

# THEOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY



## JUSTIFICATION, REGENERATION, & ASSURANCE





- ❖ What do we mean by salvation?
- ❖ How are we saved?
- ❖ Is there an order to salvation? If so, what is it?
- ❖ Do we have to do anything to be saved, i.e. adjust our behaviour?

# SALVATION

- ❖ West: pardon, East: power, Wesley: both
- ❖ Council of Trent: infusion of holiness must precede justification
- ❖ Protestants worry that this invalidates justification by grace

- ❖ Originally decided to answer how sinners can be pardoned
- ❖ East: this is not a problem the answer is simply through merciful love
- ❖ focus is how to recover the image of God which leads to recaptured presence of God
- ❖ West has tended to see this as works-righteousness

“What is salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. ... It is not a blessing which lies on the other side of death ... it is a present thing ... [it] might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.”



# 3 DIMENSIONS OF SALVATION

- ❖ Pardon - salvation begun
- ❖ Holiness/Grace - salvation continued
- ❖ Heaven/Glory - salvation finished

# 3 DIMENSIONS OF SALVATION

- ❖ Justification - Delivered immediately from the *penalty* of sin
- ❖ Sanctification - Delivered progressively from the *plague* of sin
- ❖ Consummation - Delivered eschatologically from the *presence* of sin and its effects

# ORDER OF SALVATION

- ❖ Scholastic/Puritan emphasis
- ❖ A series of discrete states; persons move from one state to another. So, abrupt transitions in status vs. responsive relationship with God.
- ❖ Wesley in middle did have this emphasis but moved in his mature theology to gradual nature



- ❖ Perseverance: a person's justification is instantaneously complete and irreversible; it cannot be endangered by lack of growth in holiness.
- ❖ Systematic organization: attempt to give definitive description of Christian faith that distinguishes and organizes various component parts.
- ❖ Wesley: Way of salvation - intertwined facets of the gradual recovery of the holiness that God intends for us.

# REGENERATION

- ❖ Scholastics: Regeneration = New Birth; God's gracious gift that instantaneously and irresistibly transforms sinner from fallen state to new life where repentance and faith are natural
- ❖ So, new birth must occur before humans can respond to God.
- ❖ So, unhappy with Wesley who says repentance comes before new birth.



- ❖ Wesley: regeneration = born again; “being inwardly changed by the almighty operation of the Spirit of God; changed from sin to holiness; renewed in the image of him who created us.”
- ❖ Reflects Wesley’s therapeutic understanding of salvation - taken in strongest sense new birth = entire sanctification.
- ❖ New birth and sanctification distinguished; restored presence of God and renewal of moral nature - together regeneration

- ❖ Wesley differs because his doctrine of prevenient grace prior to new birth
- ❖ So, prevenient grace allows us to respond to God in repentance which leads to new birth, i.e. “repent and believe the good news”
- ❖ So, rather than stages he emphasized grace upon grace



# AWAKENING

- ❖ Because salvation is cooperant humans must become aware of the need for it - they need be awakened
- ❖ Means: tragedies, natural disasters, awakening sermons, conversations, even direct conviction of HS

- ❖ Involves: removal of apathy - we must be convinced of our sin in words, deeds, and tempers and our helplessness to transform these.
- ❖ So, during first stages of revival Wesley stressed fear of punishment and reward as motives for salvation.
- ❖ Late Wesley focused on positive ways prevenient grace awaken sinners.



# REPENTANCE

- ❖ 1: Repentance prior to justifying faith
- ❖ 2: Repentance within the Christian life (to be discussed next week)

- ❖ Revival charge Wesley preaching salvation by human works rather than faith alone
- ❖ Anglican charge Wesley restricting repentance to conviction of sin rather than an actual change of life seen in scripture and liturgy
- ❖ Wesley's dictionary "a thorough conviction of sin, an entire change of heart and life."



- ❖ 1st aspect recognition of sinfulness and helplessness - a gift of God; only this aspect prior to faith in Christ
- ❖ 2nd aspect (which leads out of the 1st) - an entire change of heart and life
- ❖ Reformed uncomfortable with Wesley's focus of continued necessity of repentance within Christian life

# JUSTIFICATION

- ❖ Justification one facet of God's gracious provision for our need (helpless sinners); forgiveness - being pardoned and received into God's favour
- ❖ Excluded from definition: sanctification (an immediate recovery of full Christ-likeness) and imputation of Christ's active righteousness to believer.

- ❖ Council of Trent: 1) purpose/goal was glory of God, 2) stimulus God's gracious mercy, 3) price Christ's passion and death, 4) means of appropriation baptism, 5) formal cause justice God infuses in believers (debate focused here)
- ❖ How can God justly accept sinners? God infuses righteousness into believers so they can be declared righteous.



- ❖ Reformed insisted that Christ's death was the formal cause of our justification - Christ's death does not earn our salvation, it is our salvation, i.e. it is imputed to us which leads to predestination and limited atonement because all for whom Christ died would be necessarily justified
- ❖ Anglican middle way: formal cause is covenant to have mercy on all who believe

- ❖ Wesley's problem with Reformed is it could be understood in an 'antinomian' (lawless) sense
- ❖ It could exempt obedience in the Christian life
- ❖ So, Wesley rejects notion that God can be deceived into seeing sinners as righteous by imputation of Christ's innocence

- ❖ So, Wesley formal cause God's merciful grace pardons us by virtue of the merits of Christ
- ❖ This allows him to deny justification being a human work but retaining human responsibility to respond to God's gracious acceptance.



# PARDONED TO PARTICIPATE

- ❖ Divine grace conveys both pardon and power - bible clearly affirms believers recover capacity of spiritual life, are reunited with God, and made partakers of the Divine nature
- ❖ To enjoy faith is to receive the Spirit of Adoption, “restoring the due relations between God and [humanity], by uniting for ever the tender Father and the grateful, obedient [child].”

# ASSURANCE

- ❖ 1725 “if we can never have any certainty of our being in a state of salvation, good reason it is that every moment should be spent, not in joy, but fear and trembling.”
- ❖ Moravians convinced him that once he had saving faith it would be complete - one would be free from all sin, fear, and doubt.

- ❖ His experience after Aldersgate fell short of this expectation
- ❖ He recognized that he did have a degree of saving faith and he began talking about degrees of assurance
- ❖ So, a person could be truly Christian without being fully Christian
- ❖ So, reflects the ongoing relational cooperant nature of salvation and faith