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ARMINIANISM: A MOST MISUNDERSTOOD THEOLOGY

Julian Pace

I don't think it would be an understatement to say that Arminian theology has fallen on hard times in recent years. I think this is because many of the United States' most influential preachers tend to be far more sympathetic toward Calvinism than Arminianism. Indeed, some of America's best-known preachers do not make any bones about the fact that they are staunch Calvinists. Pastors and theologians like John MacArthur, John Piper, Matt Chandler, David Platt, and Al Mohler openly profess their embrace of Calvinism as well as

their rejection of Arminian theology. Turn on Christian radio or attend a Passion Conference and you will hear sermons and see dozens of resources written by these men. While many theologians teaching at seminaries in the United States are Arminians, I can't think of an American preacher who openly professes to be an Arminian and enjoys the influence and popularity of a John MacArthur. MacArthur has authored one of the most popular study Bibles in the United States. Can you name a study Bible written by an equally influential Arminian preacher?

I am also convinced that many people are fearful of claiming to be Arminian because of the charges that have been leveled against it by some of the United States' most prominent preachers. Influential Calvinist preachers such as John Piper and R. C. Sproul have often critiqued Arminian theology as *man-centered*, *semi-pelagian*, and *barely Christian*. These preachers and theologians are listened to by millions of American Christians and have a major impact on the American church's thinking, practice, and spirituality. Thus, when they hear these preachers speak negatively about Arminianism, many Christians understandably conclude that these well-educated and eloquent preachers must certainly be right. However, I am convinced that Arminian theology is oftentimes misunderstood, probably by even many Arminians themselves!

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Although Calvinists have critiqued Arminian theology for dozens of reasons, I will, for the sake of brevity, only respond to two objections that appear most often in Calvinist literature and sermons. First, Calvinists will often argue that Arminian theology is unscriptural because it fails to appreciate human sinfulness and our utter inability (without God's intervening grace) to respond to God's offer of salvation. In short, Arminians reject the scriptural teaching of total depravity. Second, Calvinists claim that Arminians reject a robust view of God's sovereignty.

When dialoging with Calvinists it has been my experience that they are quite surprised when I tell them that I affirm the doctrine of total depravity. Often, they are even further surprised when I tell them that every "classical" Arminian affirms total depravity as well. I affirm, with the Calvinist, the scriptural teaching of Romans 3:11 that without God's intervening grace we would never pursue a right relationship with God. Sin has so damaged our will that we can't exercise the slightest inclination

toward God without divine aid. The Arminian solution to this problem is the doctrine of "prevenient grace." This doctrine teaches

that God in his mercy has enlightened the will of people to the extent that they have the choice to freely choose or reject him. Without God's gift of prevenient grace, we don't have the ability to choose God. All we can do is rebel against God. Both the Calvinist and the Arminian affirm that we need to receive God's grace prior to justification due to our depraved nature.

The key difference between the two positions is that the Calvinist believes in *irresistible* grace while the Arminian believes in enabling grace. For the Calvinist, if God has elected to save you, he will regenerate your will prior to justification which will *certainly* lead you to exercise faith in God. The Arminian posits that

God's gift of prevenient grace is for all people, and it gives you the ability to choose God or freely reject him. God regenerates and frees our will so that we are then able to exercise a right attitude toward God if we so choose. Thus, for the Arminian, salvation is all of God's grace. If God had not taken the initiative in salvation, we would never have sought him. The positions are distinct, but they are both attempts to solve the problem of man's total inability to choose God without the help of divine aid.

It is often said that Arminians reject God's sovereignty. This is simply *not* the case. Like the Calvinist, the "classical" Arminian affirms that God has exhaustive foreknowledge, is all powerful, and rightly and sovereignly rules over the whole universe. The difference between the Arminian and the Calvinist's view of God's sovereignty is that the Calvinist believes that God has *determined* every aspect of history and has thus rendered each historical event certain. Thus, when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they could *not* have chosen otherwise because God, before the foundation of time, *determined* that they would sin against him. The Arminian view quite rightly distinguishes between God's permissive and decretal will. God in his foreknowledge knew that Satan, Adam, and Eve would rebel against him; but they genuinely could have chosen to do otherwise. Their choice to rebel was permitted by God, but it was not determined by him. While I can appreciate the Calvinist's desire to affirm God's sovereignty, I still must reject their view because I do not see how it does not lead to God being the author of sin. If God *determined* every historical event, thus rendering certain that Satan, Adam, and Eve would rebel and sin against him without the possibility of doing otherwise, then it seems that sin originated in the mind and will of God. To affirm this, as the Calvinist I think would agree, is blasphemous.

I want to close by noting that I have been positively influenced by several Calvinist theologians. I have benefited greatly from the work of Calvinist theologians like Donald Bloesch, Tim Keller, and many, many others.

We take human depravity seriously, we affirm God's sovereignty, and are grounded in Scripture.

There are aspects about the Reformed tradition I genuinely appreciate. Thus, my goal here is not to smear Calvinism or its proponents, even though I ultimately can't affirm some of what it teaches. Rather, my goal is to dispense with some of the more common, and I think erroneous, objections that have been leveled

against Arminianism so that people will give it a fair hearing once more. I think someone who approaches Arminian theology with an open mind will find that this doctrinal system takes seriously the depraved nature of people, robustly affirms God's sovereignty, and is thoroughly grounded in the biblical witness.

A BLOW TO THE ROOT: THE NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN INERRANCY AND ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION IN RECENT WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION *Part 2*

William Ury

Having served in a theological school within the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition for two decades, I recognize the cost of relating inerrancy and entire sanctification. At nearly every level of research and ministry within many of our denominations there is a growing sense of a reserve regarding the nature of Scripture and the nature of salvation. The majority of what follows is a theological survey of several discernible shifts that are present in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (hereafter *WTJ*) from 1966–2008. There are many articles in the *WTJ* that pertain to some element of both of these major doctrines of the church, but very few on the two specific issues, at least overtly, after the first decade. There are none that relate the two theologically after that period of time.

The ideological shift of the twentieth century regarding objective revelation

We have been told from every sector of theological scholarship that it is arrogant and ludicrous to claim a distillation of truth in revealed words or propositions. Language games and the cultural influence on symbols which depict reality have become isolated linguistic subcultures which are defined by their own experience. Neo-orthodoxy did not offer any

real objective support for recovering a strong doctrine of Scripture. The world of revelation remained split between the God who reveals himself and the text which *contained* the Word of God. Most of the Western Church, in which the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition is ensconced, has been left with a split reality within which to function and to attempt to offer truth.

It may be also that we are operating under Hume's skepticism, or as Wesley put it, his "insolence." Our plausibility structure has been so diminished that we are no longer able to confidently proclaim that God has spoken or speaks truly beyond issues of faith and practice. We have let others draw the line and have tried to fit exegesis, theology, and soteriology within that prescribed Procrustean framework. Revelation has been so reduced that it is very rarely referred to as a miraculous work of God for the sake of his own. No miraculous words means no miraculous salvific work—if logic pertains.

While we may never be able to return to a theological discussion doing its business out of a belief that God did speak and act in ways that were truly recorded in the original documents of Scripture, we should be rigorously honest about why it is that we cannot. Wesleyans attuned to the theology arising out of our ranks have experienced for four decades the in-

creasing inclusion of other views of scriptural authority—all of which reject inerrancy. What has been the result? One is a theological community in which *inerrancy* is no longer used freely, and *infallibility* or *authority* are used to cover just about any perspective. One wonders if the loss of an emphasis on the crisis of en-

Wesley viewed the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of sanctification inseparably.

tire sanctification has also given way to a more accepted view of holiness as almost exclusively a concept of growth in Christian character. That would mean that we are not offering anything substantively different than the larger evangelical spectrum of soteriology.

The question remains for Wesleyans, can the triune God of holy love communicate his moral character to us through special revelation, in all of its forms, and can he also impart that moral love as salvation in its fullness? The Wesleyan tradition, at its best, has held that the moral law is true, not just because the revealed law is true, but that the context in which it was given was historically accurate. And being thus revealed, it can subsequently and actually be written on the heart of any believer, in the same time and space as the Scripture references, who desires to participate in the nature of God's gracious gift of holiness.

Does historic Wesleyanism hold to an inerrancy of Scripture in relation to the doctrine of entire sanctification?

Wesley was aware of the best scholarship on Scripture in his day. He mentions at several points of the *Notes* insights garnered from much research into textual evidence of his day. The *Notes* actually accompanies his own translation of the New Testament, and it showed a remarkable amount of textual correction of the Authorized Version.

There is no better term yet produced in our day than *inerrancy* for the way Wesley referred

to and used Scripture in all that he produced. He did not keep “problems” with the text hidden, but neither did he confuse biblical criticism with the truth that God had inspired actual people to communicate truly in the divine-human Word. No one knows for sure what terminology he would agree with regarding the veracity of Scripture three centuries later. While the advocates of various positions on Scripture and inerrancy choose the portions of his multifaceted corpus which support their agendas, one must be willing to allow his writings to point toward our present situation. What is clear is the absolute dependence he displays on every sector of Scripture to proclaim freedom from original sin and inbred sin. It is not sufficient, in my reading, to say that soteriology is the sole purpose of revelation for John Wesley. His *ordo salutis* was *telic*. It was incorporative of the sanctification of the heart and life at every point. The metaphors used for presenting holiness from Scripture were drawn from every sector of the text. He saw the truth of God in every word of Scripture and that truth, if properly understood, was to have immediate moral and ethical implication in the life of the believer. Speaking of the full restoration of the image of God as revealed by the triune Persons in salvation history, he wrote, “Everything in Christianity is some kind of anticipation of something that is to be at the end of the world.”

His *teleological* theological interpretation of Scripture, which was for him (after 1729) only and always the final, and thus absolute, authority for truth, has been explored by many and deplored by many more. The undeniable result of any foray into the doctrine of Scripture in Wesley and his understanding of the doctrine of sanctification is that he viewed them inseparably. His distinctive teleological soteriology was based entirely upon the veracity of Scripture which presupposed the God who is eternally true. To disconnect theology from revelation and its requisite goal, described in a variety of ways, is to lose the Wesleyan tradition. The Holy One made the universe as

the context for his relationship with his own people that reflect his holiness. The objective standard, revelation, for him, is always personal first and foremost. The medium of self-revelation is trustworthy because it issues from the faithful intra-communicative love of the triune God. Historical facts, poetic and wisdom literature, and the accompanying propositions are crucially important; but they are truest as they lead one to God and to the fullness of his life.

Wesley was willing to build upon the exegesis of the Reformation and the early church in the creative milieu of the Anglicanism of his day to offer a fuller rendition of Scriptural holiness than had ever been advanced before, theologically, anthropologically, and ecclesiology. Wesley was as clear as anyone be-

They had a maximalist view of grace regarding inspiration and sanctification.

fore or after his time regarding the relationship between experience and Scripture. His con-

tinued confrontation with the subjective bent of the mystics of his day and the accusation of fanaticism from his Anglican peers forced him to explain the relationship between Scriptural truth and the confirmatory nature of Spirit-enabled experience. For him, experience was only confirmatory of Scripture. It never proves anything without the Word as an *a priori* foundation.

An attempt to delineate “periods” within Wesleyan/Holiness thought where the doctrine of Scripture directly impacted the doctrine of entire sanctification

1965-1975 *The presentation of the “maximalist” school.*

There is little doubt that the earliest founders of the WTS were committed to the relationship between inerrancy and entire sanctification. They had a maximalist view of grace with regard to the supernatural elements of di-

vine inspiration and the salvation from inward sin. They viewed the integrity of Scripture as crucial to what could be believed about a heart freed from self-will.

A review of the articles in the first issue of *WTJ* would reveal the bold language of both inerrancy and entire sanctification. The robust statements about the Bible and the reality of a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit and filled with perfect love are ubiquitous. Charles Carter suggested that we must take “the Holy Scriptures to be the utterances of God.” Mildred Bangs Wynkoop’s first article was straightforward on Scriptural injunctions to holiness. Kenneth Grider discussed the Greek tenses pertaining to the theology of sanctification out of a concern for the “radical, critical biblical scholarship” from which some “Wesleyans have unwittingly borrowed elements of both methodology and message” that “cannot be harmonized with the biblical message of full salvation.”

This period was not without its own disagreements. Leo Cox indicated that inerrancy and the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” were issues that raised the most concern during that period but did not, by his estimation, divide the WTS. Charles Carter clearly advocated the sanctification of the apostles at Pentecost as the culmination of the redemptive process. Though supportive of the ethical cleansing at Pentecost, Robert Mattke hints at the debate concerning Wesley and Fletcher on Pentecostal sanctification and the language regarding the Spirit’s baptism there. Wilber Dayton tied the inerrancy of Scripture with the theological foundations of the church. W. Ralph Thompson raised concerns with the inerrancy issue soon after the beginning of the organization. The interchange was healthy and sustained.

The language which Wesley used regarding Scripture became the gristmill for the chasm to deepen between the two major schools of thought. William Arnett quotes the preface to the *Notes* where Wesley states his intention to “give the direct, literal meaning of every verse,

of every sentence, and as far as I am able, of every word in the oracles of God.” The split had begun between those who were more impatient with the more traditional interpretations of Wesley. As with every other theological family in the West, decisions were made which set a trajectory.

In her presidential address at the tenth anniversary of the WTS, Wynkoop enumerated various areas of needed attention. Among many wide swaths she cut, she underscored the crucial substance, the “basic, biblical and unchanging truth,” of the real Wesleyan contribution to Christianity. She stated that Wesley’s lifelong biblical study was to unlock the scholastic doors of harsh and cold post-Reformation ideologies and as a “man of one Book,”

as he called himself, added a dimension to theology that had never been an integral aspect of it before. She knew that “heat will be generated by ‘perfect love’ discussions, but the heat can fuse the isms into a dynamic spiritual unity-in-diversity.”

Editor’s Note: Stephen W. Paine told how the WTS dropped inerrancy in 1969 to accommodate scholars who held more liberal views of scholarship. Apparently they were disqualified from membership in the WTS, but their own denominations did not require adherence to inerrancy. The WTS vote was 1412. “The Bible, Its Relation to Fellowship Among Holiness People.” *The Wesleyan Advocate* 128:9 (May 4, 1970) 89.

CALVINISTIC ASSUMPTIONS *Part 7*

Gil VanOder

Calvinists assume God ordained evil. Edwin Palmer wrote: “All things that happen in all the world at any time and in all history come to pass because God ordained them. Even sin—the fall of the devil from heaven, the fall of Adam, and every evil thought, word, and deed in all of history. It is even biblical to say that God has foreordained sin.” R. C. Sproul Jr. wrote: “God created sin.”

Of all the assumptions Calvinists accept as true, this one maligns the character of God the most. In the beginning, God said everything he made “was good” (Gen. 1:4, 12, 31). If everything God made is good, then, according to Calvinists, sin and evil are actually good because they were ordained by God. If sin is a good thing, then why does God hate it? Why does God become angry with this good thing that he created?

Calvinists claim that sin is a good thing because it serves the purpose of giving God the opportunity to display his justice and glory. So, according to Calvinism, God needed sin

to accomplish his will. But God is in need of nothing. So, God didn’t need sin to display his full glory; but he chose to create sin anyway, even though he could have accomplished his will another way. The same is true for God’s creation of humans. According to Calvinism, God creates humans and then sends the majority of them to hell for his glory. If God must ordain the preponderance of mankind to eternal suffering in order to get glory for himself, then God *needs* men to get what he wants. If he does not need people and is able to receive glory in a different way, then he is monstrously cruel because this is the way he has deliberately chosen to receive self-glorification.

No, God did not create sin. Verses like Jeremiah 7:30-31; 19:3-6; and 32:35 make that clear. It must be conceded that God did create the conditions that made evil possible. That is, he gave other beings the awesome power of choice. By doing so, he also gave them the power to create evil. It is not unlike a chemist who creates two chemicals that, if used separately, can do nothing but good. At the same

God did not create sin.

time, he is aware that mixing the two chemicals would create a poisonous explosion and warns his assistant never to mix them together.

One day the assistant, overcome with curiosity as to whether the chemist is telling the truth, decides to disobey the strict command and mixes the chemicals. After the firefighters sort through the debris, whom do they blame for the poisonous explosion, the master chemist or the foolish assistant? If only the assistant had trusted the master chemist and obeyed his warning, the explosion would not have happened.

The same is true for evil. God created humans (good things). He also created and gave to them the power of choice (another good thing). He warned them, however, that they should not use their power of choice unwisely by disobeying him. Regardless of the warning, they foolishly used their power of choice to disobey God's commands and thus created evil. Sin and all of its ugly results then came into existence, not at the hand of God, but as a result of the disobedient choices made. We

cannot blame God for what we ourselves have created. Granted, God—as the master chemist—knew the serious risks involved in giving us the gift of choice; but he knew that love required it. If he wanted to force his creations to love and trust him, he would have created slaves or robots but not people. God desired to create people in his own image with the capability of responding volitionally to both his love and his commands. As a result, he also had to create us with the potential for rejecting both his love and his commands (warnings). He took the risk completely aware that the “explosion” would occur and that we would disobey. He also knew he would have to do something to take care of the “mess” at great price to his only Son. But that’s how great his love is for us.

Editor’s Note: Gil’s new book, *Five Reasons to Believe in Calvinism and Fifty Reasons Not To*, has just been published by Schmul Publications. It is available through them for \$13.99. Call 800-772-6657.

SPURGEON AND WESLEY: UNITY IN CHRIST AMID THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Dan Shepherd

While such classifications are admittedly subjective, most scholars would at least be willing to admit that identifying John Wesley and Charles Haddon Spurgeon as the dominant Christian leaders of their respective generations is within the scope of reasonableness. Though the ends of their ministries are separated by about one hundred years, each man’s spiritual influence on his society and culture was nothing short of astounding, indeed, supernatural.

Yet, each had a passionately held but wildly divergent view of life’s most vital question: how man is reconciled to God and saved from sin. Wesley’s name yet today is almost synonymous with Arminian theology, and Spurgeon may

be the best-known Calvinist outside of Calvin himself. To modern thinkers, this distinction separates the two men into disconnected and opposing camps. The assumption is that the differences between them are an impossible gap and that some shade of enmity must naturally exist between them—and between their many followers.

Of course, both men had very strong statements about the other’s theological foundation, statements that to modern ears can sound almost excessively belligerent, and one—this side of heaven—will never know what John Wesley may have thought of Charles Spurgeon; but Spurgeon’s comments about John

Wesley are, for the most part, respectful and, at times, almost reverential.

A cursory search of the electronic version of Spurgeon's collected sermons indicates that the word "Wesley" is used nearly 400 times, and the vast majority of these are very positive references. For example, in a sermon from James 4 dated February 7, 1892, Spurgeon expresses his astonishment that Wesley's *Journal* includes information that the great evangelist did something for the kingdom of Jesus every twenty minutes during a given day. In a sermon from August 26, 1869 from Revelation 4, Spurgeon states that Wesley was a man "of whom the world was not worthy."

Spurgeon's other writings were equally effusive. On December 6, 1861, in a lecture entitled, "The Two Wesleys," Spurgeon, indicating his high regard for Wesley's spiritual walk, said:

I am afraid that most of us are half asleep, and those that are a little awake have not begun to feel. It will be time for us to find fault with John and Charles Wesley, not when we discover their mistakes, but when we have cured our own. When we shall have more piety than they, more fire, more grace, more burning love, more intense unselfishness, then, and not till then, may

we begin to find fault and criticize.

Elsewhere, he commented upon Wesley's "vital godliness" (April 11, 1861). Later, in his *Autobiography*, Spurgeon wrote, "If there were wanted two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitefield and John Wesley" (Vol. 1, p. 173.).

Spurgeon's admiration for Wesley is a powerful, practical reminder of Jesus' great prayer in John 17: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. . . . I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity." Today, and in the past, theologians have often allowed meaningful dispute to inhibit Christian love. Spurgeon, at least in reference to John Wesley, had no such difficulties, and his admiration for Wesley, even given their diametrically opposed soteriologies, is a wonderful example of unity amid seeming conflict.

Editor's Note: On January 6, 1850 Charles Spurgeon was converted in a small Primitive Methodist Church in Colchester, Essex, UK. Only twelve to fifteen people were present.

WESLEY AND THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

Joseph D. McPherson

It was at Land's End—the peninsula-shaped land extremity of southwest England, where the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean meet—that evil too often overtook the mariner. It was on that rugged and barren coast that merchant ships of past centuries too often crashed on the rocks that protrude into the sea.

After visiting this place in September of 1743, Mr. Wesley writes this account in his *Journal*: "We went . . . down, as far as we could go safely," says he, "toward the point of the rocks at the Land's End." He then described it

as "an awful sight" where "the sea does indeed boil like a pot."

While lately taking that same walk "toward the point of the rock," we too were awestruck by the sight. Greater, however, was our wonder at what we were about to hear from the lips of a British park ranger there stationed. We stood in a gentle rain as he first described to us the wickedness of the inhabitants of that coastal region back in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. He assured us that the men of nearby Penzance and other

smaller communities engaged in the plundering of wrecked vessels. It seems they even engaged in the sinister practice of alluring ships toward the rocks with lights at night, systematically following each crash with the killing of the crew and plundering of the cargo. Such was the history of this place that inspired the writing of the English operetta entitled, “The Pirates of Penzance” by Gilbert and Sullivan.

All of this violence and plundering eventually came to an end, according to the ranger, with the coming of Mr. Wesley and his Methodist preachers to the region.

It is true that the southwest part of England, known as Cornwall, became very well acquainted with Mr. Wesley and his preachers. Many times over a period of years he and they traveled into this British back country, visiting and preaching abroad under the open sky to the people of Exeter, St. Just, St. Ives, Land’s End, Gwennap, Penzance, Mousehole, Plymouth (where in 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers departed on the Mayflower to sail for America), and numerous other locations in that region of England. They organized and nourished thriving Methodist societies made up of sincere souls truly athirst for God. So it was that the whole region ultimately turned from sin and darkness and reflected the light and life of New Testament Christianity.

Late in his life Mr. Wesley himself gave a personal and most gratifying testimony of God’s transforming power in the lives of the people of Cornwall and those of Penzance in particular. In one of his last references to these once wicked inhabitants, he writes as follows in his *Journal*, dated August, 1781:

In the evening I preached in the marketplace at Penzance. I designed afterwards to meet the society; but the people were so eager to hear all they could, that they quickly filled the House from end to end. This is another of the towns wherein the whole stream of the people is turned, as it were, from east to west.

Interestingly enough, chapels and churches can be found throughout Cornwall even today with the names of “Methodist” or “Wesley” identifying them as some of the lasting fruitage from the seed sown there by the Methodists almost two and one-half centuries ago.

Editor’s Note: This article is one of 194 articles contained in *Exploring Early Methodism* (2018). It is priced at \$30 and available through Amazon. ISBN 978-0-9914251-8-1.

RECONSIDERING OUR THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

Vincent A. Artese

Within the broader Wesleyan tradition, there is a great variety of perspectives on sanctification. Dr. Chris Bounds summarizes them into three broad categories: “The Shorter Way,” “The Middle Way,” and “The Longer Way.” Bounds describes “The Shorter Way” as “the most optimistic view on holiness” which “teaches that Christians can experience entire sanctification now, in the present mo-

ment, through an act of entire consecration and faith, whereby believers surrender their lives to the lordship of Christ and trust God to purify and empower them.”

This perspective, as seen in the teachings of the 19th century holiness movement, is essentially semi-Pelagian or fully Pelagian. This is because “The Shorter Way” tends to place the responsibility for the work of sanctifica-

tion on *man*. According to this view, Christians can appropriate entire consecration and faith when they choose to do so. This perspective makes a sharp distinction between entire sanctification and maturity. It also emphasizes that “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” is given simultaneously during the experience of

The word perfection means a dynamic, not a static, state.

entire sanctification. This teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit is alien to the theology of

John Wesley, who taught that the baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place during regeneration. The founders of “The Shorter Way” were Phoebe Palmer and Charles G. Finney.

The second perspective is “The Middle Way.” This perspective emphasizes how through “personal consecration and faith, entire sanctification is realized in a Christian’s life” and also “makes a distinction between Christian maturity and holiness.” Yet it differs from “The Shorter Way” in significant ways. This perspective “does not believe that faith necessary to appropriate entire sanctification is a power inherent at any given moment in a believer’s life. Rather, sanctifying faith is seen as a gift of grace, a grace with which a Christian can choose to cooperate or not.” This is very different from “The Shorter Way” in its emphasis on *God* as opposed to *man*. Therefore the Christian does not “entirely consecrate” himself and “exercise faith” whenever he chooses for entire sanctification. Instead, “Christians actively seek entire sanctification, availing themselves of the various means of grace, waiting for God’s grace capable of creating faith to appropriate it. Thus, a person cannot be entirely sanctified at any given moment, but only in those times and places in which God’s grace is being made available that can create such faith.”

In terms of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, some adherents of “The Middle Way” believe it takes place at regeneration (like Wesley), while

others hold to it taking place at the moment of entire sanctification (like Finney). This perspective could be traced back to the writings of Wesley before the 1760s. This is the stage that Chris Bounds describes as the more “optimistic” Wesley before the perfectionism controversy broke out with his preachers Thomas Maxfield and George Bell in the 1760s. After the perfectionism controversy, Wesley’s views on Christian perfection became more guarded and carefully worded.

Finally, the third perspective is “The Longer Way.” According to this perspective, entire sanctification “is realized most often in a Christian’s life after a long journey of dying to self, following many years of spiritual development. There will be some Christians who will realize entire sanctification in the present life, but most will not experience it until just before death or at the point of glorification.” This perspective also differs from the previous two in how it essentially equates entire sanctification with maturity. This is because “The movement toward this state of perfection can only be brought about by growth in grace, knowledge, wisdom, experience, and the practice of spiritual disciplines. As such, entire sanctification is not seen as a possibility for new converts, but only for those who have diligently followed Christ for many years.” In terms of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, this view affirms it takes place during regeneration as John Wesley did. “The Longer Way” seems to be the view that Wesley generally supported after the 1760s, but there is evidence that he supported it before then as well. It is seen in his sermons “Christian Perfection” (1741) and “On Perfection” (1784) as well as his writings “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection” (1763) and “Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection” (1767).

After considering these three views as presented by Dr. Chris Bounds in a theology class I took with him at Wesley Seminary, I would suggest that Wesley’s view lies between

“The Middle Way” and “The Longer Way.” After considering the overall corpus of Wesley’s writings, it seems that a “view between views” is the most fitting to Wesley’s theology overall. It also seems to be the most appropriate when one considers the Greek word for perfection. Much confusion regarding Christian perfection comes from how the word perfection is used in English in contrast to its linguistic roots. According to Thomas Oden, “the Latin term *perfectus* tends to contort and caricature the earlier Greek language tradition of *teleiotes*.” The Latin understanding of *perfectus* is static, whereas the Greek understanding of *teleiotes* is dynamic “in the sense of the most excellent conceivable contextual

Christian perfection is an imperfect perfection that is only possible as we remain in Christ.

functioning of the developing person.” Wesley never meant that the word perfection would be used to describe a static (still, frozen)

state, but rather he meant it as a dynamic (living, moving) state. Properly understood, *teleiotes* does not imply that no further progression is possible. Properly understood, Christian perfection is an imperfect perfection that is only possible as one remains in Christ by faith. Wesley writes that “we have this grace not only from Christ, but in him” and “our perfection is not like that of a tree, which flourishes by the sap derived from its root, but ... like that of a branch, which united to the vine, bears fruit; but severed from it, is dried up and withered.” *Teleiotes* is only possible through union with Christ.

Thomas Oden writes that the idea of Christian perfection as getting to a “fixed state of perfection in a motionless sense” is “a very un-Wesleyan notion.” Christian Perfection is “rather being in a continuing process of growth in grace that has multiple moments of completion and fulfillment, where the reflection of inexhaustible love occurs at many

points (in principle any point) along the way.” Christian perfection is most accurately defined as “love excluding sin” and is best understood as a “concept of different levels or stages or degrees of perfection” like “rungs on a ladder” and “it may be better to refer to these as degrees of perfecting, indicating that our growth and development into Christian maturity continue as long as we live.”

Therefore, it is truly Wesleyan to hold to the *optimism* and *expectation* of “The Middle Way” while realizing that even when Christians are given the grace of Christian perfection they are in reality given a relative perfection that is still dynamic and still in process. Wesley believed “there is a completeness that even newborn babes have, since the notion of maturity must be understood contextually within the frame of reference of what is possible at a given stage of development.” Therefore, Christians should “actively seek entire sanctification, availing themselves of the various means of grace, waiting for God’s grace capable of creating faith to appropriate it,” but even after appropriating it there is still further perfection or “perfecting” to go. As Oden writes, “However far one travels on the way of holiness, there is always room the next moment to go further, to grow from grace to grace. There is no perfection that does not admit of continual increase, of further growth in grace. However mature, it is always further maturing, perpetually in process.” With all this considered then it is clear that Christians will not be brought to their highest level of relative or “imperfect” perfection “until just before death or at the point of glorification.” Yet even then Christian Perfection is still relative because Wesley taught that the perfect would continue to grow in grace to all eternity. In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* Wesley asked, “Can those who are perfect grow in grace?” He answered, “Undoubtedly they can; and that not only while they are in the body, but to all eternity.”

THE UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT IN 1 JOHN 2:2, Part 3

Justin Gravett

Considering the teaching of 1 John 2:2, which articulates an atoning sacrifice of Christ for all persons, a universal and provisionary model can be drawn from the text. It is *universal* in that the propitiation of Christ is designed, intended, and sufficient for all; *provisionary* in the sense that while it is made for all, it is only efficacious for the faithful—those in allegiance to the Lord Jesus.

This universal and provisionary motif is common in the biblical data. Old Testament types which are taken up by New Testament authors as fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death help illustrate this. For example, John compares Jesus to the bronze serpent, written of in Numbers 21, where God gave Moses a bronze serpent and said: “Everyone

The atonement is universal and provisionary.

who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live” (v 8). There was provision for *all* of Israel, but only those who looked at the serpent in faith would be saved. David Allen writes, “The limitation for Israel was not in the provision of the bronze snake (it was given for all Israel); rather, the limitation was in the application: only those who looked lived. There was a remedy for all Israel, and they would be healed if they would only look. There is a remedy in Christ’s death for all, and they will be saved if they will only believe.” As Allen alludes, Jesus refers to this passage himself. He says that in the same way (as the bronze serpent), he also must be “lifted up, so that whoever believes will in him have eternal life” (John 3:14-15), a provision directed to the *world* (3:16-17; see also 12:32). Provisionary for all, effective through faith. Another example given by John is seen in chapter 6 of his Gospel. Jesus compares himself to the bread (manna) given to Israel in the Old Testament (Exod. 16:4; Num. 11:8). However,

who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live” (v 8). There was provision for *all* of Israel, but only those

both with the bread of the Old Testament and the living bread of Jesus, it had to be collected to provide sustenance. Jesus says his bread “gives life to the world” (v.33), but that it must be eaten (v 51)—which in the immediate context is synonymous with coming and believing (v.35). Provisionary for all, effective through faith.

One final example regarding Jesus, connecting him to an Old Testament type as a universal and provisionary sacrifice, is the sacrificial lamb. In a number of places, Jesus is called the sacrificial Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:12) who was slain for the world (John 1:29). This, no doubt, hearkens readers back to Exodus 12, where God commanded Israel to kill a lamb as a protective sacrifice (12:6). Worth noting is that the command was also to *eat* the lamb and *apply* its blood to each household’s doorpost (v 7). Only the *applied* blood was a covering from the wrath of God (v 13). The slain lamb alone, just as with Christ, did not save; it had to be enacted through obedience. Calvinist A. W. Pink, in his commentary on Exodus, puts it superbly, “A Savior *provided* is not sufficient: he must be *received*. There must be *faith* in his blood (Rom. 3:25), and faith is a *personal* thing... I must by faith take the blood and shelter beneath it.” Pink correctly notes that the Passover is “one of the most striking ... foreshadowments of the cross-work of Christ to be found anywhere in the Old Testament.”

Laurence Vance notes the Passover “is a clear example of the principle that the atonement and its application are to be distinguished. The blood of the slain Passover lamb ... became efficacious only after it was applied to the doorpost per instructions.... The death of the lamb saved no one: the blood had to be applied.” Provisionary for all, effective through faith.

Furthermore, there is a plethora of passages which show how well 1 John 2:2 fits with the larger biblical narrative of a God who provides atonement for all in Christ as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, applied through faith. These include verses which show Christ is the intended Savior of *the world* (1

John 4:14), for *all people* (1 Tim. 4:10), as God offers salvation to *all* (Titus 2:11); Christ tasted

death for *everyone* (Heb. 2:9), and God is reconciling *the world* to himself (2 Cor. 5:19); Christ takes away the sin of *the world* (John 1:29) and is the ransom for *all* (1 Tim. 2:6); his death is *for all* (2 Cor. 5:14-15), and he offered his life and justification *for all* (Rom. 5:18); the bread of life is given to *the world* (John 6:33, 51) and his atonement is made even for those who deny him (2 Pet. 2:1) and for those who later fall away (Heb. 10:26; 1 Cor. 8:11; Rom. 14:15). The Bible thus is clear in its presentation of a universal atonement which is made, offered, and provided for all. The earliest believers could boldly proclaim to all that “Christ died for our sins” without reservation, deception, or confusion due to the universal atonement made in Christ (1 Cor. 15:3). Indeed, one wonders how the biblical authors *could not be clearer* in their numerous descriptions of Christ dying for all.

Jesus Christ is the propitiatory sacrifice for the whole world.

Having looked at what 1 John 2:2 teaches in its proper context, one can correctly conclude that Christ is indeed the propitiation for the *whole world*—believers and unbelievers. Surveying how John uses *world* in his epistles demonstrates a consistent theme of referring to forces in opposition to believers and Christ—which fits well with the common theme of diametrically opposed ideas in the letter. Therefore, there is no plausible reason to suggest that 1 John 2:2 includes the sole exception to the definitional norm. Proper hermeneutics would demand a reader to understand the same word, a word used by the same author in the same book, in similar fashion.

Christ is thus the atoning sacrifice made for all, yet efficacious for believers. As Robert Shank writes, there is “an objective atonement sufficient for all men, [and] efficient for the elect.” Leroy Forlines says, “Atonement is provisionary until it is applied. It can be applied only on the condition of faith and on the grounds of union with Christ. When applied, [the] atonement becomes efficacious.” A number of objections have been shown to be spurious and none prove to dismantle the prima facie reading of 1 John 2:2’s universal scope. Furthermore, the holistic biblical data strongly supports a universal atonement made by Christ. One can thus conclude that the Lord, King, and Savior, Jesus Christ, is the propitiatory sacrifice for the whole world.

A WORD FROM WATSON

Vic Reasoner

All things work together for good, but not to all men indiscriminately. This promise is directed toward those who love God and who are “effectually called.” This call was both the outward call of the Word and the internal operation of the Holy Spirit. These elect had not been disobedient to that call.

God is at work to secure our good. Whatever designs may be formed against us, they are

made to work for good if we love God. “Abide in Christ, if you would always have this promise as your own.”

But there must be cooperation in the direct work of our salvation and in the administration of God’s providence—between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Affliction which is not accompanied by the grace of God produces nothing good. Neither does prosperi-

ty. God must give his blessing and we must live under his blessing. “The best adapted means will then only avail you when there is prayer, and the supply of divine influence.”

We must also cooperate with the plans of God. Every blessing brings its particular duties. We must avoid all hasty conclusions about the dealings of God. The dispensations of providence may be painful and they may militate against our present, temporal interests; but we have the assurance that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” We may not be able to see the operation of the divine plans, however. Yet we know it by faith in the unchanging promise of God. It is the light of eternity that will reveal to us the glorious

wisdom and love of the accomplished plans of God. Until that light shall break forth upon us, let us submit in all things to the will of our heavenly Father, resting in the calm and cheering assurance that the administration of his providence and the operations of his grace will result in our spiritual improvement and final salvation.

“The High Privilege of Them That Love God,” Sermon #6, based on Romans 8:28. *The Works of the Rev. Richard Watson*, Vol. 8. This volume contains 12 sermons “taken down in shorthand.” These sermons are not in his *Sermons and Sketches of Sermons*.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN INSPIRATION AND CONFIRMATION

Vic Reasoner

Second Peter 1 deals with inspiration, transfiguration, and revelation. No other passage reveals so much about the unique process of the inspiration of Scripture. Men, whether prophets or apostles, were carried along by the Holy Spirit. They were elevated above their humanity and so overshadowed that they were enabled to receive and convey God’s words. Their experience was awesome and their finished product provided the inerrant and authoritative Word of God for the whole world. While their experience cannot be repeated, Peter says our faith—which is based upon faith in that Word—is equally precious.

In this same chapter Peter also was inspired to write about his own experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. There were only three eyewitnesses, and what they saw will never be repeated. Those three men saw a revelation of Jesus Christ which compares to John’s later revelation. While Peter, James, and John had walked and lived with Jesus during

his incarnation, they had never seen him in his majesty and glory. That must have been an awesome experience, but Peter says that our faith is equally precious.

Finally, Peter teaches at the end of this same chapter that while we were not included in the process of inspiration, nor were we present for the transformation, we can have our own revelation of Jesus Christ. Every person who responds to God’s preliminary grace will experience the awakening of the Holy Spirit like a lamp shining in a dark place. The dark place describes our unawakened heart and mind. As we are enabled to move toward the light and do so, a new day begins to dawn; and the morning star of hope dispels the darkness.

Peter describes conversion six times in this short letter as the full knowledge of God. This is in contrast to the Gnostics, who “know it all” but do not know God experientially.

As we walk in that new light, the darkness turns to dawn; and the dawn advances until

noon day brightness. As a mature believer, it is our privilege to live with the full assurance of faith. And the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. Thus, our faith is equally precious.

This interpretation, put forth by the Methodist writers of the past, has been obscured by the popular interpretation that Peter is describing the second advent. While he will deal with the second advent in chapter 3, every commentator I have read who tries to make that interpretation fit, stumbles over the phrase “in your hearts.” I have seen some very creative attempts to explain how the second coming of Christ will be internal. However,

We can know that we are saved

Peter cannot establish his authority and his credibility, which he must do before he can denounce the false Gnostics in chapter 2, on an event which has not yet occurred.

Some commentators come closer to the truth when they say that these verses contrast the old covenant with the new. But again, Peter is describing an existential and personal experience. In fact, he almost sounds like a Quaker describing the “inner light.”

But Peter balances the subjective and internal work of the Holy Spirit within the human heart with the objective and external testimony of Scripture. We must have both! We may contend for the final authority of Scripture, devoid of all feeling, until we are nothing more than conservative rationalists.

Or we can contend for an ecstatic experience in the Holy Ghost, devoid of any biblical grounding, until we become mystics. The evangelical church today is polarized as either Calvinists, who stand upon the Word (and their interpretation of it, which they hold as equally authoritative) or the Charismatics, who do not

care what the Bible says since their final authority is their personal vision from God.

No other movement in church history has maintained the dual witness of the Word and the Spirit as Methodism has done. The irony is that I am promised a personal revelation of Jesus Christ by the Bible and the Bible then becomes the final test concerning whether or not that revelation is legitimate.

If Methodist doctrine can be reduced to its central message, which is risky because it can lead to a distortion, Methodism broke into the deistic rationalism of the 18th century declaring that we can know that we are saved.

When Samuel Wesley was dying, he told John on more than one occasion, “The inward witness, son, the inward witness, that is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity.” At the time John did not know what he meant, but after Aldersgate John preached this inward witness to the world.

Daniel Steele, an American Methodist, claimed the daystar is “the divine coming into contact with the human—the Holy Spirit directly revealing Christ to the consciousness, illuminating our spiritual intuitions.” Wesley preached, “Let all, therefore, who desire that day to dawn upon their hearts, wait for it in ‘searching the Scriptures.’”

True Methodism never divorces one from the other. I did not hear what Peter heard on the Mount of Transfiguration when he heard the Father say to the only begotten Son, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” But every adopted son or daughter can hear those same words whispered into their heart by the Holy Spirit. Hallelujah! Because I have heard those words from my heavenly Father, my faith is just as precious as that of Peter. [Extracted from *A Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on 1–2 Peter* (2017)]

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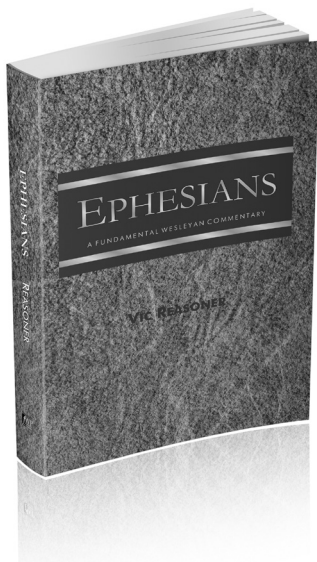
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