

Wesley's Way of Salvation

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Creation in the Image of God

The imprint of God in the original design of humans has three main categories for Wesley the natural (immortality, free will, affectations) political (dominion over the creation), and moral (righteousness and true holiness).

Thus, to be created in the moral image of God is to be created 'full of love, which was the sole purpose of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions.' Justice, mercy, and truth characterize this image well. This understanding of creation in the moral image of God is foundational to the rest of United Methodist doctrine. It underlies the soteriology of the *Sermons* and *Notes*.¹

Original Sin

¶ 103 Section 3--- Article VII-Of Original or Birth Sin

*Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.*²

Prevenient Grace

¶ 103. Section 3 Article VIII—Of Free Will

*The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.*³

If humanity is going to choose the gospel of Jesus Christ, entering the process by which they are remade (reborn) in his image, then God's grace is required to restore the elements of the divine imprint that reflected freedom of the will.

----- Universal Humanity Above this Line

Justifying Grace

"God does this {treats our sin driven maladies} by giving us knowledge of himself, faith, repentance, and lowliness of heart, and by instilling in us the love of God."⁴ Justifying grace meets the human need to have their relationship with God restored through the expiation of the sin that divides us from God.

¹ Scott Jones, *United Methodist Doctrine; The Extreme Center* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2002). Quoting Wesley's sermon on new birth.

² The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004, 61.

³ BOD, 61.

⁴ Jones, 153.

Justification (Sanctification Begins)

In describing justification Wesley (and his Methodist heirs) joins the reformed tradition by arguing that in being justified a person is put in right relationship with God and is accounted righteous before God on the merits of Christ.⁵ This is imputed righteousness. Wesley held that at the moment of justification sanctification also begins. Both are acts of grace but there is an important distinction in kind for Wesley.

Growth and Maturation (Potential for Assurance)

Generally sanctification and thus salvation is a process and at times Wesley distinguishes this from instantaneous justification: "A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time. Afterward he gradually and slowly grows till he attains the stature of a man. In like manner a child is born of God in a short time, if not in moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ."⁶ Yet, Wesley held that full sanctification can be experienced in this life and that entire sanctification can occur instantaneously.



Sanctification (Sanctifying Grace)

Sanctifying grace responds to the human need to be remade in the image of the Son, to have the divine image restored, and to be formed by love of God, righteousness and holiness. Sanctifying grace begins its work within the individual at the same time that the individual is justified.

"Sanctification is a real change, where righteousness is imparted to human beings. It is the freedom from the power of sin. It is the transformation of the person from sin to holiness and growth toward having the mind of Christ."⁷

Wilderness State

Back sliding and the Loss of Salvation
Remains Possible for Everyone.

Heaviness

Weariness, heavy hearts and fatigue as
one moves along the way- but not the
actual loss of faith- does increase risk
of temptation and/or falling away.

⁵ ¶ 103. Section 3--- Article IX 'Of the Justification of Man'

⁶ John Wesley, "The New Birth" Sermon 45—1760; JWS, 343.

⁷ Jones, 179.

Perfection or Christian Maturity (Entire Sanctification)

EUB Article XI—Sanctification and Christian Perfection

Entire sanctification is a state of perfect love, righteousness and true holiness which every regenerate believer may obtain by being delivered from the power of sin, by loving God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving one's neighbor as one's self. Through faith in Jesus Christ this gracious gift may be received in this life both gradually and instantaneously, and should be sought earnestly by every child of God.

We believe this experience does not deliver us from the infirmities, ignorance, and mistakes common to man, nor from the possibilities of further sin. The Christian must continue on guard against spiritual pride and seek to gain victory over every temptation to sin. He must respond wholly to the will of God so that sin will lose its power over him; and the world, the flesh, and the devil are put under his feet. Thus he rules over these enemies with watchfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christian perfection is the result of God's grace with human cooperation restoring the moral image of God, establishing the mind of Christ, and full orientation to love of God and love of neighbor. It is but a subset of glorification- the entrance of humans into the divine life.

In simplest terms- we were created good- things went bad early; we inherit this sinful tendency and commit sins ourselves. We cannot fix this disease, heal this wound, or save ourselves- worse we don't even acknowledge this truth about ourselves. We delude ourselves into believing we are decent, free, and wise creatures with little need or interest in reconciling with God. God, in an abundance of grace, reveals the truth about our brokenness and points us towards the remedy. This may happen through a sermon, reading the bible, a friend, a time of suffering or success the possibilities for the means by which God gets a hold of us is infinite. Once God awakens us to his reality and the truth about our need for him- we can accept God's offer of peace through Jesus Christ. If we accept Christ, we are put right with God (that means all the junk we have ever done is forgiven) the weight of sin and guilt is lifted from us. Our participation (that is our acceptance) amounts to opening our hands that are clenched around our sin and guilt and watching God melt them away. In the place of sin and guilt- God begins to build, foster, and encourage holiness, righteousness, kindness, and love. This means we are first freed from the conviction of all our faults and then God goes to work on making us a new creation (born again) formed in the image of Christ. This can take the rest of our lives- and we are called to join the process. That is, by praying, worshiping, studying, loving, aiding the needy, serving others, taking communion, (and if we haven't already done so, getting baptized) and through Christian fellowship we are reshaped by God into the men and women we were intended to be. This is not a steady, flat, and safe process. It is a life time of adventure with bumps, bruises, and surprises along the way. Ultimately, we are headed into the heart and mind of God to do and see things that are beyond me to describe; heaven is life with and in God and thus may begin even now but remains for us to enter in its fullness on the other side of our mortality or in the dawning of the *eschaton*.