

THEOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY



PREVENIENT GRACE



- ❖ Humanity is totally depraved, are we hopeless?
- ❖ If dead, then how can we be saved?
- ❖ How does God restore?

THREE GRACES

- ❖ Prevenient Grace (not saving)
- ❖ Justifying Grace (saving)
- ❖ Sanctifying Grace (fully saved)
- ❖ Model of house: porch, door, rooms

PREVENIENIENCE OF GRACE

- ❖ West: Depravity=limited atonement & unconditional election
- ❖ Rome/East: Depravity not total
- ❖ Wesley: Total depravity & responsible grace

- ❖ Wesley sought way to affirm restored spiritual health, which includes responding to God's saving action, without human participation being automatic
- ❖ Prevenience/pre-vent=comes before
- ❖ This grace which comes before makes human response possible

TWO SENSES OF PREVENIENCE

- ❖ Broad: Every good human action/virtue is grounded in empowering of God's prior act of grace - rooted in love vs. sovereignty
- ❖ Narrow: This grace is prior to justifying grace over against Calvinistic doctrine of predestination

CHARACTER OF RESTORING GRACE

- ❖ Doctrine of restoring grace reflects a traditions doctrine of human predicament
- ❖ West: God's grace = pardon; unmerited forgiveness of our guilt through Christ
- ❖ East: God's grace = power to heal our infirm nature through participation in God

- ❖ Calvin: Grace=pardon/mercy; rarely connected with sanctification
- ❖ Wesley: Pardon & power almost evenly mixed (Robert Hillman)
- ❖ Wesley fluctuated with his own focus (i.e. Aldersgate) or focus of his community
- ❖ Overall concern is to integrate the two dimensions

“By ‘the grace of God’ is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which ‘worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure’. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein. And now we can perform through God, what to [ourselves] was impossible....a recovery of the image of God, a renewal of soul after His likeness.”

- ❖ So, God's forgiveness (west/juridical) is instrumental to healing our corrupt nature (east/therapeutic)
- ❖ God's grace = God's love, so sin & grace are relational in nature, so not metaphysical property bestowed, but God's renewed presence in our lives
- ❖ Grace is the Holy Spirit at work in our life, initiating and sustaining our Christ-likeness

- ❖ God's grace inspires and enables, but doesn't overpower, i.e. grace is resistible or co-operant
- ❖ So, as God's grace acts on the human person, the human person is to reciprocate that grace to God
- ❖ So, grace can deepen or weaken as God waits on the human response
- ❖ Therefore, grace & salvation can be progressive and have degrees

PREVENIENT GRACE THE BEGINNING OF RESTORATION

- ❖ Fallen 'man' is an abstraction because the guilt of sin is canceled at birth by virtue of Christ's redemption
- ❖ So, we bear culpability of rejecting God's restoring work in our lives not based on original sin

- ❖ Also, P.G. also partially restores our sin corrupted faculties, so that: 1) we might sense our need of God's salvation, 2) we might sense God's offer of salvation, and 3) we might respond to God's offer of salvation
- ❖ Understanding is restored: 1) we have knowledge of divine things, i.e. God, future reward/punishment, 2) conscience, i.e. moral good and evil - universal

- ❖ Liberty: we have been restored to being free to accept or reject God's grace (over and against Calvinism!)
- ❖ Will/affect: our ability to act virtuously
- ❖ Irresistible prevenient grace - only hope of full restoration
- ❖ P.G. not a gift from God, but a gift of God's presence

SYNERGISM

- ❖ Sermon on Philippians 2:12-13
- ❖ “It is God that worketh in us to will and to do”
- ❖ 1) therefore, we can work (freeing grace)
- ❖ 2) therefore, we must work (necessary response)

SUMMARY

Benefits of Prevenient Grace

- ❖ Basic knowledge of the attributes of God
- ❖ Re-inscription of the moral law
- ❖ Conscience
- ❖ A measure of free will graciously restored
- ❖ Restraint of wickedness (Collins)