

keep unity among God's people (Eph 4.1-3; 1Pe 5.5). The only lifestyle worthy of the Christian's calling is a life of humility (Eph 4.1-2). God is going to humiliate every proud person (Mt 23.12), but every humble person will be exalted (Lk 18.14). God measures greatness in the Christian not by one's spiritual gifts or position or sacrifices, but by one's humility (Mt 18.4). Humility is essential to effective service for Christ (Ac 20.19; 2Co 10.1). Heavily burdened sinners are attracted to the humble minister because they know they will receive loving help (Mt 11.28-30).

We can test ourselves for humility. True humility can be seen by our yieldedness to the Lord. The humble Christian will do anything for the Lord, even to the point of dying for Christ (Php 2.3-8). Furthermore he considers every other Christian to be more important to the church than he himself (Php 2.3). Like his Lord, the Christian who "thinks low of himself" will lay aside his own rights and liberties to help the elect be saved and grow in Christ (Php 2.3-4). Paul said it this way: "I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, and with it, eternal glory" (2Ti 2.10). Humility is also seen in the way we treat weaker brethren (Mt 18.1-14). The humble Christian will love, respect and nurture those who are young in the Lord. He will carefully avoid putting any kind of stumbling block in their way (vv 5-14). He will associate with those of lower social and economic standing without partiality (Ro 12.16; Jas 2.1-9). He is willing to sacrifice financially without complaint for the cause of Christ (Php 4.12). He will labor for the Lord even if it means he must forego getting paid (2Co 11.7).

Humility is seen by the way we listen to sermons and how we take spiritual correction (Jas 1.19-22). The humble believer will try to think through what the other is trying to say to him. He will not angrily react or interrupt; instead he will eagerly and earnestly seek to understand the message (Jas 1.19-21). He willingly and respectfully submits to the spiritual leaders in the church (1Pe 5.5). And if he himself is in leadership, he respectfully and kindly considers the views of those who are part of Christ's church (1Pe 5.5).

Negatively there are evidences that we lack humility. If we respond to "stupid questions" with a tongue-lashing, we no doubt lack humility (Jas 1.5). God never responds to us this way (Jas 1.5). If we consider ourselves "too good" to associate with those whose economic, educational, or cultural standing is different from ours, we are no doubt proud and have evil

motives (Ro 12.16; Jas 2.1-9). If we chaff under our circumstances and our trials in life, we demonstrate that we are proud (1Pe 5.6). Any failure to willingly submit to any service for Christ—no matter how low—is pride (Php 2.3-9). Finally, a sure sign of pride in the church is disunity (Jas 4.1-10) and/or rebellion (Eph 4.1-3; 1Pe 5.5). One who is harsh in his stand about doctrine or practice is "arrogant" (Jas 3.14). This wisdom is sourced in jealousy and ambition (Jas 3.13-18) and, sadly, is demonically motivated (Jas 3.15). Such evidence of pride calls for deep, heartfelt repentance (Jas 4.8-9).

The Christian should be warned that there is such a thing as a false humility. One of Satan's tricks is to make one proud of his religion. False humility takes pride in its sacrifices "for the Lord" (Col 2.18-23). It is identified by legalism (vv 16-17)—the idea that one is saved or earns merit because he does or does not do certain things. A perfect example of this verse would be Roman Catholic nuns and monks who lock themselves in dark cells and beat themselves with chains while starving their bodies. They worship angels/saints, and make dogmatic statements about what the Virgin Mary or some "saint" has said in their most recent appearance to them—which they really didn't see (Co 2.18). It is religious pride—not true submission to Christ—that moves a person to such false worship. The truth about this kind of religion is that it appears to be true wisdom, but in reality it is empty and powerless to defeat the power of temptation in one's life (Col 2.23).

From all this we can easily see that we all desperately need humility. Our churches, our families, and we ourselves are suffering horrible wounds because of our lack of Christlikeness. It would be well for us to prayerfully consider the NT passages about humility, asking the Lord to "search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps 139.23-24). May God give us all Christlike humility.

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Putting Theology Back in the Pew

September, 2005

Who Was John Wesley?

Part 2: Wesley's Distinctive Theology
Andrew Naselli

Last month we began looking at the life of John Wesley, one of the most prominent figures in church history. This month we continue by examining Wesley's distinctive theology.

Wesley was not a systematic theologian, nor did he write anything resembling a systematic theology. Controversy shaped his theology, and his theology "underwent a number of changes and variations" (Murray, *Wesley and Men Who Followed*, 76). Iain Murray notes, "He popularized a school of Christian thought which in some respects is distinct from any previous tradition of teaching that claimed Scripture as its source" (42) His preaching centered on what he called "the three grand scriptural doctrines—original sin, justification by faith, and holiness consequent thereon" (Heitzenrater, "Wesley, John" in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Larsen, 714). What follows focuses on the two aspects of Wesley's theology that most distinguish him from other evangelicals and that are the most controversial among conservative evangelicals.

John Wesley's Arminianism and Anti-Calvinism. *Objection to Calvinism:* Murray explains Wesley's main theological objection to Calvinism:

How could a belief that God has elected some to salvation, and decreed the reprobation of all others, be consistent with the love that has commanded the good news to be proclaimed to every creature? If only the salvation of the elect is certain, then God must have predestinated all others to damnation. "Predestinarian" belief therefore had to be a threat to evangelical Christianity; he was sure it would imperil the work of evangelizing the masses so wonderfully begun. . . . So Calvinism, as Wesley misunderstood it, meant no proclamation of the love of God for all men. . . . Wesley saw his friend [Whitefield] as an

inconsistent Calvinist, and that because he did not fit his perception of what a Calvinist had to be (Murray 59-61).

Wesley also objected to Calvinism because he thought that it necessarily led directly to antinomianism.

Original Sin and Prevenient Grace: Wesley affirmed man's "total corruption" in agreement with Calvin but sharply departed from Reformed theology by affirming prevenient grace and man's free will. Wesley believed that as a result of Adam's fall, man is spiritually sick. His depravity is debilitating, yet he is able to contribute to his salvation (i.e., cooperate with God, who

Controversy shaped John Wesley's theology.

initiates the process) because prevenient grace counteracts his debilitating depravity. God did not impute Adam's sin to all mankind; rather, all men are born with a corrupt nature *without* guilt. Prevenient grace, which is a distinguishing mark of Wesleyan Arminianism, refers to a universal, non-regenerative, and non-effectual work of God that equally enables all men to respond to God in faith. Arminians base Scriptural arguments for universal prevenient grace primarily on John 1.9, 12.32, and Titus 2.11. Arminians conclude that the nature of grace is equally prevenient and ultimately resistible for every individual. There is no distinction between the general and effectual call. Man cooperates with the Spirit's grace (synergism), and his will is free in the sense that he can act contrary to his nature because of prevenient grace.

Assurance, Eternal Security, and Perseverance: "Wesley believed that it was possible to fall from grace and lose one's salvation. For Wesley, assurance comes through experience" (Priest, "Church History III," *Unpublished Syllabus*, 104). As an Arminian, Wesley taught that genu-

ine believers can totally and finally fall away from the faith and may not persevere in the faith to the end and be eternally saved (cf. Lk 13.14; Col 1:29; 2 Tim 2:5; Heb 6:4-6; 1 Pet 1:10). Arminians may have assurance of their present salvation but never of their final salvation.

John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection. *Why Wesley Taught It:* Wesley taught that Christians can experience "Christian perfectionism." This is the most distinctive feature of Wesleyanism, and for Wesley, "the opinion rested quite as much upon alleged experiences as upon any interpretation of Scripture" (Murray, 47).

What It Is Not: Edward Panosian explains,

For Wesley, Christian perfection is not sinless perfection. Sin, to him, is defined narrowly as a voluntary transgression of a known law. . . . It is not infallibility, nor perfection in knowledge, nor freedom from ignorance, nor freedom from mistakes concerning things not essential to salvation, nor freedom from bodily infirmities, nor freedom from errors of judgment or action, nor freedom from temptation. . . . It is not a final state or condition which it is impossible to lose nor which is incapable of increase (in Sidwell, *Faith of Our Fathers*, 140).

What It Is: According to Wesley, God promised "salvation from all willful sin" before physical death. Wesley called this "Christian perfection," "perfect love" (1 John 4.18), "entire sanctification," and "full salvation," and he described it as "holiness," "purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God," and "loving God with all our heart and serving him with all our strength." Panosian explains,

In summary, love is the keynote of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection: perfect love toward God and man. Its by-product is the complete exclusion of conscious sin. It happens in a moment as a gift of God in response to faith and is maintained by humble dependence on Him (126).

Jonathan R. Pratt explains,

John Wesley's main contribution to sanctification teaching is his separation of justification from sanctification, both of which are to be received in separate acts of faith. Wesley describes this sanctification as "entire sanctification" or perfection." The experience of receiving this type of sanctification has five specific elements: 1) it

is instantaneous; 2) it is distinctly subsequent to justification; 3) it is only [sic] received by those who seek for it; 4) it defines sin as "conscious, deliberate acts"; and 5) it may be lost (Pratt, "Dispensational Sanctification: A Misnomer," *DBTS Journal* 7 [Fall 2002], 102).

Its Consequences: To his credit Wesley never claimed to have attained Christian perfection, but he did claim to know many people who did. He also realized how readily people could abuse the doctrine. Nevertheless, Wesley is the father of numerous people and movements that separate justification and sanctification: Charles Finney and Asa Mahan; Phoebe Palmer; the Higher Life movement; the Keswick (Victorious Life) movement; Chaferian or Dallas Seminary theology; and the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.

Conclusion: John Wesley's Legacy.

Praise God for Wesley's Christ-centered preaching, holy lifestyle, and widespread ministry of God's words.

Murray comments that "perhaps Wesley's mistakes were allowed so that the church would not make too much of him" (78). Murray and J. C. Ryle summarize Wesley's legacy:

If Wesley's theology was confused, why, some might ask, should we value his memory today? The answer is that it is not in his theology that his real legacy lies. Christian leaders are raised up for different purposes. The eighteenth-century evangelicals were primarily men of action, and, in that role, John Wesley did and said much which was to the lasting benefit of many thousands. It is to him in that role that we need to turn. The words of J. C. Ryle are a fitting conclusion to this chapter: "That Wesley would have done better if he could have thrown off his Arminianism, I have not the least doubt; but that he preached the gospel, honoured Christ, and did extensive good, I no more doubt than I doubt my own existence" (79).

In our assessment of Wesley, we should not make the same mistake that some people do with men like Luther and Calvin. Some people who are opposed to Reformed theology acknowledge little if any good in such men, and they whip them and tear them down *while standing on their*

shoulders! I acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of John Wesley, and I praise God for his Christ-centered preaching, holy lifestyle, and widespread ministry of God's words. "The unifying principle was his commitment to the Bible" (Murray, 80). If C. H. Spurgeon compared his ministry next to Wesley's as a "farthing candle" next to the sun, far be it from me to demean it (Murray, 4). If George Whitefield could request that Wesley preach the sermon at his funeral, far be it from me to marginalize his godly character. Through the life of this little man who was just five feet and two inches tall and weighed a mere "eight stone" (112 pounds), the Lord enabled His words to *gallop* and be glorified (2Th 3.1).

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Putting on the Humility of Christ

Colossians 3.12
Steven Owen

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Mt 5.6). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us that true happiness ('blessed') comes to those who regularly experience a powerful craving (the Greek behind 'hunger, thirst') to be like Jesus Christ ('righteousness'). That powerful craving will be satisfied. And Colossians 3 & 4 prescribes for the

The greatest example of humility is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian the process of becoming Christlike. As we have seen in previous issues of *Sola!*, after putting off the garments of sin, the Christian is to begin by putting on the Christlike garments of compassion and kindness. Let's now consider the next step to Christlikeness: putting on the humility of Christ.

We first need to understand what humility is. The Greek word here translated 'humility' apparently was coined by the Holy Spirit. It is not found in any extra-Biblical Greek literature before the second century. *Tapeivophrosune* is a compound word comprised of the word *tapeinos* ("lowly") and *phrosune* ("to think"). It means "to think low of ones self." The Roman world did not value the Christian virtue of humility; therefore *tapeinos* ("lowly") was always used in a contemp-

uous way. This word was used to describe a slave or something that had little or no value. In the NT "lowly" is used to describe people of meager financial means (Jas 1.9) or social standing (Ro 12.16). Humility, then, is to consider oneself to be of low standing.

But how low should we think of ourselves? After all, our culture (and many false teachers!) tells us that our problems are caused by low self esteem. Our culture, like all cultures, is Satanically influenced (Eph 2.2). Each one of us has been thoroughly influenced by it. Therefore we need to carefully consider the examples of Scripture to fully appreciate how God wants us to think about ourselves. The greatest example of humility is the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 2.6-7 informs us that "although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant." Please note that this verse says that Jesus Christ is fully God. The expression "*form of God*" does not mean that He was like God in outward form only. God is a Spirit (Jn 4.24); He has no outward form (Lk 24.39). The Greek word *morphe* has reference to the *essence* of a thing. It is used only of Christ in the NT. Compare it to verse 7 where it says He took the "*form of a slave*." "Form" in both verses is the same word. His outward appearance as a man was not that of a slave in that He had no human master. But He was fully the slave of the Father. Everywhere Jesus affirmed that "I have come not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (Jn 5.30). The very essence of His earthly life was to be a slave to the Father. So you see He was fully God in essence and in essence fully a slave to the Father. But note how our Lord thought about Himself. "He did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Php 2.6). He did not demand His rights as God. Although He was equal with God, He did not consider Himself too high to become a slave to the Father. Nor did the Righteous One consider Himself too exalted to submit to dying like a criminal on a cross! The Creator, Sustainer, and Owner of the Universe did not think that He was too exalted to die for the service of the Father and the blessing of His people! This is humility! This is what we are commanded to put on (Php. 2.5).

Humility is an essential ingredient to our Christian lives. God commands us to be humble (Jas 4.10; 1Pe 5.5). It is the very nature of Christ our example (Mt 11.29). But beyond that, humility is the key to receiving God's grace (1Pe 5.5). God comforts those who are low in spirit (2Co 7.6). God literally wars against the proud (Jas 4.6). Furthermore, humility is required to