

## **The Wesleyan Quadrilateral**

This is a methodology for theological reflection that is credited to John Wesley. The term itself was coined by 20th century American Methodist scholar Albert C. Outler. This method involved scripture, tradition, experience, and reason as four different sources of theological or doctrinal development. The theological teaching of each parts are stated as follows:

### **Scripture**

Wesley insisted that scripture is the first authority and contains the only measure whereby all other truth is tested. It was delivered by authors who were divinely inspired. It is a rule sufficient of itself. It neither needs, nor is capable of, any further addition. The scripture references to justification by faith as the gateway to scriptural holiness are well known to true Wesleyans:

Romans 2:13 - *For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

Romans 3:24 - *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

Romans 3:28 - *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*

Galatians 2:16 - *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

### **Tradition**

Wesley wrote that it is generally supposed that traditional evidence is weakened by length of time, as it must necessarily pass through so many hands in a continued succession of ages. Although other evidence is perhaps stronger, he insisted: "Do not undervalue traditional evidence. Let it have its place and its due honor. It is highly serviceable in its kind, and in its degree". The Apostle Paul spoke of the importance of tradition, but with proper understanding:

2 Thessalonians 2:15 - *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*

Colossians 2:8 - *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*

Wesley states that those of strong and clear understanding should be aware of its full force. For him it supplies a link through 1,700 years of history with Jesus and the apostles. The witness to justification and sanctification is an unbroken chain drawing us into fellowship with those who have finished the race, fought the fight, and who now reign with God in his glory and might.

*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*  
Hebrews 12:1-2

### **Reason**

Although scripture is sufficient unto itself and is the foundation of true religion. Wesley wrote: "Now, of what excellent use is reason, if we would either understand ourselves, or explain to others, those living oracles." He states quite clearly that without reason we cannot understand the essential truths of Scripture. Reason, however, is not a mere human invention. It must be assisted by the Holy Spirit if we are to understand the mysteries of God. With regard to justification by faith and sanctification Wesley said that although reason cannot produce faith, when impartial reason speaks we can understand the new birth, inward holiness, and outward holiness. Although reason cannot produce faith, it can shorten the leap.

### **Experience**

Apart from scripture, experience is the strongest proof of Christianity. "What the scriptures promise, I enjoy". Again, Wesley insisted that we cannot have reasonable assurance of something unless we have experienced it personally. John Wesley was assured of both justification and sanctification because he had experienced them in his own life. What Christianity promised (considered as a doctrine) was accomplished in his soul. Furthermore, Christianity (considered as an inward principle) is the completion of all those promises. Although traditional proof is complex, experience is simple: "One thing I know; I was blind, but now I see." Although tradition establishes the evidence a long way off, experience makes it present to all persons. As for the proof of justification and sanctification Wesley states that Christianity is an experience of holiness and happiness, the image of God impressed on a created spirit, a fountain of peace and love springing up into everlasting life.