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Imputed *and* Imparted Righteousness

Vic Reasoner

Roman Catholic theology teaches our righteousness is based on the sacramental infusion of grace. Thus, righteousness is *imparted* through the sacraments. The Eucharist is the means of our justification. Romanism rejects imputed or forensic righteousness as legal fiction.

However, Reformation theology emphasizes *imputed* righteousness. This emphasis is the result of the doctrine of original sin. If man is a sinner, any justification must be imputed to him. Luther called this an alien righteousness. It is not based on works or receiving the sacraments.

The historical debate between Roman Catholic and Protestant theology is focused on the question, does

justification declare someone to be righteous or acceptable to God or is it a process whereby someone is made to be righteous?

John Wesley originally followed an Anglican-Catholic view that some measure of sanctification is required as the basis of justification. Yet under the influence of the Moravians, especially Peter Böhler, Wesley came to a biblical understanding of faith alone as the basis for justification. This led to his Aldersgate experience.

Two years after Aldersgate, Wesley explained that he had wandered many years in the “*new path of salvation by faith and works, but about two years ago it pleased God to show us the old way of salvation by faith alone.*” Thus, John Wesley’s theology stands with Protestant theology regarding the *nature* of justification as a forensic declaration by God by which he graciously forgives and accepts sinners.

In 1977 E. P. Saunders advanced a new interpretation on Paul. In 1982 James Dunn named it The New Perspective on Paul. The new perspective says Martin Luther assumed that Paul went through the same struggle that he went through. This struggle, for Luther was a shift from God’s justice to God as the justifier who acquits the sinner. And the conclusion of the new perspective is that Luther assumed Paul was reacting against the same legalism as he was; that Judaism was the equivalent to Roman Catholicism. But the new perspective is that when Paul dealt with justification by works he was not addressing legalism. Instead, righteousness is seen in relational terms which produces good works. As God draws people into relationship with him, they are changed and the old questions about imputed righteousness become non-questions.

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N. T. Wright teaches that justification is acceptance into the family of all who accept the gospel of the Lordship of Christ. For Wright, justification is not about “getting in” but “telling who is in.” Thus, justification is more about ecclesiology than soteriology. Paul’s doctrine of justification does not tell how sinners can find acceptance but explains how we can tell who belongs to the community of the true people of God. However, this seems more like a doctrine of adoption than the doctrine of justification.

Is righteousness transformative or forensic? The adjective *dikaios* can be translated “just” or “righteous.” And so theologians debate whether the verb to justify (*dikaion*) means “to make righteous” or “to count righteous?”

God implants righteousness in everyone to whom he has imputed it.

The New Perspective on Paul is popular among those who are not Calvinists. Its emphasis on *imparted* righteousness also provides a bridge in ecumenical dialog.

In contrast John Piper, who represents the old Reformed perspective, defends the biblical doctrine of imputed righteousness. But then he stops. Forensic, imputed righteousness need not be abandoned but this emphasis on a declared righteousness must be kept in balance with the imparted, transforming righteousness.

In the current debate between the old perspective and the new, the classic Methodist commentators and theologians offer theological balance. Early Methodist theology held to the Protestant view that the *basis* of justification is faith alone. However, Wesley broke with the Protestant Reformers concerning the *results* of justification. While Wesley did not adopt Catholic theology, neither did he accept the majority Protestant view that the Christian is at once just and yet a sinner. While Wesley saw himself within the Protestant tradition, he disagreed with Luther’s conclusion that the Christian is at the same time just and yet sinful.

Luther claimed that the saints are in reality sinners, but that they are righteous because God reckons them as such. “They are unknowingly righteous, and knowingly sinners. They are sinners in fact, but righteous in hope.”

Wesley’s concern was that an unbalanced emphasis upon imputed righteousness, without the corre-

sponding imparted righteousness, can lead to antinomianism. John Wesley declared, “I believe God *implants* righteousness in every one to whom he has *imputed* it.” We must also maintain this balance between imputed and imparted righteousness.

1. Wesleyan-Arminianism affirms imputed righteousness

In a letter to John Newton, John Wesley declared that he was in agreement with Calvin on justification. “In this respect I do not differ from him a hair’s breadth.” Methodist theologian Richard Watson agreed with John Calvin that the imputation of righteousness was simply the non-imputation of sin or the remission of sins. Justification is both positive and negative. Negatively, God does not count our sins against us. “There is now no condemnation” (Rom 8:1). Positively, God counts our faith as righteousness and we have peace with God (Rom 5:1).

In Romans 4 Paul uses *logizomai* eleven times. This key word means to reckon, credit, rank with, calculate, consider, deliberate, grasp, draw a logical conclusion, decide, or impute. Romans 4:3-8 teaches that faith in the atoning work of Christ is imputed to the believer for righteousness. Paul then argues that neither Abraham nor David was justified or accepted on the basis of their works.

Arminius declared that “faith, and faith only, (though there is not faith alone without works,) is imputed for righteousness. By this alone are we justified before God, absolved from our sins, and are accounted, pronounced and declared RIGHTEOUS by God, who delivers his judgment from the throne of grace.” Arminius also declared,

I believe that sinners are accounted righteous solely by the obedience of Christ; and that the righteousness of Christ is the only meritorious cause on account of which God pardons the sins of believers and reckons them as righteous as if they had perfectly fulfilled the law. But since God imputed the righteousness of Christ to none except believers, I conclude, that in this sense it may be well and properly said, *To a man who believes Faith is imputed for righteousness through grace*,—because God hath set forth his Son Jesus Christ to be a propitiation, a throne of grace, [or mercy-seat] through faith in his blood.

2. Wesleyan-Arminianism denies the Calvinistic doctrine of imputation

Arminius denied that “the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us for righteousness.” Arminius argued that the obedience of Christ to the Father was not a substitute for righteousness, but was actual righteousness. If that obedience of Christ is then imputed to us as a substitution for righteousness, the word *impute* is being used two different ways and implies “that the righteousness of Christ is not righteousness itself.”

Richard Watson concluded that imputation is never used in scripture “in the sense of accounting the actions of one person to have been performed by another.” Instead, the imputation of righteousness is the non-imputation, or pardon, of sin. Miner Raymond

wrote that in Romans 4:3-8 the terms *justified, justifieth, forgiveness of sins, iniquities are forgiven, sins are covered, counted unto him for righteousness, imputeth righteousness, and will not*

impute sin “are used to designate the same thing.” But Raymond rejected the Calvinistic doctrine that by faith the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us.

Thomas Coke taught that faith is imputed for righteousness, not in the sense that faith settled the debt or that faith is meritorious, but that faith “gives a man a claim to what Christ has paid.” John McClintock explained that the Arminian employs *imputation* in the sense of accounting to the believer the benefit of Christ’s righteousness; the Calvinist employs the same word in the sense of reckoning the righteousness of Christ as ours. Thomas Ralston explained,

Calvin teaches imputation in a strict and proper sense; whereas Wesley teaches imputation in an accommodated sense. He holds that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us in its effects—that is, in its merits: we are justified by faith in the merits of Christ; or, in other words, we are justified “forgiven and accepted, for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for us.” It amounts to no more than this: that the meritorious sacrifice of Christ is the ground upon which God pardons the sinner when he believes.

It is sometimes asserted that the active and passive righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers. The active obedience of Christ refers to his sinless life,

while the passive obedience of Christ refers to his atoning death. An emphasis on the imputation of Christ’s active *and* passive righteousness leads to antinomianism. Joseph Sutcliffe concluded that if the active and passive righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, we do not need the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit to make us righteous. Fletcher explained that we are made righteous, not by speculative imputation of the works of Christ, but by being made partakers of the divine nature, begotten of God, and clothed with righteousness and true holiness.

The issue is whether Christ’s active obedience to the precepts of the law is imputed to the believer in lieu of righteousness. **Does God impute our faith in the atoning work of Christ to us as righteousness or is the obedience of Christ transferred to us in lieu of future personal righteousness?**

Watson summarized and rejected the view that “Christ so represented the elect that his righteousness is imputed to us as ours; as if we ourselves had been what he was, that is, perfectly obedient to the law of God, and had done what he did as perfectly righteous.”

The meritorious cause of man’s justification is based on Christ’s passive obedience unto death. We are saved by his atoning death, not through his sinless life. In his substitutionary death Christ did not become a sinner. Our sins were not transferred to him, but the penalty of our sins was laid upon him. He became a sin offering, not a sinner.

The active obedience of Christ’s sinless life meant that he was not disqualified to become our substitute in the passive obedience of his passion and death. But if our sin was so imputed to him that he became a sinner, he would have been disqualified to have become our atoning sacrifice. The scripture is abundantly clear that Christ did not sin. Here again, the issue of imputation must be defined. Those who teach that he *really* became sin have moved beyond simply a legal concept of the transfer of penalty.

The first Methodist Conference in 1744 concluded, “We do not find it expressly affirmed in Scripture, that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to any; although we do find that ‘faith is imputed’ to us ‘for righteousness.’” In 1765 Wesley also preached,

In the meantime what we are afraid of is this: lest any should use the phrase “the righteousness of

An emphasis on the imputation of Christ’s active and passive righteousness leads to antinomianism.

Christ,” or, “the righteousness of Christ is imputed to me,” as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have known this done a thousand times. A man has been reprov’d, supposed for drunkenness: “Oh, said he, I pretend to no righteousness of *my own*: Christ is *my righteousness*.” Another has been told, that “the extortioner, the unjust, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” He replies, with all assurance, “I am unjust in myself, but I have a spotless righteousness in Christ.” And thus, though a man be as far from the practice as from the tempers of a Christian, though he neither has the mind which was in Christ, nor in any respect walks as he walked; yet he has armor of proof against all conviction, in what he calls the “righteousness of Christ.”

In 1773, after a debate with the Calvinist Rowland Hill, Wesley resolved never to use the phrase “the imputed righteousness of Christ” lest he be mis-

There is no text in the New Testament which categorically states that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers.

understood to imply that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us for obedience. Adam Clarke wrote in a letter,

I am quite of Mr. Wesley’s mind, that once “we leaned too much toward Calvinism,” and especially

in admitting in any sense, the unscriptural doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ. I never use the distinction of righteousness imputed, righteousness imparted, righteousness practiced. In no part of the book of God is Christ’s righteousness ever said to be imputed to us for our justification; . . . I have long thought that the doctrine of imputed righteousness, as held by certain people, is equally compounded of Pharisaism and Antinomianism.

In his *Commentary* Clarke explained

This doctrine of the *imputed righteousness of Christ* is capable of great abuse. To say that Christ’s *personal righteousness* is imputed to every true believer, is not Scriptural: to say that he has fulfilled all righteousness for us, or in our stead, if by this is meant his fulfilment of all moral duties, is neither Scriptural nor true.

More recently Robert Gundry came to the same conclusion. Gundry also rejects the doctrine that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us who believe.

With the exception of Galatians 3:6, every text which explicitly refers to imputation in relation to righteousness is found in Romans 4. But Gundry concluded that none of these texts say that Christ’s righteousness was imputed. Michael Bird also concluded, “There is no text in the New Testament which categorically states that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers.”

While J. I. Packer admitted that the phrase “the imputation of Christ’s righteousness” is not found in Paul’s writings, he argued that the concept was biblical. Calvinists such as John Murray and John Piper, who understand these texts to teach an imputation of Christ’s righteousness, argue that Paul means, “Faith was counted, with the result that Christ’s alien righteousness was imputed.” But the lack of any reference in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 to Christ’s righteousness confirms Gundry’s observation that the counting of faith as righteousness is not Paul’s shorthand expression in which faith is the instrument by which Christ’s righteousness is received. Rather, this phrase “counted as” is used to describe an identification of what is counted—faith, with what it is counted as—righteousness. Gundry concluded that Paul wants to emphasize the obedient life of righteousness that we are supposed to live—and indeed will live if we are true believers.

In Romans 4 it is faith that is reckoned as righteousness. Yet John Piper believes that Paul is describing God’s justifying work in terms of imputing or crediting the work of God. For Piper, righteousness is imputed to us, not our faith being recognized and considered as righteousness. He sees “faith imputed for righteousness” and “righteousness imputed apart from works” as synonymous phrases. Piper interprets “the seal of righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:11), not as a righteousness which consists of faith but imputed righteousness received by faith. Yet Michael Bird observed, “A uniform translation of ‘imputed’ as applied by Piper does not fit the verses where faith is the subject, since it is odd to think of faith being imputed.” Bird concluded,

Romans 4 does not assert that one is justified because of the imputed righteousness of Christ or that God reckons faith as covenantal conformity. Instead, God regards faith as the condition of justification (reckons faith as righteousness) and justifies believers (credits righteousness) because of their union with Christ (raised for our justification).

Faith, therefore, cannot be reduced to the righteousness of Christ which the elect passively have imputed to their account as evidence of their regeneration. The Westminster Confession of Faith that God justifies neither by infusing righteousness “nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them.”

Thus it seems that faith, for the Calvinist, is passive. George Bryson concluded, “While Calvinists give *theological lip service* to the place and importance of faith, Calvinists do not see faith as a *condition of salvation*, but instead they reduce it to a mere *consequence of election*.”

In the Calvinistic order of salvation, faith and repentance come *after* regeneration. If regeneration comes first in the Calvinistic order of salvation, then why does imparted righteousness not come before imputed righteousness?

Wesley also objected to a distortion of the doctrine of imputation which results in God being deceived in

those whom he justifies, “that he thinks them to be what in fact they are not, that he accounts them to be otherwise than they are. . . . He can no more in this manner confound me with Christ than with David or Abraham.”

Fletcher explained that we are made righteous, not by a speculative imputation of the works of Christ, but by being made partakers of the divine nature, begotten of God, and clothed with righteousness and true holiness.

Thus, the real concern of early Methodist theology was with an unbiblical emphasis on imputed righteousness which led to lawlessness. And that concern is just as valid today. Recently Kevin DeYoung declared, “If people hear us talking about justification and don’t almost think that we are giving them a license to sin, we aren’t preaching grace strong enough.” But grace must not be preached so as to result in antinomianism.

This is an edited version of a paper given at the Evangelical Theological Society in Atlanta on November 17, 2010. To be continued.

Faithful to the End

Russell Frazier

Perhaps you’ve heard it said, “Once saved—always saved.” Those who use the dictum desire to protect their peculiar doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. However, my concern is that the saying envisions the perseverance of sinners in salvation who never really quit the sin business. Let me explain.

People argue that evangelical conversion resolves once and for all the question of one’s future destiny. In this way of thinking, believers can live like they want to live without their behavior and attitudes affecting their final destiny. Thus, conversion becomes a license for all kinds of lawless behavior. Like the radio preacher, those who hold this view say, “Live like you want to live; do what you want to do—just send more money!”

The rationale runs like this: “I’ve been saved—my eternal destiny is certain. Thus, there is no need for the Ten Commandments. After all, Paul says, ‘By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:16).’” The Bible becomes a sort of scrapbook or a cut-and-paste book. People take or leave certain portions of Scripture as they will. Not only are the 10

Commandments jettisoned, but the moral declarations which Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount are set aside or explained away. Some commentators who hold this view assert that the Sermon on the Mount belongs to an earlier dispensation, and that the words of Jesus are no longer valid for Christians today. Those who hold to this view, “once saved—always saved,” discard practically the majority of the Bible because the only thing that really matters is their “faith.”

This view not only does violence to the understanding of Scripture, but it also does violence to another doctrine. If one holds the view “once saved—always saved” there is little or no significance to the final judgment. The judgment is simply the authentication of an experience in which one went to the altar for relief of guilt or joined the church or shook the preacher’s hand. God becomes a doting grandfather who overlooks the rebellious crimes against His holiness. God wears rose-colored glasses and sees everything through them; He is deceived and doesn’t see sin in the lives of believers.

However, those who believe that God overlooks sin are really deceived themselves. They walk in “the futility of mind”; their “understanding is darkened.” They are “alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Ephesians 4:18-19).

I believe that you, my dear reader, “have not so learned Christ” (Ephesians 4:20). You are aware that you are responsible—that God will hold you accountable. There is a judgment day coming. God will judge us not only according to the way that we have received Christ, but He will also judge us for our deeds. He will judge us not only for our *faith in Christ*, but He will judge us for our *faithfulness to Christ*.

In a post-modern, relativistic society, few will dare to declare absolute truth. In the blah-blah world of evangelical Christianity, there are few prophets

which will warn you of this truth. Too often, we have overemphasized the beginning of the Christian life and have failed to emphasize the ending. In the society today, a subtle deception arises saying that the way we live our lives makes no difference. It does make a difference! Apparently, the same deception was around in the early Church; Paul wrote, “*Do not be deceived*, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). In fact, the difference is an eternal one—between heaven and hell.

John the Revelator assures us of the future judgment of our works, “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And *the dead were judged according to their works*, by the things which were written in the books” (Rev. 20:12, emphasis added). God is keeping records. So, I encourage you, the faithful, continue to be faithful—faithful to the end! The finish line is just ahead!

The Acts of the Spirit, Part 7

Joseph D. McPherson

The Conversion of the Ephesian Twelve

Among all of Luke’s accounts in the book of Acts concerning the progress of evangelization in the primitive church, the opening verses of chapter 19 provide a most unique narrative of special significance, though sometimes misunderstood and theologically misapplied.

The Apostle Paul, “*having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus.*” It was there that he came in contact with “*certain disciples*” to whom he asked, “*Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?*” They answered, “*We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*” Paul followed with yet another question. “*Unto what then were ye baptized?*” They readily testified to having been baptized “*unto John’s baptism.*” The apostle responded by explaining that, “*John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.*” We then read that “*When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them... And all the men were about twelve*” (vv. 1-7).

Some wish to persuade us that these twelve Ephesians were already born again Christians when met by Paul because they are referred to as *disciples*. The terms *disciple* and regenerated *Christian*, however, are not necessarily synonymous, especially in this case. The twelve Ephesians were truly disciples in the sense that they were sincere followers of evangelical truth as they then knew it. To go so far, however, as to say that they were Christians in the sense of being regenerated believers, is unsubstantiated, for Christian regeneration is not without an inward possession of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, we see that Paul baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. Robert Lyon is persuaded that this was “an act he would hardly have performed had he regarded them as Christians.”

According to the testimony of the twelve Ephesian disciples they had not experienced the receiving of the Holy Ghost. Rather, they were conscious of having been baptized only “*unto John’s baptism.*” In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul assures us that “*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*” (8:9). Having received the baptism of repentance, they had been prepared to believe in the coming of

Christ, whom John had proclaimed, but evidently had not received any further instruction in the Christian religion.

According to F. F. Bruce, “the baptism of John was a baptism of expectation and preparation rather than one of fulfillment. The major difference,” says he, “between John’s baptism and Christ’s baptism was that the Holy Ghost was imparted through Christ’s baptism. John’s water baptism was only a shadow and symbol of Christ’s Spirit baptism. Thus the superiority of Christian baptism demonstrates that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John” (Luke 7:28).

Reference to the “aorist participle” is sometimes urged in support of the King James translation of Paul’s question. It is true that the word *believed* in verse 2 is an aorist participle, but in light of the best scholarship of New Testament Greek, the action of an aorist participle may be *before*, *after*, or *simultaneous* with the main verb. Most commentators recognize this as a *coincident aorist* which is best

translated *when* rather than *since*. Randy Maddox wrote a paper in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* entitled, “The Use of the Aorist Tense in Holiness Exegesis” (Fall 1981), in which he

argued that understanding of the aorist tense was inadequate among many in the holiness movement.

W. B. Pope, sometimes referred to as the Prince of Theologians, assures us that Paul’s question literally means, “*Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?*” He further assures us that possession of the Holy Spirit is not reserved to those only who are sanctified wholly. “This kingdom of God,” says he, “is already within [regenerate believers], if we would let it come in its perfection. Neither *since* in this passage [KJV], nor the *after* in ‘*after that ye believed*’ (Eph. 1:13), has anything corresponding in the original Greek. The teaching tends to diminish the value of regeneration, which is itself a life hid with Christ in God.”

Pope lived some years after early Methodism’s original leaders and personally witnessed the early rise and development of the modern holiness movement. He is found giving warning concerning some of the new teachings he was then observing: “There has

been a tendency among some teachers of religion in modern times,” writes Pope, “so to speak of Christian perfection as to seem to make it the entrance into a new order of life, one namely of higher consecration under the influence of the Holy Ghost. That this higher life is the secret of entire consecration there can be no doubt. But there is no warrant in Scripture for making it a new dispensation of the Spirit, or a Pentecostal visitation superadded to the state of conversion.”

To His disciples shortly before His ascension, Jesus declared: “*Ye shall be baptized by the Holy Ghost.*” In his *Notes*, Mr. Wesley assures the reader: “And so are all true believers, unto the end of the world.”

With like persuasion, Adam Clarke plainly demonstrates that “the disciples of Christ differed from those of John” by having been “*baptized with the Holy Ghost*. And to this day,” continues Clarke, “the genuine disciples of Christ are distinguished from all false religionists, and from nominal Christians, by being made [at regeneration] partakers of this Spirit, which enlightens their minds, and convinces of sin, righteousness, and judgment; quickens their souls, witnesses to their conscience that they are the children of God, and purifies their hearts. Those who have not received these blessings from the Holy Spirit, whatever their profession may be, know nothing better than John’s baptism: good, excellent in its kind, but ineffectual to the salvation of those who live under the meridian of Christianity.”

John Wesley, John Fletcher, Adam Clarke, Richard Watson and W. B. Pope all taught that water baptism and Spirit baptism were both initiatory events in the life of a believer. Baptism in the Spirit was symbolized by water baptism. Historically, they were again in agreement with the Reformers before them and the earliest church Fathers.

One does not find a single religious movement the first eighteen-hundred and fifty years of church history whose teachings made the baptism of the Holy Spirit synonymous with a second work of grace. Such a view originated with the modern holiness movement. It is true that John Fletcher and others within early Methodism considered both regeneration and entire sanctification as being wrought by the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” In this way they looked upon the Holy Spirit’s work in a holistic sense. Regeneration, however, was never considered to be accomplished without the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

Water baptism and Spirit baptism are both initiatory events in the life of a believer.

nor was the “baptism of the Holy Spirit considered synonymous with entire sanctification and thus confined to a second work of grace.

The Fathers consistently understood water baptism as being symbolic of Spirit baptism by which regeneration is wrought in the heart of the believer. “*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,*” wrote St. Paul, “*and have been all made to drink into one Spirit*” (1 Cor. 12:13).

The apostle hereby assures us that all true believers are baptized in the Holy Spirit and that this is an initial work of the Spirit by which they enter the mystical church of Christ. New Testament perfection was then taught by the Fathers and early Methodists as an advanced work of grace by the same Spirit. But baptism (both water and Spirit) was always considered the way of entrance into the Church and Body of Christ.

As Robert Lyon assures us: “From Pentecost on every one enters [the Church] upon receiving (i.e., the baptism) of the Spirit. The 3,000 at Pentecost, the Samaritans, Paul, Cornelius and his household, and the 12 in Ephesus all enter the body of Christ by virtue of the common experience of the Spirit... To be baptized is to receive the Spirit as promised. From Pentecost on, not to have the Spirit is not to be a Christian (cf. Rom. 8:9).”

It is a mistake to equate regeneration with the experience of Christ’s disciples prior to Pentecost as some do. Such a view sinks the standard of New Testament Christianity dreadfully low, making conversion or the new birth far less the miraculous heart transformation that the New Testament describes it to be. While with Christ in the flesh, the disciples lived in a

time of transition between the old and new covenants; between the dispensation of the law and that of the Holy Spirit. The experience of the original disciples cannot, therefore, provide a model or pattern for today. “The model,” writes Dr. Lyon, “is not followed elsewhere in Acts or the early Church [and] it fails to consider the... significance of Pentecost as the once-for-all inaugurative event which establishes the Church.”

It is also popular in today’s holiness movement to speak of the disciples as being entirely sanctified on the day of Pentecost. But where in Scripture is this asserted? Generally speaking, it can be said that the Holy Spirit’s presence in not without His sanctifying influence. So it is that the regenerated experience is what theologians identify as initial sanctification. To conclude, however, that the disciples experienced a second work of grace on that day is going beyond the plain revelation of Scripture. It is true that, according to Peter, their hearts were purified on that day by faith (Acts 15:9). Interestingly, this same Apostle in his first epistle, refers to “*newborn babes*” in the faith as “*having purified your souls,*” which, according to Alex Deasley, is explained in the following verse as “*being born again*” (1 Peter 1:22-23). It must therefore be acknowledged that regeneration is not without its purifying influence (Titus 3:5).

Amazingly, some in the modern holiness movement have convinced themselves that they have made improvements on the teachings of early Methodism. However, while thus persuaded they would also have to believe and claim their views to be superior to all who came before the early Methodists, even those of the earliest church Fathers.

Getting Acquainted with Arminius, Part 2

John S. Knox

In the years preceding the *Declaration of Sentiments*’ creation, Arminius frequently defended his position as a minister and theologian in the Reformed church and as a supporter of Calvin. His *Declaration* is the summary compilation of that defensive effort against the Supralapsarians and high Calvinists. As such, each section of the *Declaration* will be inspected as to its topic(s), thesis statement, and supportive assertions.

The *Declaration* consists of ten chapters on a variety of topics, but Arminius did not dwell equally in consideration on each of them. With clear purposes in

mind, he gave appropriate attention to the aspects of doctrine crucial for a better awareness of his position, and in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the relationship between humanity and God. As such, he hoped his presentation would serve a dual purpose in his endeavors for biblical truth and in his defense of Supralapsarian charges.

SECTION I - “ON PREDESTINATION”

This is by far the most complex part of the *Declaration*. Nearly 15,000 words long, this exposition has three purposes. First, Arminius describes the

Supralapsarian understanding of predestination and explains how it is harmful and wrong. Second, he presents other views of predestination with their finer points of understanding and benefit. Lastly, Arminius presents his own views on predestination.

Arminius' depiction of the Supralapsarian understanding regarding this topic is unflattering, to say the least. He begins his examination with a blunt statement of dismissal of their assertion that God has predestined some to salvation and others to damnation. He points out the fact that it is a belief "...espoused by those [Supralapsarians] who assume the very highest ground of this Predestination." So begins his condemnation of their extremist doctrinal interpretation of Calvin and the Bible.

He then goes on to detail their arguments and later provides the grounds for his rejection of these theological opinions. The main reasons for his denunciation of the Supralapsarian position are: (1) "it is not

the foundation of Christianity, of Salvation, or of its certainty," (2) it "comprises within it neither the whole nor any part of the Gospel," and (3) it "was never

admitted, decreed, or approved in any Council, either general or particular, for the first six hundred years after Christ." Supplementing this, he adds, it "neither agrees nor corresponds with the Harmony of those Confessions which were printed and published together in one Volume at Geneva, in the name of the Reformed and Protestant Churches," it is "repugnant to the Nature of God," it is "opposed to the Act of Creation," it is "injurious to the Glory of God," it is "hurtful to the salvation of men," and it "is in open hostility to the Ministry of the Gospel."

Apparently, Arminius has little trouble pointing out the defects of the Supralapsarian approach to predestination. He backs up each of these criticisms with proof of their flawed foundations. This long list is a testament to his personal disdain for the doctrine promoted by these high Calvinists.

Arminius then goes on to describe two other incorrect ways of conceptualizing predestination other

than that of the Supralapsarians. First, God irreversibly decided in eternity,

to make (according to his own good pleasure,) the smaller portion out of the general mass of mankind partakers of his grace and glory, to the praise of his own glorious grace. But according to his pleasure he also passed by the greater portion of men, and left them in their own nature, which is incapable of every thing supernatural, [or beyond itself,] and did not communicate to them that saving and supernatural grace by which their nature, (if it still retained its integrity,) might be strengthened, or by which, if it were corrupted, it might be restored—for a demonstration of his own liberty. Yet after God had made these men sinners and guilty of death, he punished them with death eternal—for a demonstration of his own justice.

The crux of this complex passage is the suggestion that Arminius finds no logic or love in God predestining some people to salvation and others to damnation whether it is before or after the Fall of Adam — both seem incongruous considering God's expressed plan in Scripture for humanity.

Arminius rejects this understanding because it makes God the author of sin, which he cannot and will not affirm. Furthermore, this concept suggests an understanding of predestination that is "a palpable and absurd self-contradiction." It does not fit into any logical understanding of the nature of humanity nor does it accommodate God's biblical plan of redemption.

Arminius describes a third understanding of predestination in which, "God acts without the least consideration of repentance and faith in those whom he elects, or of impenitence and unbelief in those whom he reprobates." Arminius condemns this third understanding of predestination because it suggests that God does not care about the moral behavior or authentic faith of His followers—a concept not found in Scripture. This concept conflicts with the image of the God of justice accepted by early church fathers. God carefully judges the world and all its inhabitants, suggesting that He would not arbitrarily send certain people to heaven and hell, regardless of their good or bad faith in Him.

God decreed to receive into favor those who repent and believe.

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Finally, Arminius presents his own understanding of predestination. Rather than the lengthy exercise used earlier to invalidate the Supralapsarian view, Arminius offers a short and concise argument for his beliefs in this matter. He points to four decrees of God as evidence for his standpoint.

First, God “decreed to appoint his Son, Jesus Christ, for a Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Priest and King, who might destroy sin by his own death, might by his obedience obtain the salvation which had been lost, and might communicate it by his own virtue.” Jesus Christ is the ultimate sin offering used to appropriate the complete salvation of all humanity. Second, God “decreed to receive into favor those who repent and believe, and, in Christ, for his sake and through Him, to effect the salvation of such penitents and Believers as persevered to the end.” Remaining in a sinful state only leads to death and to eternal damnation, but turning from sin leads to personal salvation. Third, “God decreed to administer in a sufficient and efficacious manner the means which were necessary for repentance and faith.” The resources for finding one’s salvation are

always available to everyone because God is ultimately wise, merciful, and just. Fourth,

He knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his preventing grace, believe, and, through his subsequent grace would persevere, according to the before described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith; and, by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who would not believe and persevere.

This is not the same as ordaining some to salvation and others to perdition. Rather, it is a supernatural ability to see into all possibilities of humanity and the future. It speaks of the power of God, which, conveniently, Arminius discusses in the next section in his *Declaration*. Predestination was perhaps the most serious misjudgment of the Supralapsarians according to Arminius, but his high Calvinist peers also embraced other extreme distortions of biblical interpretation and application, dangerously manifest in their rigid doctrinal positions not explicitly found nor supported in Holy Scriptures.

Reviews:

Diane Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2010). 320 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8341-2469-1

Leclerc, professor of historical theology at Northwest Nazarene University, opens with a plea for a postmodern approach to holiness. She argues that we cannot go back to modernism. And I applaud the rejection of Enlightenment rationalism as the ultimate source of authority.

But the postmodern approach emphasizes complexity, ambiguity, and diversity. It rejects any notion of absolutes and therefore is rejected by most evangelicals. However, Leclerc proposes seven ways in which Wesleyan theology parallels postmodern theology. She embraces a postmodern Christian consciousness which is expressed in the emerging church movement.

What follows is her postmodern, relational, feminist, Wesleyan presentation of holiness which follows the quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Part 1 is a survey of the Scriptural foundation. Part 2 is a survey of holiness historically. Part 3 is the theological statement based on reason and Part 4 is the experience, holy living for a new century.

Leclerc does affirm that the Bible stands above the three handmaids of tradition, reason, and experience. However, chapter one, “How to read the Bible as a Wesleyan,” implies that we approach the Bible with a certain philosophic presupposition. This, however, may result in an interpretation which differs from Wesley himself.

There was nothing unique to Wesley about his hermeneutic. He utilized Reformation hermeneutics, the grammatical-historical approach. Leclerc describes Wesley’s approach as inductive, yet she states her conclusions *before* ever approaching scripture. Basically, we are to accept Wesley’s order of salvation and so when we read the Bible we read those presuppositions into the text. Yet Calvinists read the same scripture with their own presuppositions and arrive at very different conclusions. There can be no objective proof whether either approach is right because we have already stripped the Bible of its final authority.

Leclerc argues that exegesis is hard. The result is that she tends to avoid stating what a passage means. Thus she is unsure of what happened at Pentecost, how to interpret Romans 7, or even what happened to John Wesley at Aldersgate. Yet she is critical of Wesley’s views on biblical authority and is sure that we should reject biblical inerrancy. We are assured that Wesley would have adopted the biblical criticism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had he been living now. Therefore, we are given permission to reject Wesley’s view of inspiration and authority, but we must read the Bible with Wesley’s analogy of faith — yet realizing he may not be right!

Part 1, Biblical Holiness, was rather sophomoric and does not lay an adequate foundation. Part 2, Holiness History, is stron-

ger. Leclerc, however, tends to write a consensus history which plays down any departures from Wesleyan theology by the holiness movement. For example, she repeatedly connects Phoebe Palmer's "altar theology" with the comments of Adam Clarke. However, the truth is that Palmer misunderstood and misapplied Clarke's comments. I also think Leclerc misunderstands John Fletcher's statements on Spirit baptism. On the other hand, Leclerc is absolutely right that Charles Finney was teaching a new kind of Calvinism.

Part 3, Holiness Theology for Today, is a strong section. Leclerc affirms total depravity *and* total depravity. She sees idolatry, not pride, as the essence of original sin.

She explains how faith is a gift of God and not a human work. She presents a Wesleyan order of salvation begins with prevenient grace. She declares, "Void of an understanding of prevenient grace, we find no way of explaining how the steps of faith are possible except as an act of the human will." Without such a doctrine of prevenient grace, the danger is that we embrace a "practical Pelagianism."

Leclerc also warns against proclaiming sanctification in such a way that the power of the new birth is minimized. "Holiness begins at regeneration. Sanctification begins at our new birth in Jesus Christ." Later on she writes that at the moment of salvation God begins to impart righteousness to us.

She describes sanctification as the grace which heals the disease of sin and empowers us for sacrificial living. As God pours his love into the heart, love excludes sin. In a five-page section, Leclerc deals with ten myths about sanctification. Here she is basically correcting misconceptions which arose from the holiness movement and is giving a more Wesleyan understanding.

The further we read, the better it gets. Part 4, Holy Living for a New Century, begins with a chapter on holiness as purity. This chapter ends with a helpful excursus on sexuality. The next chapter deals with holiness as perfection and relied heavily on Wesley.

In the chapter on holiness as power, when discussing power for victory over sin, Leclerc finally comes down on Romans 7. "What Paul talks about in Rom. 7 is *not* to be descriptive of a saved, redeemed, or sanctified Christian's experience."

This chapter contains a very helpful discussion under the heading "power when life goes wrong." Leclerc says if holiness is anything, it is absolute dependence on God. This weakness is strength because his strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9-10). Thus, power and weakness are not in contradiction. Weakness elicits our dependence on God and on each other. We are holy through the broken body of Christ. In fact, God saved the world through the broken body and shed blood of Christ, which we celebrate at the Lord's table. Therefore, the heart of God is present to the broken and weak. In her 2008 Presidential Address to the Wesleyan Theological Society, Leclerc expanded on this theme, revealing how she has watched some of those closest to her suffer. Her own son has a form of Autism.

This chapter is followed by chapters on holiness as character and holiness as love. I was very depressed with how this book began and very challenged by how this book ended. I have no doubt that the author is a woman of God. All this raises the question which begs to be asked, If Leclerc can produce a challenging theological statement of Wesleyan doctrine without an adequate biblical foundation, how important is the biblical foundation?

My opinion is that this theology reflects the residual influence of those prior to Leclerc who *did* have an adequate biblical foundation. How far can we go in accommodating the latest philosophical trends until we have compromised truth? We will be in trouble when academics, who do not have a heart after God, write our theology. I believe Leclerc does have a heart after God and the second half of this book is worth the asking price. Get it, even if you skip the first section.

– Vic Reasoner

***Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will, and the Nature of God.* John D. Wagner, ed. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011. ISBN 13:978-1610970303**

Dare we say that the majority of "Arminians" have never read the writings of James Arminius? And it is little wonder considering the three volume compilation of his writings, The Works of James Arminius, containing over 2200 pages of relatively small type, is not easily accessible to many would-be readers, and its contents are not easily navigated by those who have the access. As a result, Arminius is perhaps the most misunderstood, misquoted, and misrepresented theologian of all time, and that not by Calvinists only, but by those actually claiming to be Arminian in their theology. Thankfully, John D. Wagner has made the writings of Arminius much more accessible and

much easier to read. Not only has he supplied introductions to each section, but the language of Arminius has also been updated. For those familiar with the original Works, this might not be appreciated or even necessary. But for the rest of us, who find it easier to read the New King James Version rather than the original KJV, this is a welcome addition.

This book will be especially helpful to those who are interested in the Calvinist and Arminian debate as Wagner has chosen writings that deal largely with election and salvation. By reading the words of Arminius firsthand many of the "misunder-

standings” concerning Arminius’ views on these subjects will be quickly dispersed. The selected writings are most helpful in understanding Arminius’ orthodox view of salvation that is dependent entirely on the grace of God from beginning to end.

To quote from Robert Picirilli, who wrote the Foreword for this work, “Anyone who desires to know what Arminius really said will do well to read these selections and will share the in-

debtedness of the church to this editor.” So those like me, who often quote Arminius or refer to his teachings, who are more than just a little interested in the ongoing Calvinist—Arminian debate, and who have found it difficult to wade through those 2200 plus pages, this book of less than 400 pages is for you. I recommend that you add this one to your collection!

– James O. Jones, Jr.

William H. Willimon, *This We Believe: The Core of Wesleyan Faith and Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010). 155 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4267-0689-9

Here is an introduction to Wesleyan theology written at a lay level. As bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, Willimon writes that we should avoid unproductive, theological hairsplitting. While we should not be drawn into squabbles over nonessentials,

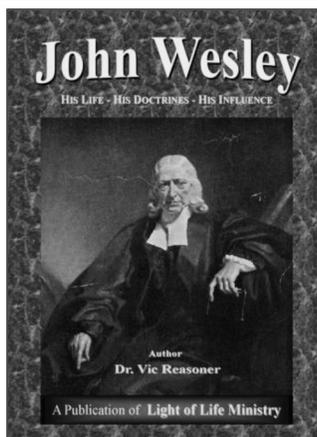
At our worst, this generous Wesleyan “think and let think” has led to our acting as if ideas about God are not that important after all and to the sad error of thinking that because thought about God is inconsequential, who cares what anybody believes as long as that belief is sincerely held? Wesley

was a fierce foe of this sort of goofy theological “indifferentism.” So is the Bible.

In a later chapter, Willimon rejects biblical fundamentalism, claiming that we cannot reduce the bubbling vitality of the Bible to a set of fundamentals. Yet Willimon does a fairly adequate job in articulating fundamental or essential Wesleyan emphases. His summary of theology in the Wesleyan tradition, “warm hearts and active hands,” should also include “transformed minds.” While he could have affirmed the essential doctrines of systematic theology with more clarity, many of them are implied.

This introduction is intended as a companion to the new *Wesley Study Bible* which was reviewed in the Fall 2009 *Arminian Magazine*.

– Vic Reasoner



Available now is this newly released twelve lesson (160 pages) study titled *John Wesley – His Life, His Doctrines, His Influence*. Written by Dr. Vic Reasoner and published through Light of Life Ministry, this introduction to John Wesley is one of 22 courses offered through *The Wesley Institute*, the continuing education program of Southern Methodist College. It can also be used in a Sunday School or Bible study format, or just for private instruction. To order this study for yourself or to request more information about *The Wesley Institute*, see instructions below!

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