonable man desire more I allow the whole sense which you contend for; that we have every blessing through the righteousness of God our Saviour. I allow you to use whatever expressions you choose, and that a thousand times over; only guarding them against that dreadful abuse, which you are as deeply concerned to prevent as I am. I myself frequently use the expression in question, -- imputed righteousness; and often put this and the like expressions into the mouth of a whole congregation. But allow me liberty of conscience herein: Allow me the right of private judgment. Allow me to use it just as often as I judge it preferable to any other expression; and be not angry with me if I cannot judge it proper to use any one expression every two minutes. You may, if you please; but do not condemn me because I do not. Do not, for this, represent me as a Papist, or "an enemy to the righteousness of Christ." Bear with me, as I do with you; else how shall we "fulfil the law of Christ" Do not make tragical outcries, as though I were "subverting the very foundations of Christianity." Whoever does this, does me much wrong: the Lord lay it not to his charge! I lay, and have done for many years, the very same foundation with you. And, indeed, "other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ." I build inward and outward holiness thereon, as you do, even by faith. Do not, therefore, suffer any distaste, or unkindness, no, nor any shyness or coldness in your heart. If there were a difference of opinion, where is our religion, if we cannot think and let think What hinders but you may forgive me as easily as I may forgive you How much more, when there is only a difference of expression Nay, hardly so much as that all the dispute being only, whether a particular mode of expression shall be used more or less frequently Surely we must earnestly desire to contend with one another, before we can make this a bone of contention! O let us not any more, for such very trifles as these, give our common enemies room to blaspheme! Rather let us at length cut off occasion for them that seek occasion! Let us at length (O why was it not done before) join hearts and hands in the service of our great Master. As we have "one Lord, one faith, one hope of our calling," let us all strengthen each other's hands in God, and with one heart and one mouth declare to all mankind, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."
Lesson 8
The Person of Christ and the Person of the Spirit

Learner Objectives

At the end of this lesson, participants should

• Explain Wesley’s view of Christology
• Define practical monophysitism
• Recognize the Spirit as a personal entity

Motivator

Wesley advises his ministers to:

“Declare in every sermon (and the more explicitly the better) that the first and great command to a Christian is ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ’: that Christ is all in all, our ‘wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption’; that all life, love, strength are from him alone, and all freely given to us through faith.”

On Preaching Christ

Quoted in Outler, pp. 234-35.
The Person of Christ and the Person of the Spirit

Christ’s Person

Wesley, being a devout Anglican, followed the Christology of the early ecumenical councils, the first four of which developed the orthodox belief in the nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully God, sharing the same essence or substance as the Father, and He who revealed the nature of God fully and finally. Jesus is unified with God in that He shares the same essence, the same attributes, and the same purposes. Refer to Resource 8-, pg 57

As the Chalcedon creed affirms, Wesley states that Jesus is “real God, as real man,” “perfect, as God and as man,” and thus worthy of our true worship. And yet Wesley also recognizes that the Christology of the Early Church was philosophically bound—much of the creedal language does not come from Scripture but from the philosophical system prevalent in the late Roman Empire. From Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, p. 730, Phil 2:6; p. 815, Heb 2:10.

Wesley sought his Christology, as well as all of his theology, in the Bible first. He preferred scriptural language. For this reason, Wesley was not interested in some of the speculation around the issue of Christology that arose in his own day. In fact, the nature of Christ was not his primary interest. His emphasis lay in the work of Christ, also known as the doctrine of soteriology. His soteriology is broader than the emphasis of Western Christianity, which focused on the death of Jesus as the most significant aspect of salvation. Following in the footsteps of Irenaeus of Lyon (who wrote in the second century), Wesley affirms the saving significance of Jesus’ life. The Incarnation is very significant in Wesley’s thought.

And yet, according to Randy Maddox, some have argued that Wesley displays an ambivalence about Jesus’ humanity. Common to Western Christianity is the tendency to keep Christ’s two natures distinct. Eastern theology, on the other hand, has, as Maddox states, emphasized the “interpenetration” of the natures.
Exploring John Wesley’s Theology

This has brought the charge of “monophysitism”—an Early Church Christological heresy that so emphasized Christ’s divine nature that His humanity was diminished. Thus the question that Maddox raises and addresses is the question of Wesley’s monophysitistic tendencies.

Maddox does see a “discomfort” with Jesus’ humanity in the writings of Wesley, particularly in his “Notes” on the New Testament. He tended to downplay any emotion or vulnerability that Jesus displays. Maddox explains this by focusing on Wesley’s resonance with Eastern Orthodoxy’s goal for humanity—to become like God (also known as deification or divinization)—what we might call the goal of the process of sanctification.

Christ’s incarnation and life, as well as His death, influences our understanding of and appropriation of holiness. Maddox also points out that the Atonement is based firmly on God’s initiative toward humankind and the divine Christ is the fullest expression of that initiative.

**Be prepared to discuss:**

*When we say that our goal is to become Christlike, are we saying like His divinity or His perfect humanity?*

*Why is it important to maintain a strong emphasis on Jesus’ human nature?*

As with all of Wesley’s theology, his Christology has practical relevance. He is much more interested in Christ’s work than His nature. And yet, even when talking about His nature, the *practical* implications always accompany his considerations.

**The Spirit’s Person**

The Spirit is the presence of God in the Christian life. It is key for Wesley that not only did Christ make provision for our redemption but also that such redemption is applied by the work of the Spirit. It is appropriate to say that Wesley paid closer attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit than his Western counterparts.

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Even to this day, persons standing in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition have a broader and deeper doctrine of the Spirit than those from the Reformed tradition. The Spirit is a “person” of the Godhead, with personal characteristics, and His own “beingness,” not just a subordinated, functional part of God or a present expression of Christ on earth. Refer to Resource 8-2, pg 58

The Spirit is unique in His role in the Trinity and our lives. As Maddox says, “Wesley was clear that the Holy Spirit should be seen as fully personal, not merely a force or energy in our lives. . . . Grace for him was not simply a Divine-originated product bestowed upon humanity. It was the activity of God’s very Self in human life . . . ‘present to us in the indwelling Person of the Holy Spirit.’” From Maddox, pp. 120.

We will more fully investigate the work of the Spirit when we turn our attention in succeeding lessons to the doctrine of soteriology. There we will discuss the Spirit’s sanctifying work and the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit. Under the topic of spiritual formation, we will discuss the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.

As way of summary, Wesley wrote:

I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us: enlightening our understanding, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God. - Letter to a Roman Catholic

Be prepared to discuss:
*Do we spend enough time preaching/teaching about the Holy Spirit?*
**Christ’s Person**

Wesley followed the Christology of the early ecumenical councils, the first four of which developed the orthodox belief in the nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is fully God, sharing the same essence or substance as the Father, and He who revealed the nature of God fully and finally.

Wesley states that Jesus is “real God, as real man,” “perfect, as God and as man,” and thus worthy of our true worship.

Wesley’s emphasis lay in the *work* of Christ, also known as the doctrine of soteriology.

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Letter to a Roman Catholic

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