

Eschatological Living in John Wesley's Theology: An Outline

1. Teleological Goal: Connection with God in the Kingdom of Glory

- What is the Kingdom of Heaven?
- Kingdom of Glory
- 1733: Sermon 17, "On the Circumcision of the Heart"
- 1748: "Sermon on the Mount-Discourse 6"
- 1777: Sermon 99, "The Reward of the Righteous"
- 1785: Sermon 64, "The New Creation"

"Seeing, then, all these things are for our sakes; seeing we have the promise of perfect happiness annexed to our obedience, of 'an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away'; 'what manner of men ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!' What diligence, even according to human prudence, should we use to make our calling and election sure!"¹

This explains why Wesley took emphasis in Kingdom of Glory as the teleological goal of our eschatological pilgrimage. This teleological goal becomes an eschatological hope for us to venture forward.

- God is "all in all."
- Longing for the Kingdom of Glory is in fact an eschatological heavenward pilgrimage with worshipping God and deep connection with Him as the teleological goal.

2. Eschatological Hope: Connection with God in the Kingdom of Grace

- How could we be part of the Kingdom of Glory?
- Repent with humility, being justified by God in Christ, embrace Christ's Kingly rule, and live in the Kingdom of Grace.
- What is the Kingdom of Grace?
- The importance of inherit the Kingdom of Grace

Wesley explains in his tract "A Blow at the Root" :

"none shall live with God, but he that now lives to God; none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven, but he that bears the image of God on earth; none

¹ Sermon 133, "Death and Deliverance," §17, *Works* 4:213.

that is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter; none can see the kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Whosoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth. He must have “that mind in him which was in Christ,” enabling him “to walk as Christ also walked.”²

- **New life in the Spirit**

“He has new life, new senses, new faculties, new affections, new appetites, new ideas and conceptions. His whole tenor of action and conversation is new, and he lives, as it were, in a new world. God, men, the whole creation, heaven, earth, and all therein, appear in a new light, and stand related to him in a new manner, since he was created anew in Christ Jesus.”³

- **New creation in the Kingdom of Grace**

In 1790, the aging Wesley states again the importance of new life and being a new creation in the Kingdom of Grace. He says:

“He is in a new world. All things round him are become new. Such as it never before entered into his heart to conceive. He sees, so far as his newly opened eyes can bear the sight,
The opening heavens around him shine,
With beams of sacred bliss.

...He sees a 'new way' that is 'opened into the holiest by the blood of Jesus'...He hears...the voice of him that is the resurrection and the life...he receives other spiritual senses, capable of discerning spiritual good and evil. He is enabled to taste, as well as to see, how gracious the Lord is. He...tastes of the powers of the world to come...He feels the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him...”⁴

- **The nature of eschatological heavenward pilgrimage**

3. Eschatological Living (1): Enriching the Kingdom’s Qualities

- **Negative dimensions:**

- Beware of Satan’s tactics

In his sermon on “Satan’s Devices” (1750), Wesley lists some of the doubts which the devil will cast in our minds:

² “A Blow at the Root,” §1, *Works (J)*, 10:364.

³ *NT Notes*, on 2nd Corinthians 5:17.

⁴ Sermon 130, “On Living without God,” §§9-11, *Works*, 4:172-73.

“Are you fit to see God? ...God is holy: You are unholy. What communion hath light with darkness? How is it possible that you, unclean as you are, should be in a state of acceptance with God? ...How can you presume then to think that all your sins are already blotted out?...you know it well; you know holiness is the full image of God; and how far is this above, out of your sight? You cannot attain unto it...”⁵

→ Deepening of Repentance

“there (sin) does still *remain*, even in them that are justified, a *mind* which is still in some measure *carnal*...and *heart bent to backsliding*, still ever ready to “depart from the living God;” a propensity to pride, self-will, anger, revenge, love of the world, yea, and all evil; a root of bitterness, which, if the restraint were taken off for a moment, would instantly spring up; yea, such a depth of corruption, as, without clear light from God, we cannot possibly conceive. And a conviction of all this sin *remaining in their hearts* is the repentance which belongs to them that are justified.”⁶

• **Positive Dimensions**

→ In Step with the Spirit

The Spirit implants Christ’s righteousness into our lives.

Sanctification

→ Strengthening our Faith

Growing from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son → the plerophory or full assurance of faith

The faith of a son: heavenly medicine.

→ Thirsting for God’s love (Fruit of faith)

→ Nurturing Christ-like joy/happiness

Wesley explains:

“Without love nothing can so profit us as to make our lives happy. By happiness I mean, not a slight, trifling pleasure, that perhaps begins and ends in the same hour; but such a state of well-being as contents the soul, and gives it a steady, lasting satisfaction.”⁷

⁵ Sermon 42, “Satan’s Devices,” §§I.2, 4, *Works*, 2:141-42.

⁶ Sermon 14, “The Repentance of Believers,” §I.10, *Works*, 1:341.

⁷ Sermon 149, “On Love,” §III.4, *Works*, 4:385-86.

Religion: “ “happy knowledge of the true God”。”⁸

Mark L. Horst: “Wesley used Christian happiness as a concept to observe, describe, sketch and delineate the transformation of a person’s life by God’s grace.”⁹

Wesley’s advice to Ann Taylor in his old age is also his advice for us as we progress in cultivating Christian happiness:

“Happiness is not in man; no, nor in any creature under heaven. Search the whole creation round, Can it out of God be found? No. When you begin to know God as *your* God, then, and not before, you begin to be happy; but much more when you love Him. And as you increase in loving faith your happiness will increase in the same proportion. Steer steady to this point. Keep these issues of your heart!”¹⁰

→ Hunger for Righteousness

Righteousness is every holy and heavenly temper in one.¹¹

“The former (The righteousness of Christ) is necessary to *entitle* us to heaven; the latter (our righteousness) to *qualify* us for it. Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no *claim* to glory; without holiness we could have no *fitness* for it. By the former we become members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. By the latter ‘we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.’”¹²

Thirsting after righteousness, therefore, is yearning for the right state of soul which is wrought by the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” §III.4, *Works*, 3:99.

⁹ Mark L. Horst, “Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith in John Wesley’s Thought.”(Ph.D Dissertation, Yale University, 1985), 40.

¹⁰ Letter to Ann Taylor (March 8, 1787), *Letters (T)*, 7:374.

¹¹ Sermon 22 “SM-II,” §II.2, *Works* 1:495.

¹² Sermon 127, “On the Wedding Garment,” §10, *Works*, 4:144.

→ Obeying Moral Law

Moral law: Ten Commandments and the commands of Christ contained in the Sermon on the Mount.¹³

“And this our Lord has abundantly performed in the preceding and subsequent parts of the discourse before us; in which he has not introduced a new religion into the world, but the same which was from the beginning; — a religion, the substance of which is, without question, as old as the creation...a religion witnessed to both by the Law and by the Prophets, in all succeeding generations. Yet was it never so fully explained, nor so thoroughly understood, till the great Author of it himself condescended to give mankind this authentic comment on all the essential branches of it; at the same time declaring it should never be changed, but remain in force to the end of the world.”¹⁴

As early as 1744, in the Question 25 raised in “The First Annual Conference,” Wesley has pointed out clearly that “our freedom is freedom from ceremonial law, not from the moral law.”¹⁵

Wesley explains :

“Indeed each is continually sending me to the other, — the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me “above gold or precious stones;” seeing I know every part of it is a gracious promise which my Lord will fulfil in its season.”¹⁶

Wesley holds firmly to the prescriptive role of the law and asserts that Christian should observe moral law for the continuation of our eschatological living.

4. Eschatological Living (2): Living Out the Kingdom’s Qualities

- Qualities nurtured in hiddenness will produce fruits of good deeds.
- Good deeds are the fruit of faith.¹⁷ Faith without work is only a mere concept.¹⁸

¹³ Letter to an Evangelical Layman (December 20, 1751), *Letters II*, in *Works*, 26: 482.

¹⁴ Sermon 25, “SM-V,” §I.4, *Works*, 1:553.

¹⁵ “The First Annual Conference” (June 25, 1744), Q.25, in Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, 140.

¹⁶ Sermon 34, “The Use of the Law,” §IV.7, *Works*, 2:18.

¹⁷ “A Farther Appeal, Part 1,” §§I.2, II.5 (Art. XII), *Works*, 11:106, 112-13; “The First Annual Conference” (June 25, 1744), Q 11, in Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, 138.

¹⁸ *NT Notes*, on James 2:17.

- **Responsible Management of Riches**

In expending this, am I acting according to my character as a steward and not as a proprietor?

Am I doing this in obedience to his word?

Can I offer up this action, this expense, as a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ?

Have I reason to believe, that for this very work I shall have a reward at the resurrection of the just?¹⁹

- **Works of Mercy and Caring**

Douglas Meeks: *Life with the poor*

Theodore Jennings: preferential option

Wesley communalized this caring of the poor through establishing connectional collections within the societies.²⁰

1773: Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions

- **Sharing the Threefold Good News**

James C. Logan: Preach Christ

Wesley saw preaching as the key way through which he could invite, convince, offer Christ to his audience, and build them up.²¹

In 1772, Wesley stressed the importance of preaching again in his letter to his brother, Charles:

Your business as well as mine is to save souls. When we took priests' orders, we undertook to make it our *one business*. I think every day lost which is not (mainly at least) employed in this thing. *Sum totus in illo* (I am entirely occupied with it).²²

In 1781, he emphasize again the importance of preaching the good news through a different perspective: "I must go on; for a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me; and woe is me if I preach not the gospel."²³

Conclusions

¹⁹ Sermon 50, "The Use of Money," §III.4, *Works*, 2:278.

²⁰ Richard Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the People Called Methodists." In *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, ed. by Richard P. Heitzenrater. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2002), 31, 35.

²¹ "Large Minutes," Q.36, *Works (J)*, 8:317.

²² Letter to Charles (April 26, 1772), *Letters (T)*, 5:316.

²³ "A Plain Account of Kingswood School (1781)," §23, *Works (J)*, 13: 301.