

THEOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY



NEW CREATION



- ❖ How is it all going to end?
- ❖ How do you feel about the word 'judgement'?
- ❖ Where does resurrection fit in?
- ❖ What happens to your soul?

TRIUMPHANT GOAL

- ❖ Eschatology of the day: neo-platonic/Medieval eschatology
- ❖ future new life in new heaven & earth replaced to immediate translation at death to transcendent spiritual heaven
- ❖ death becomes translation to glory

- ❖ This idea of Heaven became dominate model in 18th century including Anglicanism
- ❖ So, we see Charles Wesley's hymns along this line
- ❖ John Wesley came to question this inherited model

DEATH, IMMORTALITY, RESURRECTION

- ❖ Wesley's fascination with death, i.e. watching dying, emphasizes his understanding of death as both penalty and promise
- ❖ Main point is that death, for the Christian, is nothing to fear and even welcomed as deliverance from struggle to life with God

- ❖ Does it indicate a shift from resurrection to immortality of the soul?
- ❖ a doctrine that spiritual human nature can not be destroyed, i.e. we do not really die
- ❖ whereas future resurrection is confidence that God will not leave us in death
- ❖ Some understood death as should sleep

- ❖ others, a conscious intermediate state - awaiting resurrection, i.e. immortality of the soul not natural but a gift of God in anticipation of universal resurrection
- ❖ Wesley rejects as innovation the notions of soul sleep or annihilation of the person - despite early church witnesses
- ❖ Wesley, death of the body cannot be death of our soul

- ❖ Suggesting that the immortality of the soul was a benefit of Prevenient Grace
- ❖ Wesley managed to do this without denying the future resurrection or the subtle contempt for the body behind it
- ❖ He affirms that the new body will be a fresh production of our original one in a refined state

INTERMEDIATE STATES

- ❖ Medieval model claimed that senses which depend on organs would be more acute in the intermediate state (why a new body then?)
- ❖ Wesley agreed with this claiming an ethereal body - finally saying that he didn't know how it works but that it does

- ❖ John's early sermons reflect Charles's hymns of believers stepping from temporal existence to glory (and middle)
- ❖ Late Wesley rejected current state of deceased believers with ultimate hope
- ❖ Believers enter eternity at death but only enjoy or suffer intermediate expressions of our full destinies as we await the resurrection, judgement and new creation

- ❖ Paradise to heaven and hades to hell
- ❖ Hades general terms for place of the dead, so paradise became a subset of hades
- ❖ He did not have a subset for hell (traditionally, Tarturus)
- ❖ Rejected 'limbo' or 'purgatory'
- ❖ Paradise where righteous ripen for heaven

JUDGMENT

- ❖ Wesley (with whole Christian tradition) joins judgment with ultimate hope
- ❖ Difficulty with final judgment in people being in threshold of heaven or hell - judgment seems to be already done
- ❖ Final judgment becomes displaying God's glory and righteousness

- ❖ Wesley differed from others by his doctrine of cooperant grace; we are admitted by faith alone but level of blessing depends on our active response
- ❖ Late Wesley also pushed that initial judgment also must be based on our works so as to not sap the foundation of inward and outward holiness
- ❖ With this emphasis it also allows for us to reject God's offer of grace to our condemnation

- ❖ Wesley identified loss of potential intimate fellowship with God, Christ and saints as essence of damnation
- ❖ Wesley rejects annihilation as possibility seeing suffering as a eternal consequence of seperation from God

NEW CREATION

- ❖ Heaven, then, is opportunity to see God, to know God, and to love God
- ❖ Heaven then is the collection of human spirits (in spiritual bodies) in continuous worship of the Ultimate Spiritual Being

“I am a spirit from God and returning to God; just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence I am no more seen—I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven.”

- ❖ Late Wesley came to emphasize traditional distinction between three heavens - only the third being an unchanging reality, being the residence of God
- ❖ The 3rd heaven in where saints ascend to until the new creation of the other two heavens and the earth
- ❖ Shifting hope from heaven above to new creation

- ❖ New creation will be a physical place where all elements are improved from present conditions
- ❖ Better even than Adam and Eve's paradise—
animals with reason for example
- ❖ Thus redemption for late Wesley is a cosmic redemption
- ❖ Wesley comes to understand heaven from static state to continued growth in new creation