

## Grace of God

### Bible Glossary, People & Places

#### John Wesley

##### Sermon Reference

John Wesley is the central figure discussed throughout the sermon. The message highlights his discovery of the grace of God, his ministry, his extensive travels and preaching efforts, his encounters with the Moravians, his challenges in colonial Georgia, his famous Aldersgate experience, and his theological synthesis of grace, free will, and Christian perfection.

##### Background Context

John Wesley (1703–1791) was an Anglican minister and theologian who became the chief founder of the Methodist movement, a revival within the Church of England that emphasized personal holiness, social justice, and evangelical fervor. His upbringing and education, beginning at Charterhouse School and later at Oxford University, positioned him within the intellectual and religious currents of 18th-century England. Wesley's early life occurred during a time of great social inequity and widespread moral challenges in England, as noted by the rapid urbanization and stark gap between the wealthy and poor, along with pervasive problems such as drunkenness and prostitution in London. These conditions deeply troubled Wesley and shaped his commitment to spiritual renewal and practical Christian living.

Wesley's ministry was marked by extraordinary dedication and innovation. Unwilling to accept the spiritual lethargy of his day, he traveled relentlessly — over 250,000 miles on horseback and on foot — and preached more than 40,000 sermons. His prolific output also included editing hundreds of publications, aiming to spread revival and Christian teaching.

Wesley's journey to the American colonies in 1736 to Georgia was a formative period. There, he encountered difficulties, both cultural and personal, as he sought to evangelize Native Americans and colonists, yet faced rejection and misunderstanding. His return from America marked a profound turning point energized by his encounter with the Moravians and the experience on Aldersgate Street, which gave him a personal assurance of salvation. This experience catalyzed his joyful and vibrant preaching of grace, which starkly contrasted with the legalistic morality he had previously espoused.

Theologically, Wesley systematized his understanding of grace in a way that bridged divergent views of divine sovereignty and human free will. He affirmed that salvation and sanctification come solely by the unmerited favor of God, but people retain the genuine ability to accept or reject this grace. This balanced approach addressed burning theological controversies of his era related to Calvinism and Arminianism, offering a dynamic model of salvation as a transformative and ongoing process. Wesley distinguished several stages or types of grace—prevenient, convincing, justifying, sanctifying, and perfecting grace—that believers experience as they grow in faith and holiness. His teachings on Christian perfection, emphasizing living in perfect love and holiness, remain influential and distinctive to Methodist spirituality.

John Wesley's legacy extends far beyond his lifetime. His leadership helped spark the first Great Awakening in both England and America and laid the foundational structures for the global Methodist movement, which today claims tens of millions of adherents worldwide. His emphasis on social justice, disciplined Christian living, communal accountability, and evangelism continues to inspire many Christians and church traditions. Wesley's life and ministry demonstrate how committed faith can bring about both spiritual revival and social transformation, marking him as one of the most significant religious figures in Christian history.

#### Importance in the Bible

Although John Wesley is not a biblical figure, his teachings and ministry are rooted deeply in biblical truths, particularly the doctrines of grace and salvation as found in the New Testament. He took scriptural passages—like Ephesians 2:8-9 on salvation by grace through faith, Romans 11:6 on grace not being based on works, and Philippians 2:12-13 on God working in believers to will and act according to His purpose—and applied them systematically to Christian life and doctrine. Wesley's interpretive framework highlighted the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification, encouraging believers in practical holiness as outlined in the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and the apostles. His synthesis helped bridge theological divides and fostered a revival that adhered closely to biblical principles of salvation, grace, and love, fostering the spiritual renewal of the church worldwide.

## Moravians

#### Sermon Reference

The Moravians are mentioned in the sermon as the missionary group traveling with John Wesley to the American colonies in 1736. Their remarkable calm and assurance during a perilous storm deeply influenced Wesley, planting in him a desire for the assurance of salvation and a deeper experience of grace.

#### Background Context

The Moravians, or the *Unitas Fratrum*, trace their origins back to the 15th century Bohemian Reformation, predating the Protestant Reformation led by Martin Luther. They emerged as a group committed to a practical and heart-felt Christianity amidst persecution and hardship. By the 18th century, the Moravians had become a vibrant

mission-sending community centered in Herrnhut, Saxony (modern Germany), known for their deep piety, communal life, and a continuous 24/7 prayer watch that lasted over a century. This unceasing prayer vigil was a remarkable spiritual discipline and a testament to their commitment to spreading the gospel and the kingdom of God globally.

Moravian missionaries were some of the most dedicated and effective of their time, going to remote and challenging regions worldwide with a passion for evangelism and discipleship. Their humility, peace, and joyful faith, exemplified in their conduct during the storm with Wesley, reflected a deep certainty of God's saving grace and providence. This assurance was not rooted in personal merit but in a heartfelt trust in God's promises and Christ's atoning work. Their faith practices emphasized living by the Spirit and maintaining constant communion with God, influencing many, including Wesley.

The Moravians' influence on John Wesley was profound. While he initially approached his mission journey with a moralistic zeal, the calm and unshaken faith of the Moravian believers during the tempest challenged him to reconsider the nature of true faith. Their assurance of salvation and joy amidst trials became a catalyst for Wesley's theological shift from legalism to grace-centered faith. Their example helped usher in Wesley's personal awakening on Aldersgate Street, marking a turning point in his ministry and in the evangelical revival movement.

Historically, the Moravians presaged many modern missionary practices and revivalist methods. Their emphasis on small group accountability, heartfelt worship, and intercessory prayer shaped revival movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. Through their example and cooperation, they contributed to the spread of Protestant Christianity in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Their dedication serves as a model of missional life fueled by grace and love, embodying a lived theology that touched the heart of John Wesley and others.

#### Importance in the Bible

While not biblical characters, the Moravians helped practically demonstrate and embody the biblical principles of faith, assurance, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. Their 24/7 prayer and missionary zeal illustrate the biblical command to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Their courage in the face of physical danger and inner peace reflects the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23. By influencing Wesley, they indirectly impacted the spread of the gospel worldwide, highlighting how church history is deeply intertwined with biblical truth lived out through believers.

## Georgia (Colony)

#### Sermon Reference

Georgia is the American colony where John Wesley was sent as a missionary in 1736. The sermon notes that Wesley admired the capital city, Savannah's grid layout and the

colony's emphasis on religious tolerance and a haven for debtors, although Wesley faced significant challenges during his mission there.

### Background Context

Founded in 1733, Georgia was the last of the thirteen original American colonies established primarily as a buffer between Spanish Florida and the British colonies to the north, including South Carolina. Founded under the leadership of James Oglethorpe and a charter emphasizing religious tolerance and humanitarian ideals, such as providing relief for debtors—the 'worthy poor'—the colony aspired to be a model Christian and civil society. Its capital, Savannah, was designed with an innovative grid layout that facilitated organized settlement and defense. These ideals resonated with Wesley's own values on tolerance and social justice, influencing his attraction to the mission.

Despite these high ideals, colonial Georgia was a frontier society facing numerous hardships, such as harsh living conditions, conflicts with Spanish forces and Native American tribes, disease, and economic instability. These difficulties limited missionary opportunities. Wesley found himself constrained, unable to pioneer the large-scale revival he had imagined among Native Americans or even the settlers, hindered by scarce clergy, logistical challenges, and his own rigid application of church discipline.

Wesley's experiences in Georgia contributed significantly to his later theological and pastoral developments. The tensions between his moralistic approach and the realities of grace and assurance shaped his understanding of Christian faith's relational nature. The failure and frustrations he encountered led to personal disappointment but also planted seeds for renewal after his return to England. The colonial setting thus served as a crucible for his spiritual growth and the development of his transformative theology on grace and sanctification.

Historically, Georgia's establishment reflects Enlightenment-inspired ideals of liberty and social reform meshed with Christian mission. While Wesley's mission had limited success there, the colony itself evolved to become a significant part of the emerging American society, contributing cultural, economic, and religious influences. The early missionary efforts in Georgia, including those by Wesley, highlight the intersection of evangelical zeal with colonial expansion and indigenous relations during the 18th century.

## Charterhouse School

### Sermon Reference

Charterhouse School is referred to as the place where John Wesley received part of his early education. It is described as a place where he learned Latin, mathematics, and endured a hard childhood, setting the stage for his future academic and spiritual pursuits.

### Background Context

Charterhouse School, founded in 1611 in London, is one of England's historic public schools (an elite boarding school), noted for its rigorous academic standards and formation of many influential figures in British history. Originally established to provide

education for the poor and orphaned boys, the school evolved into an institution that prepared young men for further education and leadership roles. Wesley's attendance at such a school reflects both his family's commitment to education and the formative influence such institutions had in shaping intellectual and moral character during the early 18th century.

For John Wesley, his time at Charterhouse nurtured foundational skills like Latin and math, essential for his later studies at Oxford and his eventual theological work. The school's strict and disciplined environment would have instilled habits of study, resilience, and moral seriousness that mirrored the Pietistic ideals he later embraced. His education there took place in an era when classical languages and rigorous academics were seen as necessary for ministry and scholarly pursuits in the Church of England.

The broader historical context of such schools connects to the Anglican establishment and the preparation of clergy who expected to uphold religious and cultural norms in a society marked by increasing social complexity and inequality. The discipline and knowledge Wesley received at Charterhouse (and Oxford subsequently) were critical in equipping him for his vast itinerant preaching ministry and theological writings that influenced the religious landscape profoundly. Charterhouse also stands as a symbol of the tension between elite education and the pressing social needs of the time. Wesley's later ministry sought to transcend class divides through evangelical outreach to the poor and marginalized, indicating how his education was redirected toward a more inclusive and socially responsive faith expression.

## Aldersgate Street Meeting

### Sermon Reference

Aldersgate Street is the location in London where John Wesley experienced a pivotal spiritual awakening, known famously as his heart being 'strangely warmed.' This event followed his engagement with Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans and gave him profound assurance of his salvation by grace.

### Background Context

The Aldersgate Street meeting occurred on May 24, 1738, at a gathering of a small society of believers in London, organized by the Moravians and other evangelical Christians. Wesley had been struggling spiritually, uncertain about the assurance of his salvation despite his religious activity and moral efforts. During this meeting, as someone read Martin Luther's preface to Romans, Wesley recalled that his heart was 'strangely warmed' with a deep sense of assurance and trust in Christ's saving grace.

This experience marked a major turning point in Wesley's life and ministry. It shifted his understanding from a works-oriented approach to salvation to a heartfelt reliance on God's grace received by faith. Wesley described this as the moment when he knew that his sins were taken away and that Jesus had saved him from 'the law of sin and death.' The Aldersgate experience embodies the transformative and experiential aspect of

Christian conversion, emphasizing personal assurance and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

Historically, this event has become emblematic of evangelical renewal and Methodist spirituality, often called the 'Aldersgate Experience.' It symbolizes the awakening of a movement that emphasized salvation by grace, personal holiness, and active faith. Wesley's testimony from this moment fueled his preaching and writings, influencing the Great Awakening in England and beyond. Aldersgate is not only a physical location but a spiritual milestone capturing a profound biblical truth: justification by faith and assurance through grace as outlined in Romans and the gospel.

The meeting on Aldersgate is also a testimony to the importance of community and corporate worship in the Christian journey. The small group meeting, centered on Scripture reading, confession, and prayer, provided the context for Wesley's breakthrough. This scene aligns with biblical models of mutual encouragement and shared faith, as seen in the early church's gatherings (Acts 2:42-47). Aldersgate thus stands as a spiritual landmark in the church's history and Wesley's personal story of regeneration and sanctification.

#### Importance in the Bible

The Aldersgate experience reflects biblical themes central to Christian conversion and assurance—especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone as elucidated in Romans 3 and 5, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which confirms salvation and brings peace to the believer's heart (Romans 8:16). Wesley's moment of assurance echoes the Apostle Paul's transformation and the ongoing biblical emphasis that true faith involves not only intellectual assent but heartfelt trust and inner transformation. This event affirms the biblical promise that God's grace brings peace that surpasses understanding (Philippians 4:7) and that believers can know they are saved (1 John 5:13).

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