

cares a great deal for His people. In verse 7 Jesus calls God's people "His own elect," or in other words, "His chosen ones."

Notice the areas where Jesus intends us to see a parallel. This widow was helpless and had no place else to turn but this judge. God's people are just as helpless (18.7). This judge heard the pleas of this helpless widow. God hears the cries of His people (18.7). Because this unjust judge heard the cries of this widow who meant nothing to him, how much more will God hear the cries of His chosen people. This is the point of the entire parable. This parable could correctly be called a "How much more parable." The point is that if an unjust judge hears the cries of a woman he does not care about, how much more does God hear the cries of those He has chosen to be His children. That is exactly Jesus' point in verses 6–7. We need to understand that this parable does not teach why God chooses to bless His children, but that He chooses to bless His children. In other words, this parable is not teaching that God blesses His children because they pester Him night and day with the same requests. This parable is teaching that since even a wicked judge will show kindness to someone he does not care for, God, who is by His very nature good and kind, will certainly show kindness to His children who lay their requests before Him.

The Two Main Points Of The Parable Of The Unjust Judge. *During times of discouragement God's people should consistently pray (18.1).* In order to understand this parable we need to understand the context in which it was given. In 17.20–37 Jesus spoke of the coming of the Kingdom of God. In verses 26–29 Jesus states that as in the days of Noah and Lot destruction will come out of nowhere while people are eating, drinking, marrying, and enjoying life. He goes on to say in verses 30–36 that when He comes to establish His kingdom He will take many away to judgement. In 18.1 Jesus continues His conversation with His disciples. In 18.1–8 Jesus shifts from a discussion of the coming Kingdom and its horrendous judgement to the disciples and their need to be faithful as they await its coming. From Jesus words in 18:1 it is clear that the disciples were somewhat discouraged. They were tempted to "faint." So Jesus commanded them to replace fainting with prayer. In verse 1 Jesus provides for us the main purpose of the parable. The parable is designed to encourage His disciples to always pray and not faint. So Jesus is basically saying this, "Do not faint. Always pray, because you know that if a wicked judge will listen to the pleas of a person he does not care for, surely God will listen to your cries because you are His cho-

sen ones." That is how the parable fits in with Jesus' challenge in verse 1.

During times of discouragement God's people should consistently pray because God hears their prayers and cares for them (18.6–8). Verse 1 introduces and to some point explains the parable of verses 2–5. Verses 6–8 further explain the parable. In verses 6–8 Jesus answers the question we asked earlier, "Why are we to pray continually?" Here is the answer. We should continually pray because like this widow whom only the judge could help, so also only God can help us; and we should continually pray because unlike this judge, God is merciful and caring and longs to help His chosen people.

We are needy and God is gracious. Therefore, let's learn to pray and pray.

In his book *Reaching God's Ear*, Sam Storms has an excellent chapter entitled "Persisting in Prayer Without Pestering God." After dealing extensively with this passage, Storms gives six reasons why we should persist in prayer:

- We should persist in prayer because God, unlike the judge, is good and gracious.
- We should persist in prayer because such prayer will compel us to depend wholly upon God.
- We should persist in prayer because such prayer puts us in that frame of mind and spirit in which we may properly receive what God desires to give.
- We should persist in prayer because when we pray persistently about some specific matter, we are enabled to differentiate between impetuous, ill-conceived desires and sincere, deep-seated ones.
- We should persist in prayer because persistence serves to purify the content of our petitions.
- We should persist in prayer because being forced to pray persistently enables us, by God's grace, to overcome impatience.

We are needy and God is gracious. Therefore let's learn to pray and pray and pray.

Scott Williquette is pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois

Published by First Baptist Church, Rockford, Illinois, in association with the Ekklesia Consortium. For free subscriptions: sa@fbcrockford.com. For archives of past *Sola!* articles, visit the web site of the Ekklesia Consortium, www.ekklesia.to.



Published by First Baptist Church, Rockford, Illinois, in association with the Ekklesia Consortium, www.ekklesia.to

Putting Theology Back in the Pew

August, 2005

Who Was John Wesley?

Part 1: John Wesley's Life
Andrew Naselli

John Wesley (1703-1791) is one of the most prominent figures in church history. Wesley's contemporaries recognized this, and no church history book covering the period from the Reformation to the present can omit discussing Wesley without bringing its credibility into question. Some claim that he is the outstanding figure of Christianity in the 1700s. A voluminous, intimidating amount of literature exists about Wesley, but what follows is a simple, brief overview of his life and theology.

John Wesley's Early Life (1703-1738). Wesley was the fifteenth of nineteen children and the second surviving son of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Both of his grandfathers were Puritan Nonconformists, but his father was an Anglican minister, the rector of Epworth. Wesley had two brothers and seven sisters, and nine of his other siblings died in infancy. His older brother, Samuel, left home when Wesley was just one year old. Wesley's other brother, Charles, was four years younger and Wesley's closest sibling throughout his life.

Rescue from a House Fire: His father's parsonage burned down when Wesley was just five years old, and Wesley providentially did not perish. For the rest of his life, he cherished this narrow escape from death and viewed himself as "a brand plucked from the burning."

Schooling: Wesley's parents trained him well with High Church religion and high standards of discipline and academics. He spent six years at Charterhouse School in London (1713-1720), earned a BA from Christ Church in Oxford (1724), earned an MA from Lincoln College (1727), and was ordained a deacon (1725) and then a priest (1728) in the Church of England.

Character: Wesley was methodical and disciplined. While a student at Oxford, he began and led the "Holy Club" (1729), which included his brother Charles and later George Whitefield. They became known as "Methodists" because

Wesley had methods for everything they did from Bible reading to visiting orphans. Wesley later reflected of this time, "Doing so much, and living so good a life, I doubted not but I was a good Christian."

Missionary Work in Georgia: In 1735, Wesley volunteered to be a missionary to Georgia, a new American colony. He went under the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. He thought that this mission would be good for his soul, but his ministry lasted two years and was a failure. He accomplished relatively little in his ministry, and he lacked assurance of his own salvation. Furthermore, after his failed courtship with Sophy Hopkey and her subsequent mar-

John Wesley is one of the most prominent figures in church history

riage to someone else, he refused to administer the Lord's supper to her. He also criticized James Ogelthorpe and Thomas Causton's management of the colony. The colony's grand jury indicted Wesley with a number of charges, and he secretly departed Georgia before the formal trial began.

John Wesley's Conversion (May 24, 1738). On Wesley's sea voyage to Georgia, a group of Moravians impressed him with their heartfelt singing and evident trust in God even through violent storms in the face of death. Wesley had tried to merit salvation by works, and he returned to England with despair: "I went to Georgia to convert the Indians, but oh! who shall convert me?" Once back in England, German Pietists such as August Hermann Spangenberg encouraged him. The Moravian Peter Böhler and other Moravians helped him as well. On May 21, 1738, Wesley's brother Charles was converted.

Three days later Wesley was converted in a Moravian Society meeting on Aldersgate Street

in London. Wesley's journal explains this experience:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Eighteen days later he preached on Ephesians 2:8 in the pulpit of St. Mary's in Oxford, and for the next half-century, he energetically preached the gospel to anyone who would listen. When the parishes in the cold, liturgical Church of England, of which he was an ordained priest, did not embrace his direct evangelistic preaching, he boldly declared, "The whole world is my parish."

John Wesley's Ministry (1738-1791). *Preaching:* In 1739, Whitefield encouraged Wesley to preach in the open air in order to reach more people with the gospel. Wesley could not speak as masterfully as Whitefield, and some described him as a talking marble statue with the exception of his hand that turned his sermon pages. Wesley experienced revival in the midst of the First Great Awakening, and many have speculated that without this moral transformation, England would have had its own version of the French Revolution. Throughout his ministry, he was an *itinerant* preacher, known to many as "the man on horseback" rather than as an Oxford scholar. He traveled approximately 250,000 miles, mostly on horseback.

Organizing Methodists: Wesley founded the Methodist movement, initially called the United Societies of the People Called Methodists. Converts swelled in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and later America, and Wesley led a well-organized network of preachers to promote doctrinal uniformity and disciplined, practical holiness. The movement, however, was relatively small in the 1700s. His strict "General Rules" encouraged doing good, avoiding all evil, and benefitting from the means of grace. Wesley tirelessly organized Methodists into societies, preachers, class leaders, band leaders, stewards, trustees, and visitors of the sick. Wesley never left the Church of England and never intended for Methodists to break with it but to renew it.

Methodists, however, gained their own identity, and Anglicans broke with them after Wesley's death.

Writing: He published over four hundred books and pamphlets prepared especially for the devotional use of Methodists. His fifty-volume *Christian Library* contains extracts of what he viewed as the most significant Christian works. His collected works take up thirty-two volumes, and his published sermons or treatises comprise eight volumes. He also wrote many hymns though he did so in the shadow of the grand hymnody of his brother Charles. His *Journal* is filled with anecdotes that highlight the Methodist movement, and his bibliography reflects his wide range of interests including theology, poetry, science, philosophy, travel, novels, classics, and bestsellers.

**"The whole world is my parish."
- John Wesley**

John Wesley's Relationship with George Whitefield Whitefield (1714-1770) was eleven years younger than Wesley and in the year of his conversion called him "my spiritual father in Christ." Whitefield was part of Wesley's Holy Club at Oxford, and at the end of his life he requested that Wesley preach his funeral sermon. Some Calvinists questioned whether Wesley was even converted, and one person "asked Whitefield if he expected to see Wesley in heaven, to which he replied: 'I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance we shall hardly get a sight of him!'"

Their Disagreement and Division: Whitefield, however, was a Calvinist, and Wesley was militantly against Calvinism. This led to a public divide between them. The division began in 1739 when Wesley, in spite of Whitefield's pleading not to do so, published his sermon "Free Grace," which attacked Calvinism's view of predestination. When Wesley published it in England, Whitefield was traveling to America, and their correspondence about the issue made the division even sharper. When Whitefield returned to England in March 1741, he published a rebuttal to Wesley's controversial sermon.

Next month: John Wesley's Distinctive Theology

Andy Naselli is pursuing a PhD at Bob Jones University.

Why Should We Persevere in Prayer?

Luke 18.1-8

Scott Williquette

Both Jesus and the New Testament writers continually challenge us to persist and persevere in prayer. The reason is obvious. For many of us prayer is difficult, and when we don't see God answer our prayers as we want or when we want, we become discouraged. Therefore we are commanded over and over to persist and persevere in prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5.17 reads, "Pray without ceasing." Ephesians 6.18 reads, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." Colossians 4.2 commands, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

God's people should continually pray. Consistent prayer is a hallmark of the Christian faith. The question is "Why are we to pray continually?" Are we to pray consistently because the quality of our prayer is dependant on the quantity of our words? Are we to pray consistently because we think God is ignorant of our needs? Are we to pray consistently because God is somewhat forgetful and needs continual reminders? Are we to pray consistently because it is our job to convince or sway God? Do we pray in order to change God's mind?

We should continually pray because we are continually needy, and God is continually merciful.

Why is it that we are commanded to pray without ceasing? Why is it that we are commanded to continually pray? We should continually pray because we are continually needy and God is continually merciful.

The Background Of The Parable Of The Unjust Judge (Luke 18.1-8). In this parable the two main characters, the unjust judge and the widow, parallel God and God's children (18.6-7). Notice the areas where there is no parallel. (Incidentally, the way you locate parallels in a parable is by noting the words of the biblical text. When you study parables don't draw parallels unless the Bible draws them.) *This judge was driven by arrogant selfishness.* He cared about no

one but himself (18.2,4). God, on the other hand, loves those who hate Him, and He demonstrates that love continually by showing kindness to every human being and by granting salvation to His elect.

This judge was unjust. It's apparent from the parable that the widow's plea is a just plea. She has legitimately been wronged, and this judge doesn't care. God, however, is absolutely just and righteous in all His dealings. He is the very definition of righteousness.

This judge is influenced by inconvenience. The only reason he granted justice to this woman was because it served his best interests and kept her out of his hair. God, however, is not influenced by the sheer volume of someone's prayers. In Matthew 6.7-8 Jesus states, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." What exactly is Jesus condemning when He condemns "vain repetitions?" He is not condemning lengthy prayer. Luke 6.12 mentions that Jesus prayed all night. He is also not condemning repetition during prayer. Matthew 26.36-45 records that in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed three times that the cup of death would pass from Him. What Jesus is condemning here is the kind of prayer that involves repetition for the sake of influence. It was common in Jesus' day for Gentiles to pray the same prayers over and over

thinking that repetition was the key to answered prayer. Jesus' point is that babbling is not the way to the heart of God. Unlike the unjust judge, constant, nagging prayer has no influence over God. Luke 18.1-8 is not teaching that if a person nags God enough, God will give in and give him what he wants. Not only does Luke 18.1-8 not teach that, but also Jesus absolutely condemns that kind of attitude in Matthew 6.5-8. Commenting on prayer in his *Institutes*, John Calvin wrote, Christ does not "forbid us to persist in prayers, long, often or with much feeling, but requires that we should not be confident in our ability to wrest something from God by beating upon His ears with a garrulous [verbose] flow of talk, as if He could be persuaded as men are." This judge was wearied by this woman's petitions for justice. God, on the other hand, never tires of our genuine pleas for help. James 1.5 states, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

This woman meant nothing to this judge. He cared for neither God nor man, and he certainly didn't care about her. Notice, however, that God