



shoots



study guide

Week One – June 5

Scriptural Christianity



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Acts 4

THEME AND BACKGROUND: John Wesley preached the sermon “Scriptural Christianity” at St. Mary’s, Oxford University as the final sermon he preached before the university on August 24, 1744. In this sermon, Wesley bluntly confronts Oxford University with their failure to live according to the teaching of Scripture—which resulted in a disconnect between scriptural Christianity and the nominally Christian lives of most people in Oxford. Amazingly enough, the more things change—the more they stay the same. If you were to read this sermon, you’d likely not be surprised to discover this was the last time Wesley was invited to preach at St. Mary’s. This was also the fourth and final of the sermons the Wesley brothers preached at St. Mary’s. “Scriptural Christianity” is the fourth of the sermons in the Standard Sermons that are a key part of the formal doctrine of many Wesleyan/ Methodist denominations.

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

“May it not be one of the consequences of this that so many of you are a generation of triflers; triflers with God, with one another, and with your own souls? For how few of you spend, from one week to another, a single hour in private prayer? How few have any thought of God in the general tenor of your conversation? Who of you is in any degree acquainted with the work of his Spirit? His supernatural work in the souls of men? Can you bear, unless now and then in a church, any talk of the Holy Ghost? Would you not take it for granted if one began such a conversation that it was either ‘hypocrisy’ or ‘enthusiasm’? In the name of the Lord God Almighty I ask, What religion are you of? Even the talk of Christianity ye cannot, will not, bear! O my brethren! What a Christian city is this? ‘It is time for thee, Lord, to lay to thine hand!’.... Lord, save, or we perish! Take us out of the mire, that we sink not! O help us against these enemies! For vain is the help of man. Unto thee all things are possible. According to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die. And preserve us in the manner that seemest thee good; not as we will, but as thou wilt!” [IV. 10-11]

Wesley makes a comparison of Acts 4:31 to similar verses in Acts 2. The similarity continues throughout the account. In Acts 4:31, the place was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

1. They were filled with the Holy Ghost for a ‘more excellent purpose’ than the gifts of the Spirit.
2. They were filled with the Holy Ghost to give them the mind, which was in Christ, to fill them with ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness’; to endue them with faith, meekness, and temperance; to enable them to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, its passions and desires; and, in consequence of that inward change, to fulfill all outward righteousness.
3. Without losing focus by arguing about the extraordinary gifts, Wesley encouraged the Methodists to focus on the ordinary fruits:

- A. As beginning to exist in individuals.
- B. As spreading from one to another.
- C. Wesley closes with a plain practical application.

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

I. Let us consider Christianity in its rise, as beginning with individuals. (Acts 2; 4:31)

Let's suppose someone heard the Apostle Peter preach, then repented, received faith and the witness of the Spirit. As a result, they couldn't be afraid of any evil tidings. Their soul would magnify the Lord and their spirit would rejoice in God their Savior. The love of God would be shed abroad in their heart by the Holy Spirit—so much so they would love their fellow man also. This kind of love is not puffed up but is carried in a humble and meek heart—which would make it impossible for them intentionally, and with forethought/planning to do harm to any person. This new convert continued daily in all the ordinances of God and daily grew in grace (Acts 2:42-48). It wasn't enough for them to abstain from evil, their soul was thirsty to do good. Such was Christianity in its early days—as described in the Acts of the Apostle and New Testament letters.

- How do you see Christianity being lived out today?
- Do you think we have a holy boldness like that of Peter and John?
- What needs to happen to awaken the Holy Spirit in us individually and in the church?

II. Let us take a view of Christianity spreading from one to another and growing. (Acts 4)

The will of God is that Christianity should spread from His first followers to others. United Methodist pastor and teacher Ron Crandall once called Christianity a "good infection." He said our faith is to be contagious and anyone who comes around us should be exposed to the virus! We're called to be contagious Christians!

This is reflected in our love of humankind—making us concerned for 'the whole world lying in wickedness.' We have the cure and should be compelled to share it! There was a day when Christians warned others to escape the damnation of hell. They spoke to every person what was suited to their circumstance. Their labors grew the church, but also grew the number of people who were offended.

- Would you say we're contagious Christians today—or have we become comfortable in simply and quietly living out our faith?
- What needs to happen for us to become contagious?
- How might we spur one another on?

III. A plain practical application. (1700 and 2021)

The question was raised then—and begs to be raised even yet today: what place does Christianity have in our society? In our city? In our country? In the world?

- Do we have a sense of urgency to share the Gospel?
- Do we have a sense of urgency to share the Christian faith in a way that produces disciples?
- What do you believe is our role as individuals?
- What is our role as the Body of Christ—the Church?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Two – June 12

The Way To The Kingdom



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Mark 1:15

THEME AND BACKGROUND: “The Way to the Kingdom” is the seventh sermon of the Wesleyan Standard Sermons. The sermon is divided into two parts. The first part defines the kingdom of God. The second part defines the way to the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God—which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost—is attained by faith in Jesus Christ.

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

“Believe this [Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners], and the kingdom of God is thine. By faith thou attainest the promise: ‘He pardoneth and absolveth all that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel.’ As soon as ever God hath spoken to thy heart, ‘Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee,’ his kingdom comes; thou hast righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” [11.9]

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

I. The Nature of True Religion—or The Kingdom of God

Wesley wants to make it clear the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Righteousness is, first, loving the Lord. Righteousness is, second, loving thy neighbor. Righteousness also includes mercy, humility, gentleness, meekness, and long-suffering (i.e., a life manifesting the fruit of the Spirit). It isn’t in outward forms or ceremonies—whether baptized, confirmed, or ordained—but rather whether our heart has been captured and changed. The nature of religion doesn’t properly consist of any outward action—it’s not about what we “do”, but rather who we “are.” Neither does religion consist in orthodoxy or right opinions—in fact, a powerful right can be wrong.

- When you think about the kingdom of God, what comes to mind?
- What does the kingdom of God look like to you?
- What needs to happen in order for us to be “kingdom people”?

II. The Way to the Kingdom of God

The way to the kingdom of God is both simple and straightforward—repent and believe. We’re called to repent first—to know ourselves as well as our standing before God. We need to understand and come to grips with our brokenness due to sin and that it’s only through the shed blood of Christ we are redeemed and restored to a right relationship with God.

The wages of sin is death—temporal and eternal. There's nothing we can do to appease the wrath of God. Even if perfect obedience could atone for past sins, we're not capable of it. Conviction of inward and outward sin also needs sorrow and despair in self. It issues itself in repentance.

We're also called to believe the Gospel. Simply stated, the Gospel is this: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Believe this and the kingdom of God is yours. Faith isn't mental assent to propositions, but rather sure trust and confidence in God through Christ. When we believe, the peace of God is in our heart—and sorrows and sighing flee.

- What does it mean to you to believe the Gospel?
- Do you think we truly understand the meaning of repentance?
- How would you share the way to the kingdom of God to an unbeliever?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Three – June 19

The First Fruits Of The Spirit



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, "What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?"

READ: Romans 8:1-17

THEME AND BACKGROUND: "The First-Fruits of the Spirit" is the eighth sermon of the Wesleyan Standard Sermons.

1. By "them which are in Christ," the Apostle Paul means those who truly believe in Him.
2. There is therefore now no condemnation to these.
3. We come to look at and consider who those are that are in Christ and how there is no condemnation to these.

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

"By 'them which are in Christ Jesus' St. Paul evidently means those who truly believe in him; those who 'being justified by faith, have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.' They who thus believe do no longer "walk after the flesh," no longer follow the motions of corrupt nature, but 'after the Spirit.' Both their thoughts, words, and works are under the direction of the blessed Spirit of God.

'There is therefore now no condemnation to' these. There is no condemnation to them from God, for he hath 'justified them freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus.' He hath forgiven all their iniquities, and blotted out all their sins. And there is no condemnation to them from within, for they 'have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that they might know the things which are freely given to them of God': 'which Spirit bears witness with their spirits that they are the children of God.' And to this is added 'the testimony of their conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world.'" [1-2]

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

I. Who are those who are "in Christ"?

The answer: those who believe in His name. That's a given, but Wesley adds—they do not sin or walk after the flesh.

How can he say this? He understood Paul's letter to the Romans. Those in Christ have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. They walk after the Spirit in their hearts and lives. They're led by the Spirit into every holy desire. They're led by the Spirit into all holiness of conversation. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, they show the genuine fruits of the Spirit of God.

- Do you think Christians today understand there's more to following Jesus than simply believing in His name?
- Why is it important for us to understand it's not enough for us to simply believe in Jesus?
- What does it mean to you to be led into every holy desire? To show genuine fruits of the Spirit?

II. Now therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are "in Christ Jesus?"

Paul tells us that in and through Christ we're set free from the bondage of sin and death—that our sins have been cancelled. He goes on to say, as those who are redeemed in Christ, we walk no longer in the flesh but rather in the Spirit. He says, ***"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."***

- Do you think we walk as people who've been set free?
- Why is it so important for us to be led by the Spirit?
- What needs to happen in your life in order to walk more and more in the Spirit?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Four – June 26

A Caution Against Bigotry



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Mark 9:38, 39

THEME AND BACKGROUND: “A Caution against Bigotry” is the 33rd sermon of the Wesleyan Standard Sermons. This sermon is written in the context of Wesley’s leadership of Methodism as a renewal movement within the Church of England and the tensions that were often just below the surface between his ordination as a priest in the Church of England and his leadership of Methodism. Wesley’s use of lay preachers, in particular, was controversial and is an important part of the background of this sermon. In other words, the sermon should be read in part as an appeal for not interfering with lay preachers whose ministry bears fruit as leaders within the Church of England. This sermon warns against interfering with the work of people outside of your own tribe whom God is using to bring sinners to repentance—and from evil to good. The sermon has a variety of intriguing applications in the contemporary context.

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

“But what is a sufficient, reasonable proof that a man does (in the sense above) cast out devils?” The answer is easy. Is there full proof, first, that a person before us was a gross, open sinner? Secondly, that he is not so now; that he has broke off his sins, and lives a Christian life? And thirdly, that his change was wrought by his hearing this man preach? If these three points be plain and undeniable, then you have sufficient, reasonable proof, such as you cannot resist without willful sin, that this man casts out devils. [III.3]

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

In our passage for this week, we find several things taking place:

I. A man is driving out demons in Jesus’ name and miraculous healing is taking place.

- What does it mean to “cast out demons” both in the text and today
- Where have you seen God work in miraculous (the true sense of the word) ways
- Do you think that there are times when we miss the miraculous things that God is doing? If so, what causes us to do so.

II. John is expressing concern as well as passing judgment on him for what he's doing.

He didn't like it because the man he states is "not one of us." Bigotry can take on many forms. We're called to consider the various ways we pass judgment on another.

- "He wasn't one of us." What does "us" mean in the text—and what can it mean today?
- What criteria do we tend to use to determine if someone is "one of us"?
- How might this idea of "him vs. us" lead to bigotry?
- Where do you find bigotry taking place today? How might it be addressed?
- How do we avoid bigotry while creating space for ministry and also being aware of the need to "cast out demons"—to do the work of ministry to which Jesus calls us?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Five – July 3

Awake, Thou That Sleepest—or Wake Up, O Sleeper!



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Ephesians 5:8-14

THEME AND BACKGROUND: Did you know some of Wesley’s Standard Sermons were actually written and preached by John Wesley’s brother, Charles, who’s best known for writing hymns like “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing” and “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”? Charles Wesley preached the sermon “Awake, Thou That Sleepest” at St. Mary’s, Oxford University as one of the University sermons on April 4, 1742. This is the only sermon Charles preached at St. Mary’s. It’s central message is: People, who by nature are asleep and separated from God, must wake up, put their faith in Jesus Christ, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. This was the third of four sermons the Wesley brothers preached at St. Mary’s that formed the beginning of Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions*. “Awake, Thou That Sleepest” is the third in the Standard Sermons that are a key part of the formal doctrine of many Wesleyan/Methodist denominations—and it’s the only one not written by John Wesley.

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

“Awake, thou everlasting spirit, out of thy dream of worldly happiness. Did not God create thee for himself? Then thou canst not rest till thou restest in him. Return, thou wanderer. Fly back to thy ark. ‘This is not thy home.’ Think not of building tabernacles here. Thou art but ‘a stranger, a sojourner upon earth’; a creature of a day, but just launching out into an unchangeable state. Make haste; eternity is at hand. Eternity depends on this moment: an eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery!” [II.6]

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

I. The sleeper Ephesians 5:14 speaks of and importance of understanding ourselves.

“Sleep” refers to the natural state of a person. The poor, unawakened sinner has no knowledge of themselves. While full of all disease (sin), they think they’re in perfect health. A “sleeper” is a sinner satisfied in their sin, ignorant of their disease and only cure. They have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. This type of Christian, even though highly esteemed among people, is an abomination to God. They abide in death, though they don’t know it. Before one can arise, they must come to know they’re dead to God and the things of God. They don’t have the spiritual senses necessary to discern spiritual good and evil. Because they have no spiritual senses, they deny they exist. If you don’t have the witness of the Spirit, you need to be convinced you’re unawakened.

We find here the importance of understanding ourselves—that is, our true state. Too often we can become comfortable in our faith walk with the Lord and sort of put our faith journey on “cruise control.” In one sense, we can find ourselves sleep walking through our Christian life. We’re called to be a people who “Awake and cry out, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ And never rest till you believe on the Lord Jesus, with a faith which is his gift, by the operation of his Spirit.”

Christianity is participation in the divine nature, the life of God in the soul of man. New creation is essential, inward change, spiritual birth, holiness. Doing no harm and doing good won’t save you. Awake from spiritual death and come out from among the dead.

- Key questions to ask ourselves: what is the state of your soul? Are you a new creature? Have you received the Holy Spirit? Wesley would say if these questions offend you, you aren’t a Christian and don’t really want to be one. What’s your response?
- Why are these important questions for us to ask ourselves and with which we should wrestle? What keeps us from asking them?
- How could an accountability partner/group help with this?

II. The promise “and Christ shall give thee light” from Ephesians 5:14.

As we live as children of the light, we’re found in Christ goodness, righteousness, and truth. When we are awakened from our spiritual sleep that keeps us in darkness, we step into the light and begin to live the life to which God calls us. In Ephesians 5:14, the Apostle Paul makes it clear: without Christ, we’re walking in darkness—but when we’re found in Christ, we walk in the light as Jesus is the Light. Paul goes on to warn us, as we walk in the light, we must be careful how we live: **“not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”**

- What does it mean to you to “walk in the light”?
- How easy is it to slip back into the darkness? How do you keep from doing so?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Six – July 10

The Sermon On The Mount—Discourse 6



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Matthew 6:1-15

THEME AND BACKGROUND: “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth” is the 21st sermon of the Wesleyan Standard Sermons. It is also the sixth of 13 sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon unpacks Jesus’s teaching on works of mercy and works of piety, with particular focus on The Lord’s Prayer. The fact that 13 of the 44 original Standard Sermons focused on the Sermon on the Mount gives an idea of the importance John Wesley placed on Matthew 5-7. Wesley spends so much time on these three chapters of the Bible because he believed they provide essential teaching from Jesus on “the true way to life everlasting, the royal way which leads to the kingdom.”

Key Wesley quote:

*“We may observe in general concerning this divine prayer, **first**, that it contains all we can reasonably or innocently pray for. There is nothing which we have need to ask of God, nothing which we can ask without offending him, which is not included either directly or indirectly in this comprehensive form. **Secondly**, that it contains all we can reasonably or innocently desire; whatever is for the glory of God, whatever is needful or profitable, not only for ourselves, but for every creature in heaven and earth. And indeed, our prayers are the proper test of our desires, nothing being fit to have a place in our desires which is not fit to have a place in our prayers; what we may not pray for, neither should we desire. **Thirdly**, that it contains all our duty to God and man; whatsoever things are pure and holy, whatsoever God requires of the children of men, whatsoever is acceptable in his sight, whatsoever it is whereby we may profit our neighbour, being expressed or implied therein.” [III.2]*

In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus described the impact of Christianity on our thoughts, feelings, and affections. Jesus shows the necessity of purity of intention with regard to both works of piety and works of mercy.

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

I. Works of Mercy (Matthew 6: 1-4)

While it’s not wrong there are times when others observe us doing works of mercy, we should never do them for the purpose of seeking recognition. Jesus tells us not to do works of mercy with the primary purpose of others witnessing us doing them. Don’t be ostentatious when doing good to others. Don’t needlessly draw attention to yourself. When you do good, do it in as secret of a manner as possible.

- Do you think we do works of mercy without seeking any recognition?
- There's an age-old question that asks: "Would you wash another's feet, bring aid, comfort, or any act of mercy if you knew no one would ever know about it?" While we're quick to say "yes," we need to search our hearts. What's your response to the question?

II. Works of Piety (Matthew 6: 5-8)

Hypocrisy or insincerity is the first thing we're to guard against in prayer. Don't say something if you don't mean it. It's been said, "Any design but that of promoting the glory of God, and the happiness of men for God's sake, makes every action, however fair it may appear to men, an abomination unto the Lord."

Use all the privacy you can in private prayer. Do not needlessly repeat yourself. The purpose of praying is "not so much to move God" as to "move ourselves"—that we would be ready and willing "to receive the good things He has prepared."

- What does piety mean to you?
- What are some ways we allow hypocrisy or insincerity get in the way of our prayer life? Of our faith journey?

III. The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 9-15)

Jesus gives this prayer as "the model and standard of all our prayers." This prayer contains all we "can reasonably or innocently pray for."

The Lord's Prayer consists of three parts. The first is the preface: "Our Father which art in heaven." "If He's a Father, then He is good, then He's loving to His children. And here's the first and great reason for prayer. God is willing to bless; let us ask for blessing." "Our Father" emphasizes God is the Father of all. "Which art in heaven": God is over all.

"Hallowed be thy name." This is the first of six petitions that make up the core of the prayer. "In praying that God, or His 'name', may 'be hallowed' or glorified, we pray that He may be known, such as He is, by all that are capable of knowing Him."

"Thy kingdom come." The kingdom comes "to a particular person when he 'repents and believes the gospel.'" This petition is also a prayer for "the coming of His everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of glory in heaven, which is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth."

"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." This is a prayer for "active conformity to the will of God." This is a prayer God's will be done by people "as *willingly* as the holy angels" and that we would do God's will continually and perfectly.

"Give us this day our daily bread." The petitions now move from focusing on humanity broadly to our own specific needs. "By 'bread,' we may understand all things needful, whether for our souls or bodies."

"Give us": "We claim nothing of right, but only of free mercy." "This day": "For we are to take no thought for the morrow."

"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." "Nothing but sin can hinder the bounty of God from flowing forth upon every creature, so this petition naturally follows the former; that all hindrances being removed, we may the more clearly trust in the God of love for every manner of thing which is good." Forgive means either forgiving a debt or unloosing a chain. "If our debts are forgiven, the chains fall off our hands."

"As we forgive them that trespass against us." "All our trespasses and sins are forgiven us *if* we forgive, and as we forgive, others."

"And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Temptation here means a trial of any kind. "The conclusion of this divine prayer, commonly called the doxology, is a solemn thanksgiving, a compendious acknowledgment of the attributes and works of God."

- Do you think we truly consider the full extent of what we're praying in The Lord's Prayer when we pray it? Or do we repeat in a rote manner?
- What might happen if we earnestly prayed this prayer in true faith?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Seven – July 17

The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use Of The Law



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, “What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?”

READ: Romans 7:7-12

THEME AND BACKGROUND: “The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law” is the 29th sermon of the Wesleyan Standard Sermons. This sermon addresses the argument the moral law is unnecessary or unhelpful for Christians. Wesley shows the origin of the law and why it’s essential for our salvation. The law is not to be feared. Sin is to be feared. The law of God is holy, just, and good!

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

“The law of God... is a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature; yea, it is the fairest offspring of the everlasting Father, the brightest efflux of his essential wisdom, the visible beauty of the Most High. It is the delight and wonder of cherubim and seraphim and all the company of heaven, and the glory and joy of every wise believer, every well instructed child of God upon earth.” [II.6]

The Apostle Paul is referring to the moral law, as can be seen from the beginning of the letter to the Romans. It’s been said, “The Apostle having gone thus far in proving that the Christian had set aside the Jewish dispensation, and that the moral law itself, though it could never pass away, yet stood on a different foundation from what it did before, now stops to propose and answer an objection. ‘What shall we say then? Is the law sin?’... ‘God forbid!... The law is an irreconcilable enemy to sin, searching it out wherever it is.’” We come to consider and look at the origin of this law—the nature and properties of this law (holy, just, and good)—and the uses of this law.

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

I. The Origin of the Moral Law

The moral law goes back even before creation—“even beyond the foundation of the world.” The moral law was given to angelic minds “to make a way for a continual increase of their happiness; seeing every instance of obedience to that law would both add to the perfection of their nature and entitle them to a higher reward, which the righteous Judge would give in its season.”

When God created humans, He gave them the same law—written “in the inmost spirit both of men and of angels.” When humans broke the moral law, “God did not despise the work of His own hands; but being reconciled to man through the Son of His love, He in some measure re-inscribed the law on the heart of His dark, sinful creature.” God then chose a particular people “to whom He gave a more perfect knowledge of the law. And the heads of this, because they were slow of understanding, He wrote on tablets of stone.”

Today, we hear the law of God with our ears, but it must be revealed by the Spirit of God. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.... I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

- How open do you think we are to allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal God's law to us?
- What causes us to stray from God's moral law?

II. The Nature and properties of the Law

The law and the commandment are sometimes taken to be different things, but they're the same. And neither is the same thing as the ceremonial law. The law mentioned in Romans chapter 7 isn't the Mosaic dispensation. "This law is an incorruptible picture of the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity. It is He whom in His essence no man hath seen or can see, made visible to men and angels." The law is "divine virtue and wisdom assuming a visible form." From another vantage point, the law is "supreme, unchangeable reason; it is unalterable rectitude; it is the everlasting fitness of all things that are or ever were created." The law is holy, just, and good. It is holy: "'pure religion and undefiled'; or the pure, clean, unpolluted worship of God." Because the law is holy, it's enmity to sin. This is why Paul objects so strongly to the suggestion the law is sin or causes sin. Rather, the law reveals sin. "The law of God... is a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature."

- Do you think we look at and think about the law of God as being "a copy of His eternal mind – a transcript of His divine nature?"
- How might we live life differently if we did?

III. The Uses of the Law

The first use is to convince the world of sin. The second use of the law is to bring us back to life, through faith in Christ, so that we may live. The third use of the law is to "keep us alive."

The law is "of unspeakable use, first, in convincing us of the sin that yet remains both in our hearts and lives, and thereby keeping us close to Christ, that His blood may cleanse us every moment; secondly, in deriving strength from our Head into His living members, whereby He empowers them to do what His law commands; and thirdly, in confirming our hope of whatsoever it commands and we have not yet attained, of receiving grace upon grace, till we are in actual possession of the fullness of his promises." The law shows every true believer the truth more and more clearly.

- Do you think we view God's law as "of unspeakable use" in any and all circumstances of life or do we tend to pick and choose?
- What needs to happen in order for us to apply God's Law to all facets of life?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Eight – July 24

The Law Established Through Faith (Part 1)



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, "What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?"

READ: Romans 3:19-31

THEME AND BACKGROUND: "The Law Established through Faith, I" is the 30th sermon of the Wesleyan Standard Sermons. This sermon outlines ways Christian leaders nullify or void the moral law of God through the doctrine of justification by faith. Wesley shows the ways this happens and warns against these mistakes. This sermon warns of voiding the law through faith in Christ when faith actually empowers someone to obey the moral law. Faith in Christ empowers someone to obey the law, rather than making it irrelevant. Faith in Christ enables us to live the kind of life God intends for us to live out of loving response to God's love for us.

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

"This, it must be acknowledged, comes home to the point, and is indeed the main pillar of antinomianism. And yet it needs not a long or labored answer. We allow, (1), that God 'justifies the ungodly', him that till that hour is totally ungodly, full of all evil, void of all good; (2), that he justifies 'the ungodly that worketh not', that till that moment worketh no good work – neither can he: for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit; (3), that he justifies him 'by faith alone', without any goodness or righteousness preceding; and (4), that 'faith is' then 'counted to him for righteousness', namely, for preceding righteousness; i.e., God, through the merits of Christ, accepts him that believes as if he had already fulfilled all righteousness. But what is all this to your point? The Apostle does not say either here or elsewhere that this faith is counted to him for subsequent righteousness. He does teach that there is no righteousness before faith, but where does he teach that there is none after it? He does assert holiness cannot precede justification; but not that it need not follow it. St. Paul therefore gives you no color for 'making void the law' by teaching that faith supersedes the necessity of holiness." [II.7]

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

1. Justification is by faith, without the works of the law.
2. It's easy to anticipate someone might then ask, "Does justification by faith abolish the law?" The Apostle Paul reply is, "God forbid! Yea, we establish the law."
3. It's the moral law that is established by faith.
4. But many disagree with this.
5. Have those who disagree the law is established by faith "observed the connection between the law and faith?"
6. This sermon observes the ways people wrongly void the law through faith. And second, the sermon teaches "how we may follow the Apostle, and by faith 'establish the law.'"

Too often, if we're not careful, we can slip into the mindset, if we're justified by faith in Christ, there's no need for the law of God—that the law is voided by faith. This then leads us in the direction of believing living by faith excuses us from the necessity holiness. While it's true we're not saved by observing the law, we need to understand it's by walking by faith and in God's righteousness that we live out the law of God—which leads to holiness.

- What does justification by faith mean to you?
- In what ways do you see living out faith as leading to the establishment of the law in our lives?
- What is the connection between the law and faith?
- In what ways do you see the abandonment of God's law having an effect on our faith? On our society?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*

Week Nine – July 31

The Law Established Through Faith (Part 2)



Begin the study by inviting the Holy Spirit to be present. Ask the Holy Spirit, "What do You want to teach me/us in these moments?"

READ: Romans 3:19-31

THEME AND BACKGROUND: "The Law Established through Faith, II" is the 31st sermon of the Wesleyan Standard Sermons. This sermon builds on the previous sermon, "The Law Established through Faith, I" and outlines a more positive vision for how the law is established in the lives of followers of Jesus Christ. The moral law of God is established in our lives through sound doctrine, faith in Christ, love of God and neighbor, and holiness of heart and life.

KEY WESLEY QUOTE:

"Can you say, 'Thou art merciful to my unrighteousness; my sins thou rememberest no more'? Then for the time to come see that you fly from sin, as from the face of a serpent. For how exceeding sinful does it appear to you now! How heinous above all expression! On the other hand, in how amiable a light do you now see the holy and perfect will of God! Now, therefore, labour that it may be fulfilled, both in you, by you, and upon you. Now watch and pray that you may sin no more, that you may see and shun the least transgression of his law. You see the motes which you could not see before when the sun shines into a dark place. In like manner you see the sins which you could not see before, now the sun of righteousness shines in your heart. Now, then, do all diligence to walk in every respect according to the light you have received. Now be zealous to receive more light daily, more of the knowledge and love of God, more of the Spirit of Christ, more of his life, and of the power of his resurrection. Now use all the knowledge and love and life and power you have already attained. So shall you continually go on from faith to faith. So shall you daily increase in holy love, till faith is swallowed up in sight, and the law of love established to all eternity." [III.6]

Last week, we considered "How we establish the law through faith." This week, we come to consider how we establish the law by our Doctrine, by proclaiming Christ in a way that leads to holiness of heart and life, and by establishing it in our hearts and lives in a very tangible way.

POINTS FOR US TO CONSIDER:

I. We establish the Law by our doctrine

We establish the law by offering "the whole counsel of God" with "great plainness of speech." It's been said, "The law is established by our doctrine when we declare every part of it, every commandment contained therein, not only in its full, literal sense, but likewise in its spiritual meaning; not only with regard to the outward actions which it either forbids or enjoins, but also with respect to the inward principle, to the thoughts, desires, and intents of the heart."

- Why is it important for our doctrine to reflect the law of God?
- What happens when we allow our doctrine to deviate from God's law?
- In what ways have you observed the deviation from God's law in our society today?

II. We establish the Law by proclaiming faith in Christ in a way that leads to holiness of heart and life

It's not enough for us to simply proclaim Christ and our faith in Him—it must lead us to holiness of both heart and life. As we do, we'll find we make the move to establishing God's Law in in our midst.

- Do you think we take seriously the need to proclaim faith in Christ to others?
- How might we do so in a way that leads people to holiness of heart and life?

III. The Most Important Way of Establishing the Law Is by Establishing It in Our Own Hearts and Lives

It's been said: "It would serve no purpose to preach the law through our doctrine and preach Christ in all of his offices if it were not established in our hearts. How may we establish the law in our own hearts so that it may have its full influence on our lives? This can only be done by faith... Faith in general is the most direct and effectual means of promoting all righteousness and true holiness; of establishing the holy and spiritual law in the hearts of them that believe." "Let us thus endeavor to establish the law in ourselves; not sinning 'because we are under grace', but rather using all the power we receive thereby 'to fulfill all righteousness.'"

- Do you think that we take seriously the need to establish God's law in our hearts and lives?
- In what ways do you seek to grow in your faith in order that this might happen?
- How might the group help?

RESPOND

- *What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you?*
- *What are you going to do about it?*
- *How can the group help?*
- *Whom do you need to tell about it?*