

AN EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF THE WESLEYAN NOTION OF PREVENTIENT GRACE

Soteriology is inextricably related to the doctrine of God. Error in one field will inevitably beget error in the other. Speaking through Isaiah the prophet, God said, “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.”¹ Since the salvation of sinners is “to the praise of the glory of His grace,”² no belief about it, which minimizes God’s ordination, administration, or sovereign execution of it, may be espoused. Why not? The very glory of the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, is at stake.

The Arminianism³-Calvinism debate has raged for hundreds of years. Can anything end it? I have chosen to write on the Wesleyan notion of preventient grace because “Wesleyans admit that without it ‘Calvinist logic is irrefutable.’”⁴ The doctrine of salvation is a web, not a box of marbles. Various unavoidable aspects of the two major competing soteric schemes in evangelicalism today have been addressed below.

The adjective of “preventient grace” means “coming before” or “preceding” and is based on the Latin verb “*praevenīre*” meaning “to precede.”⁵ Like Wesleyans, Calvinists also

¹Isaiah 42:8, NASV

²Ephesians 1:6a, NASV

³The terms “Wesleyan” and “Arminian” are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

⁴Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Preventient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 382.

⁵*The American Heritage Collegiate Dictionary* (1997), s.v. “preventient.” An example of this usage of the word in the Vulgate is Psalm 59:10 (KJV)/58:11 (VUL). “The God of my mercy shall prevent me” (KJV,

believe in divine grace that is prevenient.⁶ “There is a grace of God that goes before regenerating grace [also called effectual, saving, or irresistible grace] and makes the soul ready for it. It is common or prevenient grace.”⁷ But Wesleyans and other Arminians believe that prevenient grace is itself saving grace. And having been given to all men without exception, man’s will is unshackled and made free (in the libertarian sense). He is now able to exercise his free will to receive Jesus, resulting in regeneration. Or he may exercise his free will to reject Jesus.

John Wesley often preached and taught the doctrine. “Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) *preventing*⁸ grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God.”⁹ Wesleyan theologian H. Orton Wiley defines it as “that manifestation of the divine influence which precedes the *full* regenerate life [emphasis mine].”¹⁰ Wesleyans in-effect teach three

emphasis mine). “Deus meus voluntas eius *praeveniet* me” (VUL, emphasis mine). See also 2 Corinthians 9:5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15 in any modern English Bible.

⁶“Augustine stresses that grace does not become operational in a person’s life only after conversion; the process leading up to that conversion is one of preparation, in which the prevenient grace of God is operative.” Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 433. Augustine believed *operative* and *cooperative* grace, which *always* follow prevenient grace in the life of God’s elect, were monergistic and synergistic, respectively.

⁷William G. T. Shedd in Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Dallas: Scholarly Reprints, 1993), 407.

⁸Wesley here uses “preventing” as Wesleyans today use “prevenient.”

⁹John Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation” (sermon, 1771) [on-line]; accessed 28 October 2005; available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.htm#vi.xxi-iii-p0.2>; Internet.

¹⁰H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1941), 2:346.

views of man: fallen, neutral (*partially* regenerated; see previous quotation), and redeemed (*fully* regenerated). Prevenient grace supposedly moves men from the fallen category to the neutral one, where he can then freely choose (unencumbered by his former bent to sin continually) to believe in Jesus.

The United Methodist (a denomination committed to Wesleyan theology) *Book of Discipline* defines prevenient grace as “the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God’s will, and our ‘first slight transient conviction’ of having sinned against God.”¹¹

Wesleyans believe that all persons are, from the moment of conception, in two relationships—one to Adam¹² and one to Jesus, more specifically, His atonement. Because of Christ’s death, the full consequences of Adam’s fall are partially relieved. Bluntly put, unregenerate sinners are no longer totally depraved. “The vindication of providence in our moral probation lies in its possibilities of good—the good of moral worth, and the good of holy blessedness forever.”¹³ Somehow, Jesus’ cross-work enables lost sinners to perform morally good deeds, most importantly, the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ. “We must either replace the

¹¹Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Gospel of Grace: The Way of Salvation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 69. Three pages later he writes, “Prevenient grace creates new possibilities for human existence. God stirs us out of spiritual slumber and produces within us the desire and the grace to *become* [emphasis mine] new creations in Christ (Ezek. 11:19; II Cor. 5:17).” Firstly, Kinghorn never substantiates his claim that prevenient grace in the Wesleyan sense is biblical before making this statement. Secondly, he cleverly uses the ambiguous form of the English copulative “to be” to convey his belief that being a new creation in Christ follows some step(s). On the contrary, Scripture never says an unbeliever *becomes* a new creation after God infuses the desire and grace to be one. Even according to the prooftext which Kinghorn cites, God is the one who gives the new heart and spirit. Note the absence of middle or passive voice verbs in the verse.

¹²“On this question [the depravity of man] Arminianism differs little from Augustinianism, so long as man is viewed simply in his Adamic relation.” John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1894), 2:243.

doctrine of total depravity by a Semi-Pelagianism or admit a gracious help for all men [to do good] as an immediate benefit of the atonement of Christ.”¹⁴ Wiley concurs: “The atonement was coextensive with the ruin of man, and that universal grace mitigated depravity and preserved the freedom of the will.”¹⁵

According to William Burt Pope, Wesleyans believe “there is a state of nature . . . being itself a state of grace, preliminary [prevenient] grace, which is diffused throughout the world.” Moreover, “The special grace of enlightenment and conversion, repentance and faith, it [Arminianism] holds to be prevenient only, as resting short of regeneration; but as flowing into [the continuity principle applied]¹⁶ the regenerate life.” Finally, it “refuses to believe that any influence of the Divine Spirit procured by the atonement is imparted *without reference to final salvation.*”¹⁷ In other words, some part of the saving work of the Spirit is contingent upon something other than Himself. Man’s action(s) are necessary for entrance into heaven.

Whereas Reformed theologians believe a lost man possesses a sense of moral duty because he personally knows Yahweh¹⁸ and His law,¹⁹ Arminians appeal to Jesus’ atonement as

¹³John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1894), 2:243.

¹⁴Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 244.

¹⁵Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 349.

¹⁶“The continuous co-operation of the human will with the originating grace of the Spirit, *merges prevenient grace directly into saving grace* [emphasis mine], without the necessity of any arbitrary distinction between ‘common grace’ and ‘efficacious grace’” Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 357. This statement smacks of the Roman Catholic dogma of infused grace through which man merits God’s righteousness. Wiley’s footnote on page 357 confirms my fear. “It [Calvinism] holds that the good in man before conversion is due to ‘common grace,’ but holds also that this [common grace] can never *become* [emphasis mine] saving grace.” This sentence seems to mean that common grace can become saving grace only if it is rightly or adequately attended by the sinner. How is this fundamentally different than a Romanist’s view of salvation?

¹⁷William Burt Pope in Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 354n.

¹⁸Mediately and immediately. See Genesis 1:27, Romans 1:19-20, and James 3:9.

the basis. A miniature spiritual and moral awakening is procured by Jesus and subsequently given to every person at the moment of conception. “Man is fallen and corrupt in his nature, and therein morally helpless; but man is also *redeemed* [emphasis mine] and the recipient of a helping grace in Christ whereby he is invested with capabilities for a moral probation.”²⁰ What is the result of this “redemption”? “He [the non-Christian] has the power of meeting the terms of an actual salvation. All men have this power.”²¹

All Wesleyans adduce John 1:9 to defend their view of prevenient grace. “The true light, which enlightens [φωτίζει] everyone, was coming into the world.”²² Hear Wesley.

Yet this is no excuse for those who continue in sin, and lay the blame upon their Maker, by saying, ‘It is God only that must quicken us; for we cannot quicken our own souls.’ For allowing that all the souls of men are dead in sin by nature, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed preventing grace. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Every one has, sooner or later, good desires; although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root, or produce any considerable fruit. Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, *enlightens every man that cometh into the world* [emphasis mine]. And every one, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.²³

Even a cursory reading of this verse, however, fails to yield the desired interpretation. Where in the Bible is the giving of light of any kind—spiritual, physical, or otherwise—equivalent to the

¹⁹Romans 2:14-15

²⁰Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 246-247.

²¹Ibid.

²²English Standard Version

²³John Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation” (sermon, 1771) [on-line]; accessed 28 October 2005; available from <http://www.ccel.org/cCEL/wesley/sermons.htm#vi.xxi-10.2>; Internet.

giving of an ability to do something? Wesleyans equate Jesus' enlightening to Jesus' giving prevenient grace on the basis of His shed blood. This is egregious eisegesis.

“Light” is a common metaphor throughout the Gospel of John. Meanings of the verb “φωτίζω” in the New Testament include: 1) to function as a source of light, *to shine* 2) to make matters known in reference to the inner life or transcendent matters and thus enlighten and 3) to cause to be illumined, *give light to, light (up), illuminate*.²⁴ The first meaning pertains to physically illuminating something, which obviously is not John’s intention. And John 1:10c precludes the interpretation that all persons have a knowledge of God because of Jesus coming into the world since John clearly states “the world did not know Him.” Inner illumination unto a knowledge of God is not taught here for Scripture plainly teaches elsewhere that all men, even before Jesus came into the world as a light, know Yahweh. Therefore, definition number two is excluded. How then does Jesus enlighten every man? The word “light” is used at least twenty-three times during the first twelve chapters of John. After chapter one the next usage is found on the lips of Jesus in chapter three.²⁵ Its presence here greatly helps us in arriving at the correct interpretation of 1:9. As Jesus shines on sinners, those who receive Him (v. 12) show they are of the fold.²⁶ As the light, Jesus “exposes and reveals the moral and spiritual state of one’s heart,”²⁷ hence the placement of verse eleven where we learn that some sinners did not receive Him.

²⁴Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “φωτίζω.”

²⁵“And the judgment [of God] is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants” (John 3:19-21, NLT).

²⁶See John 10:14-16, 26-27.

Jesus “shines on every man, and divides the race into two groups.²⁸ Those who hate the light respond as the world does (1:10); they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19-21). But some receive this revelation (1:12-13), and thereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21).”²⁹ What is the biblical reason that sinners will not, yea cannot, come to Jesus? Scripture is clear. They are not one of Christ’s sheep.³⁰ The hearts of the goats are not resting in neutral, able to accept or reject Jesus. No, they are actively hardened by God Himself.³¹

Wesleyans also appeal to John 12:32 as a prooftext for their doctrine of prevenient grace. “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw [ἐλκύσω] all men to Myself.”³² They believe this verse teaches that Jesus draws every single person to Himself. And because Jesus died for every single person (they maintain), all persons are enabled to accept or reject this drawing. The first belief at least *seems* to be correct. How can we be sure? Where else in his Gospel does John talk about God drawing sinners? Employing the analogy of faith in order to rightly exegete God’s word, we turn to John 6, specifically verse 44. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws [ἐλκύσῃ] him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”³³ All evangelical Christians believe that God must draw a sinner in order for that sinner to come to

²⁷Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” 376.

²⁸See John 8:12; 9:39-41.

²⁹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 124. Slightly modified.

³⁰See John 10:26-27.

³¹See John 12:39-40.

³²NASV

³³NASV

Jesus. Wesleyans, however, believe that God's drawing in John's Gospel may be forever resisted. But what does Jesus also say in John 6 that demonstrates the power and efficiency of God's drawing in verse 44 and 12:32? "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."³⁴ John 6:37 and 44 alone combine to form an insurmountable proof for the effectual grace (versus prevenient grace alone) of God. New Testament scholar Don Carson says, "The combination of v. 37a and v. 44 prove that this 'drawing' activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call 'preventive grace' dispensed to every individual, for this 'drawing' is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless."³⁵ Verse 39 further emphasizes the certainty of salvation for those drawn by the Father. Of all the sinners that the Father "has given"³⁶ to the Son, Jesus will lose none.³⁷ John 12:32, therefore, cannot mean that Jesus will draw every person to Himself when He is crucified, since every person throughout history has not come to Jesus. The context of John 12:32 also warrants interpreting "all men" to mean all men without *distinction*. Who, or better yet, which group of people precipitated Jesus' pericope about death and the fruit of it? Greeks!³⁸ "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it

³⁴John 6:37, NASV

³⁵Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 293.

³⁶John's use of the perfect tense of δίδωμι should not be overlooked. "The perfect [tense] is used less frequently than the present, aorist, future, or imperfect; when it is used, there is usually a deliberate choice on the part of the writer." Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 246. Jesus did not say, "Of all that He is giving me, I lose nothing." The Father was not in time giving to the Son those who chose to receive Him. No, the Father's act of giving to the Son was a completed past action with results existing in the time of the speaker (Jesus), exemplifying the normal definition of a perfect tense Greek verb.

³⁷John 6:39

³⁸John 12:20

dies, it bears much fruit.”³⁹ Likewise, unless Jesus died (“be lifted up”), much fruit—“men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”⁴⁰—would not have been produced. Jesus did not disregard the request of the Greeks to see Him. Instead, He explained to them the only way which they could truly “see Jesus”⁴¹ and come to know Him. “The point Jesus makes is that the only way Gentiles will come to him is through his death.”⁴²

Appealing to the entry for “*έλκω*” in a theological dictionary of the New Testament to argue that “The Greek verb *helkuo* does not mean that God irresistibly drags the elect into faith”⁴³ only proves the semantic naiveté of an interpreter. Local context and authorial usage *always* determine the specific meaning of a word. This is a basic linguistic rule of all languages.

Does Titus 2:11 teach prevenient grace? “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”⁴⁴ To what specifically does the “grace of God” refer? To whom has it appeared? What is the effect of it having appeared? Though some Arminians appeal to this verse, it and verse 12 prove too little for them. The “grace of God” in this context instructs *only* Paul and Titus⁴⁵—the “us” of verse 12. The passage also proves too much. The “us” whom the “grace of God” instructs, are taught to live “godly in the present age.” Surely, no Wesleyan believes that prevenient grace, about which this verse purportedly speaks, teaches or enables lost

³⁹John 12:24

⁴⁰Revelation 5:9, NASV

⁴¹John 12:21

⁴²Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” 378.

⁴³Steve Witzki, “A Preliminary Defense of Prevenient Grace,” [on-line]; accessed 27 October 2005; available from <http://www.fwponline.cc/v18n2witzki.html>; Internet.

⁴⁴NASV

⁴⁵See verses 1 and 4.

sinners to live godly!⁴⁶ How could they when many commandments given by Jesus and His apostles are *only* revealed in the Bible?⁴⁷ Every person without exception, to whom prevenient grace supposedly goes, has not even known to repent of his sins and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, two essential fruits of conversion and godliness. The application or effectiveness of this grace which has appeared is restricted to believers. “The usage of *charis* [χάρις] in both secular and Jewish Greek” led to “its frequent NT [New Testament] meaning of ‘a tangible power at work in the *believer* [emphasis mine].’”⁴⁸

Some Wesleyans refer to Titus 2:11 so haphazardly that they misquote it in an attempt to support their interpretation. “While it is God's will that all men be saved (1 Tim 2:4), the grace which appears to all is resistible.”⁴⁹ Where does the verse say God's grace appears to all? And does this grace which brings salvation to all people bring it to all persons without exception or without distinction? Paul's usage of πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις suggests the latter meaning. “No adjective more frequently qualifies *anthrōpoi* in the PE [pastoral epistles] than *pantes*, ‘all’ (3:2; 1 Tim 2:1, 4; 4:10), which signals the importance that the PE attach to the universality of the offer of salvation.”⁵⁰ The various types or groups of persons which Paul mentions in the previous and following contexts lend support for this latter meaning of the two options presented: older men (v. 2), older women (v. 3), young women (v. 4), young men (v. 6),

⁴⁶Wesleyans would probably say the ability to live godly and the ability to act on spiritual proclivities are different, thus avoiding my criticism. Even so, I have still shown they cannot cite Titus 2:11 as a prooftext.

⁴⁷E.g., repent and believe the gospel which Wesleyans call “terms of salvation,” worship God with other believers, observe communion, be baptized, evangelize

⁴⁸Jerome D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus. The Anchor Bible*, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 35 (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 151.

⁴⁹Witzki, “A Preliminary Defense of Prevenient Grace,” Internet.

bondslaves (v. 9), masters (v. 9), rulers (3:1), and authorities (3:1). And “all” in the Bible frequently refers to less than every particular of a set, class, or group.⁵¹

In conclusion, “Titus 2:11 says that God’s grace has been manifested through Christ’s work on the cross, but it does not say that God has thereby supplied the ability to believe to all people.”⁵² The Wesleyan interpretations of the passages above cannot be harmonized with a myriad of other biblical passages with which they contradict. Presupposing God is consistent, we must therefore eschew the Arminian views.

The following syllogism captures the essence of the reasoning which underlies one of the most popular Wesleyan-Arminian arguments for preventient grace.

Premise one: God may only give commands to people if they are able to obey them.

Premise two: God has given commands to people.

Conclusion: People have the ability to obey God’s commands, including the ability to repent and believe.

The major premise above does not comport with the Bible. “It [the Wesleyan understanding of preventient grace] is a philosophical imposition of a certain world view upon the Scriptures. This world view is attractive because it neatly solves, to some extent, issues such as the problem of evil and why human beings are held responsible for sin.⁵³ But the Scriptures do not yield such

⁵⁰Quinn, *The Letter to Titus*, 151.

⁵¹Matthew 10:22, Mark 1:5, John 8:2, 14:17, Acts 2:17, 22:15, 26:4

⁵²Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Preventient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” 377.

⁵³Wesleyans believe the freedom of the will “is as much the effect of grace [“preliminary grace”] as it is a *necessity* of his moral nature [emphasis mine].” Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 355. God’s command that all sinners everywhere repent and believe the gospel, according to Arminians, requires that all sinners be morally (not just physically) able to fulfill the command. “The subjects of a probationary economy must have the power necessary to the fulfillment of its requirements. There can be no probation without such power.” Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 247. The Arminians’ unfounded presuppositions exclude the possibility of a sinner fulfilling the requirements of God any other way (e.g., by having the active obedience of Jesus Christ’s perfect life imputed to their account as Paul clearly wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21).

neat solutions.”⁵⁴ Wesleyans posit the doctrine of prevenient grace in order to uphold their idea of the justice of God. They unwittingly make God subordinate to an unscriptural concept of justice, thereby deifying themselves—the source of the erroneous standard. We again see autonomy at work—“*I will* determine what is and is not just. God Himself as He is revealed in the Bible is not the standard. *I will* determine the standard.” “The assumption that God may judicially harden men and women frequently surfaces in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 9:18; 2 Thes. 2:11).”⁵⁵ Wesleyans ought to realize this hardening is never “presented as the capricious manipulation of an arbitrary potentate cursing morally neutral [the state of sinners to which prevenient grace supposedly restores them] . . . beings, but as a holy condemnation of a guilty people [John 3:36 and Rom 3:23] who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen [John 5:40].”⁵⁶

It appears a want to make God fair and non-discriminatory spawned the anti-biblical doctrine of prevenient grace. Sinners cannot stomach the thought of a God who differentiates according to His will alone, apart from any external influence. The root cause of man’s creation of prevenient grace seems to be his autonomy. Like Eve in the Garden of Eden, man will be a law to himself; nothing will be over him or control him. Sinners exclaim, “I will be the master of my destiny. I will be the final authority.” Let us recall Isaiah’s words—“How you [Lucifer] have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, ‘*I will* ascend to heaven; *I will* raise my throne above the stars of God, and *I will* sit on the mount of assembly in the

⁵⁴Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” 381.

⁵⁵Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 448.

recesses of the north. *I will* ascend above the heights of the clouds; *I will* make myself like the Most High.' Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit."⁵⁷ Note the destiny of him who confidently asserted his will.

On one point I wholeheartedly agree with Wiley. "The subject [of prevenient grace] is beset with peculiar difficulties and should be given careful study."⁵⁸ The difficulties may explain the obscure doubletalk found in Wesleyan writings. "Prevenient grace [*from the Spirit* on the basis of the atonement] provides . . . the power to choose for the good. It is for this reason that one can ascribe to man the power to make his own choice in regard to salvation."⁵⁹ Is it possible to "ascribe to man the power" to choose Jesus [a good choice] when "the power to choose for the good" really comes from the Spirit? No. A mere four paragraphs later, Cox confuses "cause" and "means" in salvation. "Though grace is not the cause of his [an unbeliever moving towards justification] right reaction, it certainly is the means by which he reacts to God and yields to further grace. When final salvation⁶⁰ is obtained, a person may look back and say, 'It is grace that has brought me home.'"⁶¹ By paraphrasing a clause from the hymn *Amazing Grace* to illustrate his theology, Cox commits the fallacy of equivocation. First he defines grace as the *means* by which a sinner does or becomes something. Then he equates grace to the *cause* of something happening, i.e., salvation. To fit Wesleyan theology, John Newton would have had

⁵⁶Ibid., 448-449.

⁵⁷Isaiah 14:12-15, NASV, emphasis mine

⁵⁸ Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 346.

⁵⁹Leo G. Cox, "Prevenient Grace—A Wesleyan View," *JETS* 12 (1969): 147.

⁶⁰Is there such a thing as *partial* salvation? Similar expressions are frequent in Wesleyan works. I cannot help but think of infused grace and progressive justification as taught by Romanists when I read them.

to have written, “It is through the means of grace that I have brought myself home.” Man in the exercise of his will, therefore, is the cause of his salvation, according to Arminians. According to the Bible, however, God alone is the cause of salvation.⁶² Orthodox Christianity has always taught that faith in Jesus Christ is the *means* of salvation, not the *cause*. “For by grace you have been saved *through* faith [*διὰ πίστεως*, emphasis mine]; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God” (Eph 2:8-9, NASV). “Therefore, having been justified *by* faith [*ἐκ πίστεως*, emphasis mine], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1, NASV).⁶³ Christians are justified *by* faith, not *because of* faith.⁶⁴ This is not theological hair-splitting.

The apostle Paul once asked the Corinthians, “For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”⁶⁵ The sinner, *not God*, makes the Christian differ from the non-Christian in the Arminian scheme of salvation. Thus the sinner, not God, gets part of the glory for salvation. If prevenient, enabling grace is given to every person, how can salvation be “apart from works” if a sinner must *do* something (i.e., believe) in order to go to heaven? All Arminians strongly believe

⁶¹Cox, “Prevenient Grace,” 148.

⁶²1 Peter 1:3, John 3:8, Romans 9:16, John 1:12-13

⁶³The preposition “*διὰ*” and its genitive object is never translated as “because of X.” See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 369, 433-35. *Ek* may mean “because of.” See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 371. But I found *no* justification-related passages where *ek* is translated causally. Rather, “by,” indicating means, always translates the preposition.

⁶⁴“God gives us the ability to respond to his offer of grace. With respect to conversion, we may say, ‘Without God we cannot, without us [*“appropriately responding to the work of prevenient grace”*] God will not.’” Kinghorn, *The Gospel of Grace*, 72. How then is salvation wholly of the Lord? The Bible teaches that both saving faith and repentance—the elements of biblical conversion—are *gifts* from God (Eph 2:8-9, 2 Tim 2:24-25, Phil 1:29, 2 Peter 1:1, Acts 5:31, 11:18), not wages tendered after an “appropriate response.”

⁶⁵1 Corinthians 4:7, NASV

the sinner “is ultimately the determining factor in the decision of his or her justification. Faith is offered as God’s free gift, but the sinner must then actively respond to that offer and reach out with the arms of true repentance to receive the gift.”⁶⁶

“We maintain, that although ‘without Christ we can do nothing,’ yet so long as the ‘day of salvation’ lasts, all men, the chief of sinners not excepted, can, through his free preventing [or prevenient] grace, ‘cease to do evil and learn to do well,’ and use those means which will infallibly end in the repentance and faith peculiar to the dispensation which they are under.”⁶⁷ I struggle to see how this belief is anything less than works-based righteousness, which Paul categorically calls “a different gospel.”⁶⁸ Wesleyans are guilty of going “beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6) to the detriment of God’s grace and the exaltation of man.

Stanley Ayling considers John Wesley to be “the single most influential Protestant leader of the English-speaking world since the Reformation.”⁶⁹ I agree, for his theology caters to the carnality of man, namely, his power-hungry lust to be the captain and determiner of his own salvation, thereby usurping the God-man’s sacred role.⁷⁰ Wesley and his devotees have indeed influenced much of the world, *wrongly* influenced.

⁶⁶Robert V. Rakestraw, “John Wesley as a Theologian of Grace,” *JETS* 27 (1984): 199.

⁶⁷John Fletcher in Miley *Systematic Theology*, 245.

⁶⁸Galatians 1:6, NASV

⁶⁹Stanley Ayling, *John Wesley* (Cleveland: W. Collins, 1979), 318.

⁷⁰See Hebrews 2:10.