

# **PREVENIENT GRACE UNVEILED: THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE ON FREE WILL AND DIVINE GRACE**

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## **DYNAMICS**

In Wesleyan theology, prevenient grace occupies a fundamental position as the divine initiative that extends grace to humanity before any acceptance or conscious decision regarding salvation. This concept, deeply rooted in the writings of John Wesley, encapsulates the belief that God's grace is not limited to the moments of conversion. Nevertheless, it pervades the totality of human existence, acting as a preparatory force that permeates the lives of all individuals. Prevented grace is understood as the grace that comes before human action, effectively inviting each person to respond to God's call towards redemption. The harmonious coexistence of free human will and divine grace holds considerable significance, stating that although humans can choose or reject God, God's previous grace allows, empowers, and even causes such choices (Warner, 2024).

Through his universally appealing framework, inherent grace represents the strong soteriological perspective of Wesley, wherein God, in His love, empowers individuals to acknowledge their need for salvation. This grace does not coerce or predetermine the results; rather, it creates a space for human agency, postulating that although humans are inherently fallen and unable to reach God on their own, they can exercise faith through the work of the Holy Spirit's empowerment. This Prevenient grace, as extensively discussed by J. Alexander Rutherford (2020), is the divine initiative that restores humanity's ability to choose God, ensuring that salvation remains a genuine possibility for all, irrespective of prior moral or spiritual condition." Therefore, prevented grace can be seen as a necessary theological response to the problem of sin, positioning humanity not only as passive receptors but also as active participants in the salvific process (Snyder, 2018).

## **FOUNDATIONS OF PREVENTING GRACE**

The foundations of preventing grace can be traced through several biblical passages that illustrate God's persistent invitation to humanity, emphasizing divine love, mercy, and the universal availability of grace. For example, passages such as Romans 1:20, which speaks of God's invisible qualities that are perceived through creation, and 2 Peter 3:9, which affirms God's desire that everyone comes to repentance, support the notion that God will not perish only to the wishes that everyone can accept the offer of salvation. This is aligned with the Wesleyan interpretations that defend the inherent dignity and potential of humanity, since all are made in the image of God and receive an initial movement of grace that precedes their conscious efforts to commit to the divine.

In contemporary discussions about free will and grace, the implications of prevented grace remain deeply relevant, especially in debates surrounding determinism and the nature of human

choice. Wesleyan thought challenges deterministic perspectives by affirming the need for freedom to accept grace, which underlines the relational dynamics between the divine initiative and the human response. The text encourages deeper engagement among modern theologians and philosophers who explore the complexities of human agency in the context of divine sovereignty. It sets the stage for discussions that not only shape doctrinal beliefs but also have profound effects on community involvement, evangelistic efforts, and personal spiritual growth. Thus, Wesleyan preventive grace not only articulates an integral understanding of grace within the Christian faith but also provides a robust theological lens through which to navigate the intersection of freedom, choice, and divine influence in the lives of today's believers. The theological implications of Wesleyan preventive grace are profound, particularly in their commitment to the notions of free will and human responsibility.

The center of understanding the grace of John Wesley is at the heart of grace, that considerate grace serves as a divine initiative, allowing humans to respond to the call of God. Unlike deterministic opinions that refuse human agency, Wesley claimed that considerate grace operates in a way that maintains moral agency while allowing for divine involvement. This grace is not coercive; rather, it respects and empowers the free will of individuals to accept or reject God's invitation to salvation. Wood (2022) articulates that Wesleyan theology contrasts with Pelagianism, which postulates that humans can reach salvation only through their efforts without divine assistance. Wesley delimits that, although human cooperation is necessary, such cooperation is made possible only by the previous grace of God, which embeds and corrects the human condition tainted by sin.

## **ON THOUGHTS OF PELAGIANISM AND THE SCRIPTURE**

While Pelagianism emphasizes human initiative to an excessive degree, Wesley affirms the primacy of God in the salvific process, arguing that grace is the gracious action of God preceding the human response. In contrast, determinism completely rejects human freedom, suggesting that all actions, including those relating to faith, are predetermined by God. For Wesley, such a vision is incompatible with the biblical story, which presents God as desiring a real relationship with humanity, which requires a human choice. Houston (2019) claims that Wesley's considerate grace affirms the relational aspect of salvation: God wishes to save everyone, establishing a framework in which each person has the capacity for faith and the opportunity to respond to the love of God.

This conception of grace reveals the depth of God's inherent love for all humanity and His desire for each person to participate in His saving grace. As Fellows (2019) notes, considerate grace reflects the character of a loving father who actively seeks his children, wishing for their redemption without compromising their freedom. The non-deserved nature of this grace is not only indicative of the benevolence of God, but also underlines a deep theological commitment to human dignity. Wesley's emphasis on grace as a fundamental aspect of human engagement with God affirms that individuals are not simple puppets in a divine drama; rather, they are active participants in an alliance relationship.

In addition, the theological implications of considerate grace extend to contemporary discussions surrounding free will and divine grace in the Christian faith. In a society often divided between restrictive notions of predestination and the release of the constraints of sin through pure will, prevenient grace sails through these tensions by affirming common ground. He recognizes the real possibility of a human choice while firmly placing it in the context of the grace of God. Such discussions prompt modern readers to reflect on the balance between divine sovereignty and human autonomy and explore how the paradigm of preventing grace can enrich contemporary Christian thought and practice.

Essentially, the theological implications of Wesleyanism resonate with the commitment to a loving God who invites rather than coerces, releasing humanity to respond authentically to the call of salvation. The scriptural foundation of Wesleyan grace is deeply rooted in several key biblical passages that highlight the nature of God's grace and its availability to all humanity. Romans 5:18 (NIV) is at the heart of this understanding, which instructs, "Therefore, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people." This verse summarizes the universality of sin and the encompassing scope of Christ's redemptive act, suggesting that grace is not limited to the privileged but is offered to everyone. Wesleyan theology interprets this passage as a fundamental declaration of God's initiative in matters of salvation, by which preventing grace serves as a divine reagent that attracts all individuals towards repentance and faith, thus preparing their hearts for the transformative power of salvation.

Other scriptural references conceptualize grace more clearly. For example, John 1:9 declares, "The real light that gives light to everyone came to the world." This recognition of Christ as the "true light" is a critical aspect of forgiveness, by which God illuminates the human heart, making it aware of its need for salvation, regardless of its initial arrangement. This idea aligns with the Wesleyan belief that God's grace precedes human action, ensuring that individuals have the opportunity and ability to respond to divine calls. In addition, 2 Peter 3:9 reinforces this notion by affirming that God "is patient with you, wanting that no one perishes, but everyone to come to repentance." This verse not only emphasizes the universal scope of the desire for divine redemption, but also highlights the role of prevenient grace in awakening the human mind to respond to this call.

Ephesians 2:8-9 also provides an essential overview of the saving work of grace and its nature. The passage says: "For it is by grace that you were saved, by faith - and it is not yourself, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." While this text emphasizes the necessity of faith in the experience of salvation, it implicitly acknowledges the role of preceding grace that facilitates this faith. Wesleyans interpret this as an affirmation of the anticipatory aspect of grace, which opens the door to the salvific act of God. He identifies that even the faith necessary for salvation is itself initiated by grace, reinforcing the understanding that human effort cannot claim credit for the gift of salvation. This affirms the basis of the doctrine according to which grace is accessible to everyone, serving as a testimony to the inclusive nature of God in the salvific plane.

## **GOD'S INITIATIVES**

The biblical story constantly highlights God's initiative and humanity's persistent awareness, thus emphasizing the theological implications of preventing grace. He establishes a framework in which divine grace precedes not only human action but also actively works in the life of each person, signaling a God deeply engaged in the process of redemption. These scriptural references provide a hearty basis for the Wesleyan understanding of Personal Pardon, illustrating that the divine initiative is fundamental to the Christian experience of salvation and underlining the relational dynamic between divine grace and human free will.

The contemporary relevance of Wesleyan grace in theological discourse is underlined by his involvement with critical themes such as free will, human agency, and divine grace. Central to this discourse is the recognition of prevented grace as the divine action that precedes human decision-making, encouraging an optimistic view of humanity's potential to respond to God. This optimism inherently affects the modern understanding of free will, as it assumes that although human agents can choose, their choices are informed and allowed by the preventive grace of God. In contrast to the deterministic interpretations of grace that suggest unilateral divine action, Wesleyan theology offers a more relational perspective, emphasizing that God's initiative does not obliterate human agency (Ham, 2020).

## **THE ECUMENICAL DIALOGUES**

Recent ecumenical dialogues have attracted the Wesleyan concept of grace, which is said to promote greater understanding among various Christian traditions. Graceful initiative is seen as a unifying wire that can divide those who emphasize divine sovereignty from those who focus on human responsibility. For example, in discussions on missionary theology, the recognition of preventive grace allows several denominations to be more constructively involved in dissemination efforts, highlighting a God who seeks and allows a proactive human response. This understanding aligns well with contemporary ecclesiology, which emphasizes the Church's role in evangelism and the call to be instruments of God's grace in the world (Barlow Jr, 2019). As churches deal with the complexities of modern life and the various worldviews that influence their communities, the Wesleyan vision offers a lens through which they can affirm human dignity and agency while simultaneously proclaiming the importance of divine assistance.

In addition to its implications for free will and ecclesial reach, Wesleyan grace reflects Wesley's optimistic view and significantly informs contemporary spiritual practices. By recognizing the availability of preventive grace, believers are encouraged to cultivate practices that promote openness to divine influence, such as prayer, meditation, and contemplative reading of Scripture. Such practices not only facilitate individual transformation but also encourage community engagement and responsibility in the faith community. In this context, the concept of preventing grace invites Christians to understand conversion not only as a unique event but as a process that is continually nourished by the grace of God working in the lives of believers (Knight, 2018). In response to grace, this aligns perfectly with the contemporary emphasis on spiritual formation, highlighting the need for active participation in the journey of faith while remaining grounded in divine assistance.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF PREVENTIVE GRACE**

The implications of the preventive grace of Wesleyan echo in contemporary discussions of justice systems and social responsibility. Understanding that all individuals are recipients of God's grace can inform social justice approaches that emphasize restorative practices over punitive measures, recognizing the inherent value and potential for transformation in all people (Ryu, 2021). As modern Christians sail through the challenges represented by systemic injustices, the recognition of universally available grace promotes solidarity and empathy in the pursuit of equity.

Consequently, the doctrine of preventive grace remains not only a theological position but also an essential structure for action and transformation in contemporary Christian landscapes. Understanding Wesleyan preventive grace in the broader Christian context is crucial to understanding the intricate relationship between divine grace and human agency. This concept, firmly rooted in the theological structure established by John Wesley, emphasizes the need for divine intervention in the human condition, illustrating how grace operates before human action. Wesleyan preventing grace suggests that God's grace is universally granted, opening the possibility of a relationship with Him before individuals consciously respond. As a theological premise, it alters the portraits of human free will, inviting a differentiated perspective that avoids deterministic structures and maintains a robust understanding of divine sovereignty.

## **CONCLUSION**

Wesleyan thought affirms that Titus 2:11, which states, "For the grace of God appeared that offers salvation to all people," is an inclusive reach of divine grace. Likewise, biblical narratives show God's persistent pursuit of humanity, as evidenced in texts such as John 1:9, where Jesus is characterized as "the true light that gives light to all." These verses highlight the notion of grace as universally attainable, illustrating that while individuals grapple with their inherent sinfulness, they are simultaneously engaged with grace that endeavors to support their transformation.

In contemporary discussions on free will, Wesleyan preventive grace plays an essential role in stating that humans are not entirely passive in their spiritual journey, nor are they merely puppets under divine control. This understanding postulates that although grace arouses the human spirit, individuals must still exercise their freedom to accept or reject this divine gift. The implications of this are vast, particularly in the ethical discourse surrounding morality, responsibility, and narratives of salvation. This reinforces the belief that humans are active participants in their redemption, a notion that releases theological discussions of the perceived restrictions of fatalism or absolute predestination. Scholars such as Collins (2017) and Cho (2022) have highlighted how this understanding of grace encourages believers to actively engage in their journeys of faith, resulting in a dynamic and interactive relationship with God.

Moreover, the relevance of Wesleyan grace in contemporary discussions extends to debates around grace in postmodern contexts, where the complexities of human choice and ethical living are examined amidst cultural relativism. Individuals dealing with identity crises and existential questions may find hope in the notion that grace is not restricted or conditional but is a continuous influence available to all, encouraging a continuous search for meaning within the

structure of Christian beliefs. Smith (2023) articulates that this grace not only serves as a catalyst for individual transformation but also promotes community involvement, leading Christians to extend grace to others in a society frequently characterized by division and conflict.

Wesleyan preventing grace contributes substantially to the ongoing dialogue on free will, divine grace, and ethical behavior in the Christian faith. Its theological implications emphasize the active role of grace in the lives of believers, while the foundations of Scripture underlie their principles in the biblical text, allowing modern believers to address millennial issues of agency and divine involvement. Continuous research on Wesleyan theology is vital to facing the spiritual and ethical challenges of contemporary society, as it emphasizes the relationship between God and humanity and promotes a structure in which grace is a personal and communal experience.

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