

O Lord, the God of our salvation, you are the hope of the ends of the earth. Upon you the eyes of all do wait, for you give unto all, life, and breath, and all things. You still watch over us for good; you daily renew to us our lives and your mercies; and you have given us the assurance of your word that if we commit our affairs to you, if we acknowledge you in all our ways, you will direct our paths. Amen.

(from "Family Prayers for Each Day of the Week," Thursday Morning, by John Wesley)

What informs our beliefs as United Methodist?

I. _____

- A. For John Wesley the Quadrilateral would really be one locus of authority in four parts. Thus, Wesley chastised his preachers who relied only on the Bible. We can safely assume that he would oppose the biblicism of later Protestants who pitted the Bible against all secular knowledge.

From "The Rule of Scripture" by Scott J. Jones in
Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation

- B. And as this doctrine [of predestination] manifestly and directly tends to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation, so it does the same thing, by plain consequence, in making that Revelation contradict itself. For it is grounded on such an interpretation of some texts (more or fewer it matters not) as flatly contradicts all the other texts, and indeed the whole scope and tenor of Scripture. For instance: Those who assert this doctrine interpret that text of Scripture, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," as implying that God in a literal sense hated Esau, and all the reprobated, from eternity. Now, what can possibly be a more flat contradiction than this, not only to the whole scope and tenor of Scripture, but also to all those particular texts which expressly declare, "God is love?" Again: They infer from that text, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy," (Romans 4:15) that God is love only to some people, viz., the elect, and that he has mercy for those only; flatly contrary to which is the whole tenor of Scripture, as is that express declaration in particular, "The Lord is loving to every person; and his mercy is over all his works." (Psalm 114:9)

This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never proved this; whatever its true meaning be. This cannot be its true meaning. Do you ask, "What is its true meaning then?" If I say, "I know not," you have gained nothing; for there are many scriptures the true sense whereof neither you nor I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense, than to say it had such a sense as this. It cannot mean, whatever it mean besides, that the God of truth is a liar. Let it mean what it will, it cannot mean that the Judge of all the world is unjust. No scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works; that is, whatever it prove beside, no scripture can prove predestination.

From John Wesley's Sermon, "Free Grace" of 1740
www.fumcwf.org/fumc_pdfs/free_grace.pdf

- C. Article V of the Articles of Religion

- D. Article IV of the Confession of Faith

II. _____

- A. Doctrinal Standards & General Rules:
 - i. The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church
 - ii. The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church
 - iii. The Standard Sermons of John Wesley
 - iv. The Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament by John Wesley
 - v. The General Rules of the Methodist Church
- B. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church
- C. The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church

III. _____

- A. We break with no one for one's opinion. We think, and let think.

From John Wesley's Journal Entry of May 29, 1745
- B. There is no other religious society under heaven which requires nothing of men in order to their admission into it, but a desire to save their souls. Look all round you, you cannot be admitted into the Church, or society of the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers, or any others, unless you hold the same opinions with them, and adhere to the same mode of worship.

The Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion; but they think and let think. Neither do they impose any particular mode of worship; but you may continue to worship in your former manner, be it what it may. Now, I do not know any other religious society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is now allowed, or has been allowed, since the age of the Apostles. Here is our glorying; and a glorying peculiar to us. What society shares it with us?

From John Wesley's Journal Entry of May 18, 1788
- C. Beware you are not a fiery, persecuting enthusiast. Do not imagine that God has called you (just contrary to the spirit of Him you style your Master) to destroy people's lives, and not to save them. Never dream of forcing people into the ways of God. Think yourself, and let think. Use no constraint in matters of religion. Even those who are farthest out of the way never compel to come in by any other means than reason, truth, and love.

From John Wesley's Sermon "The Nature of Enthusiasm"
- D. And, First, let us keep close to the grand scriptural doctrines which [George Whitefield] everywhere delivered. There are many doctrines of a less essential nature, with regard to which even the sincere children of God (such is the present weakness of human understanding) are and have been divided for many ages. In these we may think and let think; we may "agree to disagree." But, meantime, let us hold fast the essentials of "the faith which was once delivered to the saints;" and which this champion of God so strongly insisted on, at all times, and in all places!

From John Wesley's Sermon "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield"
- E. Let it not be said, "This does not concern us Protestants: We think and let think. We abhor the spirit of persecution; and maintain, as an indisputable truth, that every rational creature has a right to worship God as one is persuaded in one's own mind." But are we true to our own

principles? So far, that we do not use fire and faggot. We do not persecute unto blood those that do not subscribe to our opinions. Blessed be God, the laws of our country do not allow of this; but is there no such thing to be found in England as domestic persecution? The saying or doing anything unkind to another for following his own conscience is a species of persecution. Now, are we all clear of this? Is there no husband who, in this sense, persecutes his wife? who uses her unkindly, in word or deed, for worshipping God after her own conscience? Do no parents thus persecute their children? nor masters or mistresses, their servants? If they do this, and think they do God service therein, they must not cast the first stone at the Roman Catholics. From John Wesley's Sermon "On the Wedding Garment"

- F. There is a middle way. You may simply say, "I believe otherwise; but I think, and let think; I am not fond of contending on this or any other head, lest I receive more hurt than I can do good."

From John Wesley's "Letter to a Member of the Society" dated March 29, 1760

IV. _____

- A. Genuine religious experience is inevitably *transforming*. Religious knowledge either makes a difference to ones whole orientation or it is not genuine knowledge.

In spiritual experience, the experience produces us. *Knowing transforms the knower.*

From *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* by Theodore Runyon, p. 78

- B. Seeing our ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our senses, it is certainly necessary that you have senses capable of discerning objects of this kind, . . . *spiritual* senses. . . . It is necessary that you have the *hearing* ear and the *seeing* eye, . . . that you have a new class of senses opened in your soul, not depending on organs of flesh and blood, to be "the evidence of things not seen" as your bodily senses are of visible things, to be avenues to the invisible world. . . . And till you have these internal senses, till the eyes of your understanding are opened, you can have no apprehension of divine things, . . . seeing your reason has no ground whereon to stand, no materials to work upon.

From John Wesley's "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion"

- C. **3.** The child which is not yet born subsists indeed by the air, as does everything which has life; but *feels* it not, nor any thing else, unless in a very dull and imperfect manner. It *hears* little, if at all; the organs of hearing being as yet closed up. It sees nothing; having its eyes fast shut, and being surrounded with utter darkness. There are, it may be, some faint beginnings of life, when the time of its birth draws nigh, and some motion consequent thereon, whereby it is distinguished from a mere mass of matter; but it has no *senses*; all these avenues of the soul are hitherto quite shut up. Of consequence, it has scarce any intercourse with this visible world; nor any knowledge, conception, or idea, of the things that occur therein.

4. The reason why he that is not yet born is wholly a stranger to the visible world, is, not because it is afar off; (it is very nigh; it surrounds him on every side;) but, partly, because he has not those senses, they are not yet opened in his soul, whereby alone it is possible to hold commerce with the material world; and partly, because so thick a veil is cast between, through which he can discern nothing.

5. But no sooner is the child born into the world, than he exists in a quite different manner. He now *feels* the air with which he is surrounded, and which pours into him from every side, as fast as he alternately breathes it back, to sustain the flame of life: And hence springs a continual increase of strength, of motion, and of sensation; all the bodily senses being now awakened, and furnished with their proper objects.

His eyes are now opened to perceive the light, which, silently flowing in upon them, discovers not only itself, but an infinite variety of things, with which before he was wholly unacquainted.

His ears are unclosed, and sounds rush in with endless diversity. Every sense is employed upon such objects as are peculiarly suitable to it; and by these inlets the soul, having an open intercourse with the visible world, acquires more and more knowledge of sensible things, of all the things which are under the sun.

6. So it is with him that is born of God. Before that great change is wrought, although he subsists by Him, in whom all that have life "live, and move, and have their being," yet he is not *sensible* of God; he does not *feel*, he has no inward consciousness of His presence. He does not perceive that divine breath of life, without which he cannot subsist a moment: Nor is he sensible of any of the things of God; they make no impression upon his soul. God is continually calling to him from on high, but he hears not; his ears are shut, so that the "voice of the charmer" is lost to him, "charm he never so wisely," He sees not the things of the Spirit of God; the eyes of his understanding being closed, and utter darkness covering his whole soul, surrounding him on every side. It is true he may have some faint dawnings of life, some small beginnings of spiritual motion; but as yet he has no spiritual senses capable of discerning spiritual objects; consequently, he "discerns not the things of the Spirit of God; he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

7. Hence he has scarce any knowledge of the invisible world, as he has scarce any intercourse with it. Not that it is afar off: No: He is in the midst of it; it encompasses him round about. The *other world*, as we usually term it, is not far from every one of us: It is above, and beneath, and on every side.

From John Wesley's "The Great Privilege of Those that Are Born of God"

D. By comparing one's own experience with those of other members of the community [of faith] and with Scripture, one could determine whether one's point of view and understanding was consistent with the Scriptures, "the church of the ages," and fellow believers. Wesley frequently advised persons to measure their own experience and interpretation against that of the community. . . . He was well aware of the danger that a lay movement, lacking biblical and theological expertise, could fall into questionable teachings and esoteric enthusiasms.

From *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* by Theodore Runyon, p. 127