

# Development of john wesley's theology assignment

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The Development of John Wesley's Theology John Wesley deserved to receive the doctoral robe offered by Martin Luther as he successfully reconciled "salvation by faith alone" with "faith without works is dead." A review of the key events in Wesley's life and his developing thoughts indicates that it was a process that took a lifetime to achieve. Thus, I am left to wonder whether a doctoral robe would be sufficient recognition for such a monumental achievement. To properly address this issue, a survey of Wesley's theological formation is in order.

Wesley's journals suggest that he was tossed "by the winds of doctrine" to and fro as he sought to understand what one must do to be saved: Is one saved by "faith alone," "works alone," or "faith and works alone?" Albert Outler provides a summary of Wesley's initial understandings in Wesley's own words (pp. 44-50). Wesley apparently started with the understanding that there should be a good blend of faith and works (p. 44), but soon fell under the spell of Calvin and Luther, who argued that one is saved by faith alone (p. 45.) He climbed out of this boggy hole with the help of certain English writers (Id. Wesley's involvement at Oxford with the "Holy Club" demonstrates that Wesley was initially of the mind that "faith without works is dead." (Outler, p. 8) The Holy Club was devoted to "systematic Bible study, mutual discipline in devotion, and frequent communion." (Id.) In addition, its members were devoted to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that were sick, and visiting those that were in prison. (Handout, John Wesley's letter to Mr. Richard Morgan, the father of the young man that died, dated Oct. 18, 1732).

This group was dedicated to doing good, communicating the gospel, and observing fasts. (Id. ) In 1725 at the age of 23, Wesley experienced “ a sudden focusing of [his] faith and personal commitment. ” (Outler, pgs. 6-7. ) Wesley read several parts of Bishop Taylor's Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying (p. 7). Wesley was exceedingly affected by that part which related to purity of intention and resolved “ to dedicate all [his] life to God, all my thought and words and actions, being thoroughly convinced that there was no medium, but every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or to myself; that is, in effect, to the devil . . . .” (Id. ) Accordingly, Wesley determined that his inner spiritual life was of supreme importance and seemingly accepted that “ faith without works is dead. ” Wesley's experience of the Moravians during his fateful visit to Georgia and upon his return to England marked a key turning point in Wesley's understanding of faith. During a terrible storm at sea, Wesley observed that the Moravians set calmly singing and praying while Wesley was in fear for his life. Wesley was surprised to learn that the Moravians were not afraid of dying.

Thus, he concluded that he was not yet saved: “ I went to America to convert the Indians but, oh, who shall convert me? ” (John Wesley, p. 44). Wesley arrived back in England a spiritual mess. He had been unsuccessful in accomplishing the goals of his ministry and had been forced to leave Georgia under legal duress. It was at this spiritual low point that a Moravian priest, Peter Bohler, found Wesley. Seeking spiritual direction, Wesley consulted with Bohler who recognized Wesley's misconception of faith as an intellectual assent to truth.

Bowler eventually convince Wesley that faith meant a sure sense of confidence in salvation, demonstrated by (1) constant peace from a sense of forgiveness; and, (2) dominion over sin. (John Wesley, p. 65) What Wesley was missing, according to Bohler, was assurance of his salvation that comes only on an emotional (*fiducia*) level. Bohler stressed that faith was not just an intellectual assent that resulted in loyalty and obedience. Rather, faith is based upon trust and confidence that comes from the experience of assurance. This is what Wesley was lacking in Bohler's view.

Wesley needed to experience the assurance that would move his faith from his head to his heart. He "resolved to seek it unto the end, first by absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or part, upon my own works or righteousness ??? on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation." (Id. ) Thus, we see Wesley moving away from his understanding that "faith without works is dead" towards an understanding that "salvation is by faith alone." With this understanding in mind, Wesley had his famous "Aldersgate" experience.

Hearing the words of Luther's preface to Romans, Wesley is convinced that he had the experience of assurance - "trust in Christ . . . assurance . . . that [Christ] had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." (Id. , p. 66. ) Aldersgate is a significant incident in that it helped move Wesley's understanding of faith from a solely works oriented, intellectual assent model to also including an emotive, heartfelt experience. We also find Bohler's influence in Wesley's 1738 sermon "Salvation by Faith" preached after Aldersgate.

Contrary to his pre-Bohler view Wesley defines faith as more than a “speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head.” (Sermons, p. 41, emphasis added. ) Instead, he asserted that faith must be a “disposition of the heart.” (Id. , emphasis added. ). “Christian faith,” he continued, “is then not only an ascent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance ... trust ... a sure confidence which man had in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God.” (Id. , p. 2, italics in original, bold added for emphasis. ) Here, we see the beginning of Wesley's changing understanding of the nature of faith and its relationship to assurance. In his sermon, “The Circumcision of the Heart,” we see Wesley finding ways to work out the relationship between “assent” and “trust and confidence”, two very different ideas of faith. Wesley's insertion years later of the words “not only” into this sermon is key evidence of Wesley's theological development in this regard. (Sermons, p. 26) Wesley believes that faith shapes life if one takes it seriously.

Bohler says it's all about the heart. Wesley was simply too formed theologically by this point in his conception of faith to agree completely with Bohler. A pivotal development in Wesley's successful reconciliation of “salvation is by faith alone” and “faith without works is dead” comes from Wesley's reliance on 1 Cor. 3. Wesley concludes that there are degrees of faith as opposed to the “all or nothing at the all” image of faith. (John Wesley, p. 69. ) This reversal was a result of Wesley's inability to completely let go of the intellectual assent and practice of holiness as essentials to one's faith.

In the Jan. 4, 1739 Journal entry, Wesley is even led to conclude that he has no faith because he has none of the "fruits of the Spirit of Christ," he loves the world, has no "joy in the Holy Ghost," and has "not the peace of God." (See handout.) Wesley sets forth in his sermon "The Witness of the Spirit, II" the difference between the "witness of the Spirit" and the "witness of our spirit." (Sermons, Pg. 42) Wesley believed that if the fruits of faith are present ??? via self-examination- this the witness of our spirit.

Wesley believed it was the privilege of Christians to have this inward testimony ??? God speaking inside ??? of what is really going on in our souls. Wesley believed that if you claimed to have the inward witness without the fruit, then you were probably confused, i. e. not really saved. In "The Wedding Garment", one of Wesley's last sermons, Wesley successfully puts "justification by faith alone" back together with "holiness of Heart." (Sermons, Pg. 560). In seeking to reunite holiness and faith, Wesley says it is the "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. (From Heb. 12: 14)- (Pg. 562.) In essence, Wesley is saying that holiness is a consequence of justification. This is in accordance with the defined goal of early Methodists: To reform the nation, particularly the church (of England) and to spread scriptural holiness across the land. Wesley says that we should all be striving for "perfection" and describes perfection in a letter to his brother Charles as follows: "By perfection, I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart by the whole life.

I do not include an impossibility of falling from it, either in part or in whole. Therefore, I retract several expressions in our Hymns which partly express, <https://assignbuster.com/development-of-john-wesleys-theology-assignment/>

partly imply, such an impossibility. And I do not contend for the term sinless, though I do not object against it. " (HO, John's letter to Charles) Wesley believed that perfection representing the receiving of all the gifts of God's grace and offering them back to God through serving.

The essence of Wesley's understanding is found in "The Great Privilege" sermon which captures the image of breathing in and out with the Holy Spirit- the notion of the life of God in the soul of man- a divine living in the human- synergism. In summary, Wesley originally believed "holiness" or "works" was needed to lead to salvation. With Aldersgate and the 1738 events, he changes his view, and accepts justification by faith must occur first. Finally, Wesley came to realize that holiness is a consequence of justification. As such, Wesley