

The Problem of John Wesley

Evangelicals have long been enamoured with John Wesley; even those who hate his Arminianism feel constrained to applaud his evangelism, endeavour and organisational skills, while his journals make thrilling reading. However, in recent years there has been a steady move by Reformed writers to champion Wesley as an orthodox hero and completely ignore his character and theology. The book by Iain Murray, *Wesley and the Men Who Followed*, being the most recent example. While we can be glad about Wesley's impact on 18th century UK evangelism (though not as successful as usually thought), we should be aware of the serious problems surrounding Wesley. This short paper is intended to give a succinct summary of them. [Quotes to Wesley's Works are from the AGES CD Rom, 5th edition.]

Theology

Wesley was a hardened anti-Calvinist

- Wesley did not misunderstand Calvinism, as claimed by some, but was familiar with both Calvin and the Puritans, being clear on its precepts (See *Works*, Vol 11, p494). He could quote from Calvin's Institutes, English and French Confessions, as well as the canons of Dort (See *Works*, Vol 10, p244ff). In Vol 10 he quotes many Reformed sources (Calvin, Zwingli, Piscator, Dr. Twisse, Peter Martyr Vermigli) and on page 307 he even quotes Calvin's *Responsio ad Calumnias Nebulonis cujusdam ad Articulum primum*.
- Wesley accuses the Reformed representatives at the Synod of Dordt as being 'not so learned' as the papists at Trent and blames zealots, led by the Prince of Orange, for hounding the followers of Arminius. He completely ignores the damage done by the Remonstrants to the Dutch churches, their heresies or their despicable character evidenced in the Synod meetings resulting in their expulsion. (*Works*, Vol 10, 427)
- Despite this, Wesley attributed Calvinism to Satan and called it a 'deadly poison' and the most deadly and successful enemy (*Works*, Vol 13, p193, p243, 285).
- *What is the direct antidote to Methodism, the doctrine of heart-holiness? A. Calvinism: All the devices of Satan, for these fifty years, have done far less toward stopping this work of God, than that single doctrine. It strikes at the root of salvation from sin, previous to glory, putting the matter on quite another issue. ... Be diligent to prevent them, and to guard these tender minds against the predestinarian poison.* (*Works*, Vol 8, p395)
- Wesley warned his followers to avoid reformed churches that taught Limited Atonement.
- He published many articles savagely attacking the concept of God's sovereignty.
- Wesley called the doctrine of predestination, 'a doctrine full of blasphemy' and God as 'worse than the devil'. (See later.)
- Calvinism, according to Wesley, was 'not the Gospel' but rather 'the greatest hindrance to the work of God', the worst device 'Satan threw in the way' which 'strikes at the root of salvation from sin'. (*Works*, Vol 13, p59, 193, Vol 10, p531, Vol 8, p346, 395)
- *The Methodist Magazine* was originally published by Wesley as *The Arminian Magazine* (from 1788).
- Wesley is a lesson for watered down Calvinists, Amyraldians and four-pointers. He saw clearly that election and predestination necessarily require reprobation, and he hated this doctrine. It is impossible to support election and not reprobation, if God

selects some, he does not select the rest. If you reject reprobation, the necessary result is Arminianism or some half-way house of inconsistency like Amyraldism. Wesley was at least honest about this, if you reject reprobation, you must objectively adopt Arminianism, which he did. His arguments against Calvinism are hard for modern 'moderate' reformed folk to accept because he is right; Calvinism necessarily implies reprobation and limited atonement. *For I do not believe ... the doctrine of absolute predestination. I never did believe it, nor the doctrines connected with it, no, not for an hour. In this, at least, I have been consistent with myself. I have never varied an hair's breadth; I cannot while I believe the Bible, while I believe either the Old or New Testament. What I do believe, and always have believed in this matter, I will declare with all simplicity. (1.) I believe no decree of reprobation. I do not believe the Father of spirits ever Consign'd one unborn soul to hell, Or damn'd him from his mother's womb. (2.) I believe no decree of preterition, which is only reprobation whitewashed. I do not believe God ever sent one man into the world, to whom he had decreed never to give that grace whereby alone he could escape damnation. (3.) I do not believe (what is only preterition or reprobation in other words) any such absolute election, as implies that all but the absolutely elect shall inevitably be damned. (4.) I do not believe the doctrine of irresistible grace, or of infallible perseverance; because both the one and the other implies that election which cannot stand without preterition or reprobation. (Works, Vol 10, p449)*

- The very essence of Wesley's theology is the work of man. Being a strict disciplinarian and insisting on long catalogues of do's and don'ts for his followers (even not to eat 'dainty meats'), Wesley thought that he glorified God by making salvation an effort of man thus freeing God from the charge of dooming certain men to hell:
 - ⇒ God's foreknowledge is not determinative but is a response to a future action of man in having faith.
 - ⇒ Salvation commenced when man believed.
 - ⇒ Man can resist the call of God via the Holy Spirit.
 - ⇒ The atonement is for everyone. Man can reject God if he chooses to or can accept the work of the cross by believing in Christ by himself.
 - ⇒ Holiness and sanctification is a work of man's obedience aided by a measure of divine grace, but this grace is only granted when a man does something (believes).
 - ⇒ Salvation is continued to glorification by man's works of obedience. Persevering to the end is up to man.
 - ⇒ Perfection from all sin, while on earth, is possible if a man is determined enough to love at all times like God does.
 - ⇒ Salvation is, therefore, of works not of God. God is not sovereign over salvation, man is. God merely set up the opportunity.
- Such a theology is not only dishonouring to God, it is devilish and without any Biblical warrant.

Predestination / Election / Reprobation

- *the doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God. (Works, Vol 7, p418)*
- *this doctrine not only tends to destroy Christian holiness, happiness, and good works, but hath also a direct and manifest tendency to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation. (Works, Vol 7, p422)*
- *it is a doctrine full of blasphemy; of such blasphemy as I should dread to mention. (Works, Vol 7, p424)*

- *This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination! And here I fix my foot. On this I joint issue with every assertor of it. You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. (Works, Vol 7, p425)*
- *This is the blasphemy for which (however I love the persons who assert it) I abhor the doctrine of predestination. (Works, Vol 7, p426)*
- *I cannot believe, that all those who are not thus elected to glory, must perish everlastingly. (Works, Vol 13, p603)*
- *Predestination is not a doctrine taught by the Methodists. (Works, Vol 13, p606)*
- *The doctrine of absolute predestination naturally leads to the chambers of death. (Works, Vol 10, p303)*
- *'All who suffer (allow) Christ to make them alive are elect according to the foreknowledge of God'. (Works, Vol 7, p427)*
- *I believe this election to be conditional, as well as the reprobation. ... But unconditional election I cannot believe ... because it necessarily implies unconditional reprobation. Find out any election which does not imply reprobation, and I will gladly agree to it. But reprobation I can never agree to. (Works, Vol 10, p249, 250)*
- *Mr. Toplady says, "God has a positive will to destroy the reprobate for their sins." (Chap. 1.) For their sins! How can that be? I positively assert, that (on this scheme) they have no sins at all. [In other words, God is to blame for men's sins under the Calvinistic system.] (Works, Vol 10, p441)*

Limited Atonement

- *"Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died," (Rom. xiv. 15,) - a clear proof that Christ died, not only for those that are saved, but also for them that perish. (Works, Vol7, p423)*
- *"What! Can the blood of Christ burn in hell? Or can the purchase by the blood of Christ go thither?" I answer, ... If the oracles of God are true, one who was purchased by the blood of Christ may go thither. For he that was sanctified by the blood of Christ was purchased by the blood of Christ. But one who was sanctified by the blood of Christ may nevertheless go to hell; may fall under that fiery indignation which shall for ever devour the adversaries. (Works, Vol 10,p354-355)*
- *that it is bought for every child of man, and actually given to every one that believeth (Works, Vol 10, p299)*

Irresistible Grace

- *I believe, that the grace of God ...may be, and hath been, resisted. ... I cannot believe, that all those must be damned, in whom it does not thus irresistibly work. (Works, Vol 13, p604)*
- *I do not believe the doctrine of irresistible grace. (Works, Vol 10, p449)*
- *salvation by irresistible grace ... makes man a mere machine, and, consequently, no more rewardable and punishable. (Works, Vol 10, p273)*

Perseverance

- *Wesley believed that justification depended on a 'moment by moment' obedience by the believer (Murray p225). Q. Are works necessary to the continuance of faith? A. Without doubt; for a man may forfeit the free gift of God, either by sins of omission or commission. Q. Can faith be lost but for want of works? A. It cannot but through disobedience. (Works, Vol 8, p311-312)*
- *I do not believe the doctrine ... of infallible perseverance. (Works, Vol 10, p449)*

- *Those who live by faith may yet fall from God, and perish everlastingly. (Works Vol 10, p293)*
- *those who live by faith may yet fall from God, and perish everlastingly ... Those who are sanctified by the blood of the covenant may so fall as to perish everlastingly. (Works Vol 10, p296)*
- *On this authority, I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly. One who is endued with the faith that purifies the heart, that produces a good conscience, may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly. ... Those who are grafted into the good olive-tree, the spiritual, invisible Church, may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly ... God is the Father of them that believe, so long as they believe. (Works, Vol 10, p340,ff)*
- *... Those who are branches of Christ, the true vine, may yet finally fall from grace. ... It remains, that true believers, who are branches of the true vine, may nevertheless finally fall. ... Those who so effectually know Christ, as by that knowledge have escaped the pollutions of the world, may yet fall back into those pollutions, and perish everlastingly. (Works, Vol 10, p288,ff)*

Perfectionism

- *... circumcision of the heart ... is that habitual disposition of soul which ... is termed holiness ... the being endued with those virtues ... [is] so “renewed in the spirit of our mind,” as to be “perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.” (Works, Vol 5, p283)*
- *Real Christianity always begins in poverty of spirit, and goes on in the order here set down, till the “man of God is made perfect.” (Works, Vol 5, p336)*
- *All real Christians, or believers in Christ, are made free from outward sin. (Works, Vol 6, p19) By sin I mean a voluntary transgression of a known law. (Works, Vol 6, p468)*
- *In conformity, therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and to the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion, — A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin. (Works, Vol 6, p28)*
- *Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect, as not to commit sins and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers. (Works, Vol 6, p31)*
- *St. John says, ‘All sin is a transgression of the law.’ True, but he does not say, All transgression of the law is sin. This I deny. (Works, Vol 6, p462)*
- *“But surely we cannot be saved from sin, while we dwell in a sinful body.” A sinful body? I pray observe, how deeply ambiguous, how equivocal, this expression is! But there is no authority for it in Scripture: The word sinful body is never found there. And as it is totally unscriptural, so it is palpably absurd. For no body, or matter of any kind, can be sinful. (Works, Vol 6, p462) [Had he never read Rm6:6, 8:10?]*
- *Several persons have enjoyed this blessing, without any interruption, for many years. Several enjoy it at this day. And not a few have enjoyed it unto their death, as they have declared with their latest breath; calmly witnessing that God had saved them from all sin. (Works, Vol 6, p465)*
- *By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbour, ruling our tempers, words, and actions. ... As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant. ... I believe this instant generally is the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body. But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before. I believe it is usually many years after justification; but that it may be within five years or five*

months after it, I know no conclusive argument to the contrary. (Works, Vol 11, p523)

Justification

- He admitted that his idea was ‘a hair’s breadth’ from ‘salvation by works’. [*Is not this salvation by works? Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition. ... As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid: We are rewarded according to our works, yea, because of our works. How does this differ from, “for the sake of our works?” ... Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot.* (Works, Vol 8, p397)]
- *I do not believe salvation by works. Yet if any man can prove (what I judge none ever did, or ever will) that there is no medium between this and absolute predestination; I will rather subscribe to this than to that, as far less absurd of the two.* (Works, Vol 10, p450)
- *Those that hold, ‘Everyone is absolutely predestinated either to salvation or damnation,’ see no medium between salvation by works and salvation by absolute decrees. It follows, that whosoever denies salvation by absolute decrees, in so doing (according to their apprehension) asserts salvation by works. And herein I verily believe they are right. As averse as I once was to the thought, upon further consideration, I allow there is, there can be, no medium. Either salvation is by absolute decree, or it is (in a scriptural sense) by works. Yea, this I will proclaim on the housetop, — there is no medium between these. You must either assert unconditional decrees, or (in a sound sense) salvation by works.* (Works, Vol 11, p578)
- *It is plain, then, if we affirm, No man is saved by an absolute, unconditional decree, but; only by a conditional one; we must expect, all who hold unconditional decrees will say, we teach salvation by works. Let none, therefore, who hold universal redemption be surprised at being charged with this. Let us deny it no more; let us frankly and fairly meet those who advance it upon their own ground. If they charge you with holding salvation by works, answer plainly, “In your sense, I do; for I deny that our final salvation depends upon any absolute, unconditional decree. If, therefore, there be no medium, I do hold salvation by works.* (Works, Vol 11, p579)
- *Assurance of salvation was in line with man’s deserving it. The righteousness of Christ is doubtless necessary for any soul that enters into glory: But so is personal holiness too, for every child of man. ... The former is necessary to entitle us to heaven; the latter to qualify us for it. Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no claim to glory; without [personal] holiness we could have no fitness for it. ... Choose holiness, by my grace; which is the way, the only way, to everlasting life.* (Works, Vol 7, p352-355)
- *The nature of justification. ... I believe the condition of this is faith ... It is allowed, also, that repentance, and “fruits meet for repentance,” go before faith. (Mark i. 15; Matthew iii. 8.) ... Repentance absolutely must go before faith; fruits meet for it, if there be opportunity.* (Works, Vol 8, p55-56)
- *But must not repentance, and works meet for repentance, go before this faith [i.e. justifying faith]? A. Without doubt; if by repentance you mean conviction of sin; and by works meet for repentance, obeying God as far as we can, forgiving our brother, leaving off from evil, doing good, and using his ordinances, according to the power we have received.* (Works, Vol 8, p310)
- *Q. But can it be conceived that God has any regard to the sincerity of an unbeliever? A. Yes, so much, that, if he persevere therein, God will infallibly give him faith. ... Q. But do we not give up faith, and put sincerity in its place, as the condition of our*

acceptance with God? A. We believe it is one condition of our acceptance, as repentance likewise is. And we believe it a condition of our continuing in a state of acceptance. (Works, Vol 8, p329-330)

- We have received it as a maxim, that "a man is to do nothing in order to justification." Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favour with God, should "cease from evil, and learn to do well." (Works, Vol 8, p396-7)
- Yet I believe, (and that without the least self-contradiction,) that final salvation is "by works as a condition." (Works, Vol 10, p432)
- Wesley denied imputed righteousness. (Works, Vol 10, p381)

Free Will

- Men are as free in believing or not believing as if he [God] did not know it at all. Indeed, if man were not free, he could not be held accountable either for his thoughts, words, or actions. If he were not free, he would not be capable either of reward or punishment; he would be incapable either of virtue or vice, of being either morally good or bad. (Works, Vol 6, p256)
- Were human liberty taken away, men would be as incapable of virtue as stones. Therefore, (with reverence be it spoken,) the Almighty himself cannot do this thing. (Works, Vol 6, p355)
- I am free to choose whom I will serve; and if I choose the better part, to continue therein even unto death. (Works Vol 7, p258)
- The God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made. ... But he will not force them to accept it; he leaves them in the hands of their own counsel. (Works, Vol 7, p355)

Baptismal Regeneration

- What are the benefits we receive by baptism ... the first of these is, the washing away the guilt of original sin. (Works, Vol 10, p227)
- By baptism we enter into covenant with God; into that everlasting covenant ... that new covenant, ... even to 'give them a new heart and a new spirit'. (Works, Vol 10, p228)
- By baptism we are admitted into the Church, and consequently made members of Christ. (Works, Vol 10, p228)
- By baptism, we who were "by nature children of wrath" are made the children of God. And this regeneration which our Church in so many places ascribes to baptism ... (Works, Vol 10, p228-9)
- [By] the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again; whence it is also called by the Apostle, 'the washing of regeneration.' (Works, Vol 10, p229)

Prayers for the dead

- In this kind of general prayer, therefore, "for the faithful departed," I conceive myself to be clearly justified, (Works, Vol 9 p68)

The unconverted heathen

Wesley believed that there would be unconverted Muslims (and others) in heaven. In fact, the word 'heathen' appears repeatedly in his works, more often than words like 'Holy Spirit', and frequently with a sense of approbation. He often alluded to the character of the heathen being more becoming than that of Christians and especially reformed Christians.

- *they will be saved during their unbelief... on the footing of honest Heathens, upon the plea of invincible ignorance. (Works, Vol 6, p233)*
- *Who of us is now accepted of God? He that now believes in Christ with a loving, obedient heart. But who among those that never heard of Christ? He that, according to the light he has, "feareth God and worketh righteousness." Is this the same with "he that is sincere?" Nearly, if not quite. Is not this salvation by works? Not by the merit of works, but by works as a condition. (Works, Vol 8, p397)*
- *does it not follow, that the whole heathen world is excluded from all possibility of salvation? Seeing they are cut off from faith; for faith cometh by hearing; and how shall they hear without a preacher?" I answer, St. Paul's words, spoken on another occasion, are applicable to this: "What the law speaketh, it speaketh to them that are under the law." Accordingly, that sentence, "He that believeth not shall be damned," is spoken of them to whom the Gospel is preached. Others it does not concern; and we are not required to determine any thing touching their final state. How it will please God, the Judge of all, to deal with them, we may leave to God himself. But this we know, that he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the Heathens also; that he is "rich in mercy to all that call upon him," according to the light they have; and that "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." (Works, Vol 7, p63)*
- *When one asked Chicali, an old Indian Chief, "Why do not you red men know as much as us white men?" he readily answered, "Because you have the great Word, and we have not." It cannot be doubted, but this plea will avail for millions of modern Heathens. Inasmuch as to them little is given, of them little will be required. As to the ancient Heathens, millions of them likewise were savages. No more therefore will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had. But many of them, especially in the civilised nations, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion. Yea, and so was that Mahometan, and Arabian, who, a century or two ago, wrote the Life of Hai Ebn Yokdan. The story seems to be feigned; but it contains all the principles of pure religion and undefiled. (Works, Vol 7, p226)*
- *I have no authority from the word of God "to judge those that are without;" nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. (Works, Vol 7, p394)*

The root of future heresies

It is long established that Wesleyanism is the main root of several aberrant church movements which led into each other: American Methodist Camp Meetings and revivalism, the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism, and the Charismatic Movement, let alone the Salvation Army and many other sects. However, the Wesleyan tradition continues to spawn heresy. The latest being the concept of the 'Openness of God' or 'Open Theism' led by Clark Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College in Ontario.

Pinnock's teaching is that Man has free will, God risks the results of man's independent actions, these actions can affect God's decisions, therefore, God cannot know the future and is not totally sovereign. Pinnock calls it '*a new wrinkle in an old tradition*', that tradition is Wesleyanism. *He identifies open theism as "Wesleyan-Arminianism with a twist." He traces its theological foundations to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, and Jacob Arminius.* Furthermore, Methodists appear to support Pinnock: The School of Theology at Seattle Pacific University featured him for its annual Palmer lecture in First Free Methodist Church. Randy Maddox, professor of theological studies at SPU and

a nationally-known expert on Wesleyan thought, said that he teaches three different models of God's 'foreknowledge', including open theism. *'In the breadth of the Wesleyan traditions there is very little concern or objection to open theism, even for the more traditional Free Methodists, Maddox said'*. (Quotes from Greg Piper, editor at large, *Punch*, Campus Newspaper of SPU, October 2002, page 3.)

Miscellaneous

- He believed in ghosts. *That there are ghosts, or realms below, not even a man of them now believes.* (Works, Vol 7, p372 favourably quoting a poet.) His family home had a poltergeist called 'Old Jeffrey' (Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley, A Biography*, p18-20). He even published articles on his family's experiences and other ghost stories while in later years he welcomed paranormal manifestations (Tomkins, p20).

Wesley's Order of Salvation

All systematic theologians have an *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) which helps us to understand how salvation works in us. It may help us to fist tabulate differences between sound theology and Wesley's system. [There are slight variations in the Calvinistic system (in the order of the first three items), but what appears below is generally agreed.] We can also see that Wesleyan theology (also called Evangelical Arminianism) differs from mainstream 17th century Arminianism.

Calvinism	Arminianism	Wesley's System
God's sovereign will		
God's decree of election		
The Fall	The Fall	The Fall
Total depravity of man	Man not totally depraved	Total depravity of man
Guilt of sin imputed to all men	Adam's sin is not imputed to all men	Guilt of sin imputed to all men but is removed by grace given at birth.
	Grace given to all men	Prevenient Grace given to all men to enable man to co-operate with God.
Gospel call hardens reprobates. God's effectual call to elect only.	Gospel calls all men	Gospel calls all men
Regeneration by Holy Spirit		
Conversion	Conversion of those who accept Gospel call.	Conversion of those who accept Gospel call.
Justification / adoption	Faith is accepted as righteousness (this is not the imputed righteousness of Christ). Justification is pardon but not righteousness. Faith results in regeneration.	Justifying grace given when a man believes.
Sanctification	Obedience depends on man	Sanctifying Grace
Perseverance	Perseverance depends on man, he can fall away.	Perseverance depends on man, he can fall away.
		Perfection in this life
Glorification	Glorification	Glorification

The original features of Wesley's theology are often called 'Wesley's order of salvation' and are further explained by him as follows:

Prevenient Grace: man cannot respond to God without God first enabling him by giving him faith. This universal Prevenient Grace can't save but draws all men to God (even those who have never heard the Gospel), and enables us to have faith in God.

BUT:

- there is no Biblical foundation for this prevenient grace. In fact, the idea is a Roman Catholic one.
- The Bible states that faith comes by hearing the Gospel (Rm 10:14-17), not by a universal grace.
- This Prevenient Grace is given to sinners without reference to the cross. There is no grace that does not arise from the atonement. There is no grace given by God to man that can be resisted (thus there is no 'common grace', rather there is providence).
- This prevenient grace is improved upon when a man believes. The grace of God wasn't sufficient, man had to do the work which God cannot do. This is foolish rubbish. It makes man's own faith as the ultimate cause of salvation when the Bible shows that faith is given by God (Eph 2:8-10).

Justifying Grace: when man actually responds to the Gospel by accepting Christ as saviour, he receives justifying grace which pardons from sin and unites men to Christ. This equates to regeneration which returns men to the state of Adam in Eden. This is salvation. Men are now seen as righteous by God like Christ.

BUT:

- There is no such thing as 'justifying grace' mentioned in the Bible.
- Grace leads to man's response, not the other way around (Eph 2:8-9; Jn 1:12-13)
- Regeneration precedes conversion; the kingdom of God cannot even be seen (let alone believed in) unless one is born again (Jn 3:3-8).
- Regeneration is stated to be a work of God not a work of man (Eph 2:1; Titus 3:5; 1 Pt 1:3, 23-25; Jm 1:18).

Sanctifying grace: the righteousness of Christ is not attributed to men even though they are now seen as if they are righteous. Sanctifying grace is required to do this. Christ's righteousness is made increasingly available as man is open to God's grace. Men become more and more like Christ through obedience.

BUT:

- Justification (not sanctification) results in men sharing the righteousness of Christ and is a free gift (Rm 5:16-18; 2 Cor 5:21).
- This justification and righteousness comes by faith in Christ's work, not human obedience (Rm 3:26, 4:3-6,13, 5:1,25, 9:30, 10:10; Gal 2:16).
- We are righteous in Christ (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21).
- Sanctification is an ongoing process whereby man is increasingly able to grow in holiness through co-operation with the Holy Spirit by mortification of the flesh (Rm 6:13,16,19).

Perfection: through sanctifying grace man is transformed into a gradual likeness of Christ. This is completed in glory; however, through an experience of the Spirit, there are instances of being perfect, and some men retain this perfection continually.

BUT:

- The Bible shows that man always remains a sinner, saved by grace, to his death.
- 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' (1 Jn 1:8)
- 'For we all stumble in many things.' (Jm 3:2)
- Perfection comes when Christ returns and all is made new (Eph 4:13; 1 Cor 15:22; 1 Jn 3:2)

Thus we can see that the whole system of Wesley is confused and mixed up; he especially confuses justification with sanctification. The element of perfectionism is a serious heresy that leads men into unreality and superspirituality.

Practice

Dubious personal practices

- He drew lots for divination. In fact, it was on the throw of a dice that he chose to be an Arminian rather than a Calvinist. (See Toplady, *A Letter To The Rev. John Wesley Relative to His Pretended Abridgment of Zanchius on Predestination*. Tomkins, p54, 75, 78.)
- He believed in opening the Bible at random for guidance at critical times (Tomkins, p54, 78).
- He trusted in dreams for guidance (Tomkins, p133).
- He trusted in circumstantial signs against proper judgment (Tomkins, p71-73, 98).

Church matters

- Wesley was ecumenical with regard to Rome. (*Works*, Vol 10, p80-86.)
- He organised church societies governed by his rules, with preachers authorised by him, contrary to his office and articles 23 and 36 of the Thirty-Nine Articles.
- Also contrary to his office he supported women preachers: 'give the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallet, and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connexion'. (Zachariah Taft, *Biographical Sketches of Holy Women*, Vol 1, p84.) Also Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet (later John Fletcher's wife, his successor; Tomkins, p175, 190). He even laid down rules for them (Tomkins, p167).
- Wesley published an abridgement of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* (to which he was sworn in the Anglican Church) for the Methodists in 1794. He left out fifteen of them and edited the remainder. Gone were articles on election and predestination, articles against perfectionism, and works before justification, amongst others.
- Trust of subjective impressions and emotionalism (Tomkins, p46, 62, 66).
- Established testimonies in church meetings (Tomkins, p81).
- Methodism in the US spawned the Methodist Camp Meeting revivals [which exhibited the original form of Toronto Blessing type exuberance], the Holiness Movement, and thence Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement.

Charismatic Phenomena

Methodist revival meetings exhibited many forms of charismatic exuberance. The following quotes are from Tomkins, who states that this kind of thing happened daily (p71) and during Wesley's own preaching (p65, 103, 72, 39):

- Crying out (p65, 71, 105, 108).

- Laughing and wailing (which often was exhibited by children, p157, 155).
- Falling down (p72, 79, 105, 156-7).
- Visions (p156).
- Tongues (p144).
- One Methodist even was said to have the gift of preaching in his sleep (p144).

Wesley was apparently positively impressed by these things (p65, 73, 105, 157, 195), believed in miraculous healing (p162-3, 106) and he himself believed that he once raised someone from the dead (p106). Tomkins states that Methodism's readiness to embrace the miraculous and charismatic was crucial, it was a religion of dreams, visions, healings, convulsions, ecstatic worship, exorcisms and messages from God (p85).

Character

Marital status

Wesley married Molly Vazeille in 1751, but any woman was going to be overshadowed by his feelings for his mother, whom he felt could never be equalled. Wesley's marriage was deeply troubled, 'distant and unhappy' (Tomkins, p167). In fact he saw very little of his wife and wrote to her listing her faults. Wesley also had what is termed 'romantic debacles' before and after his marriage which 'cast a shadow over his pastoring' (Tomkins, p196).

Disputes

Wesley disputed with many good men such as James Hervey, but the most famous and cynical is the dispute with Augustus Toplady which began to appear in print in 1769. Toplady had written a tract against the Anglican Dr Nowell, who had falsely claimed that the Church of England had historically supported Arminianism. Toplady demonstrated that the basis of the church was Calvinistic. Later, after publishing Zanchius' *Absolute Predestination*, Wesley began a stream of propaganda and disinformation in response. This controversy resulted in the following:

Forgery

- Wesley published a précis of Zanchius' *Absolute Predestination* with a false and dramatic ending purporting to be from, and signed by, Toplady (See Wesley's *Works*, Vol 14, p287 in third edition 1872).
- Toplady responded immediately, demonstrating the evil tactic, which was an illegal act and was, in fact, a capital offence in those days. He writes to Wesley: *you draw up a flimsy, partial compendium of Zanchius: a compendium which exhibits a few detached propositions, placed in the most disadvantageous point of view, and without including any part of the evidence on which they stand. But this alone was not sufficient to compass the desired end. Unsatisfied with carefully and totally suppressing every proof alleged by Zanchius in support of his argument; a false colouring must likewise be superinduced, by inserting a sentence or two now and then of your own foisting in. After which you close the motley piece, with an entire paragraph, forged every word of it by yourself: and conclude all, as you began, with subjoining the initials of my name: to make the ignorant believe that the*

*whole, with your omissions, additions and alterations, actually came from me. --An instance of audacity and falsehood hardly to be paralleled!*¹

- Wesley published another tract including the same offensive and false words purporting to be Toplady's, *The Consequence Proved* (Works, Vol 10, p439). In this he sought to defend his twisting of Toplady's words with sophistry.

Lies / Slander

When Toplady died, respected sources claimed that it was Wesley who initiated a rumour that Toplady had died blaspheming God and doubting his salvation. Wesley was challenged by Richard Hill who gave ample evidence that Wesley originated the lie and gave testimony that Toplady died in a godly, trusting manner.

Fraud

Toplady accused Wesley, in the aforementioned tract, (which was not denied) that he procured a mendicant Greek minister (known to be an impostor) to ordain him as a bishop, and ordain some followers as priests, upon which they officiated in the Church of England. This was in direct rebellion to the Oath of Supremacy which Wesley had sworn.

Plagiarism

Wesley lifted 31 paragraphs from Dr Samuel Johnson's *Taxation no Tyranny* and published it as his own as *A Calm Address to our American Colonies* he also plagiarised an anti-slavery work written by a Quaker (Tomkins, p177-178).

Gambling

He said at one stage "I never myself bought a lottery ticket; but I blame not those that do". Later he had a share in one. (John Wesley & Ephraem Syrus, Gordon Wakefield, Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1998)

Treason

Wesley treasonously supported the American Revolution

Spiritual Character

Even supportive biographers agree that Wesley was 'a web of contradictions' whose own accounts of his life contain 'a dizzying degree of spin' (Tomkins, p195-7). But worst of all, there appears to be a serious question about his soul condition. He had an affinity with German mystics and translated their hymns. His supposed conversion experience was at a Pietist meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, on 24 May 1738 where he said that his heart was 'strangely warmed'. This sounds more mystical than evangelical and, in fact, the phrase echoed the Cambridge Platonist, John Smith (1673). The Methodists gave undue prominence to this experience as a turning point, but Wesley hardly referred to it later and never repudiated his pre-Aldersgate and Oxford years when he was supposedly unsaved. He emphasised his total dedication to God at the age of 22 in 1725, when his biographers state he was in a legalistic unbelieving condition.

¹ *A Letter To The Rev. John Wesley Relative to His Pretended Abridgment of Zanchius on Predestination*, Augustus Toplady (1740-1778); from *The Complete Works of Augustus Toplady* (1794), Sprinkle Publications Ed. (1987) pp. 719-728.

Perhaps it is not surprising then that Wesley's favoured church Fathers tended towards the Eastern mystics rather than the Latin writers (he did not like Augustine at all) and his model of the ideal Christian was the 'Christian', docetic Gnostic and mystic, Clement of Alexandria (155-220). Thus he learned that Christian holiness was disciplined love according to the Eastern tradition.²

In similar vein, Wesley was very influenced by Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, which he published for his followers, where growth in God is a legalistic struggle. Certainly, biographers agree that there was a streak of asceticism in him and he undoubtedly lived legalistically in Oxford. One writer says that '*his ideal did not fall short of persuading 70,000 people to adopt ... the rules of the Holy Club*' of his Oxford 'pre-conversion' days.³ His rules included avoiding adornments, fasting on Fridays and Wednesdays and strict rules for pleasure, eating and drinking.

The final shocking statement is a letter written by him to his brother Charles in 1766,

In one of my last [letters] I was saying that I do not feel the wrath of God abiding on me; nor can I believe it does. And yet (this is the mystery), I do not love God, I never did. Therefore I never believed, in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore I am only an honest heathen ... And yet, to be so employed of God! And so hedged in that I can neither get forward nor backward! Surely there was never such an instance before, from the beginning of the world! If I ever had that faith, it would not be so strange. But I never had any other evidence of the eternal or invisible world than I have now; and that is none at all, unless such as faintly shines from reason's glimmering ray. I have no direct witness (I do not say, that I am a child of God, but) of anything invisible or eternal.

And yet I dare not preach otherwise than I do, either concerning faith, or love, or justification, or perfection. And yet I find rather an increase than a decrease of zeal for the whole work of God and every part of it. I am borne along, I know not how, that I can't stand still. I want all the world to come into what I do not know. (Quoted in Tomkins, p168).

Let's analyse the features of this shocking statement:

- *I do not love God.*
- *I never did [love God].*
- *I never believed, in the Christian sense.*
- *I am only an honest heathen.*
- *I never had any [faith or] other evidence of the eternal or invisible world ... none at all.*
- *I have no direct witness [of faith].*
- *And yet I find rather an increase than a decrease of zeal.*
- *I am borne along, I know not how, that I can't stand still.*

Perhaps it is possible for a believer in a dark night of oppression and depression to say, for a moment, that he does not love God (though I doubt this). Perhaps a Christian could,

² *John Wesley & Ephraem Syrus*, Gordon Wakefield, Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1998.

³ Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm*, Oxford (1950), p430.

even after long years of service, still claim to have no assurance of faith. But no Christian could state, unequivocally, that he doesn't love God, never loved God, never knew faith, never understood spiritual revelation and was fundamentally a pagan. This is not possible.

These are, without doubt, the words of a non-Christian, and yet an unbeliever who is 'borne along' by a spiritual impetus to spread false doctrine and behave in an ungodly, and at times even illegal, manner. An unbeliever who establishes a new church system against the direct restrictions of his oath of office, a system which spreads a degenerative effect in the centuries that follow, both in terms of false Arminian doctrine and aberrant emotional church practices.

It is time that Christians re-evaluated John Wesley and the effect he has had on the church in history.

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John Wesley on John Wesley

In a letter to his brother Charles in June 1766, the Arminian evangelist John Wesley, now in his sixties, confesses that he does not and never did love God, believe or have the direct witness of divine sonship or even of things invisible or eternal. Read for yourself.

"In one of my last [letters] I was saying that I do not feel the wrath of God abiding on me; nor can I believe it does. And yet (this is the mystery), I do not love God. I never did. Therefore I never believed, in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore I am only an honest heathen ... And yet, to be so employed of God! And so hedged in that I can neither get forward nor backward! Surely there was never such an instance before, from the beginning of the world! If I ever have had that faith, it would not be so strange. But I never had any other evidence of the eternal or invisible world than I have now; and that is none at all, unless such as faintly shines from reason's glimmering ray. I have no direct witness (I do not say, that I am a child of God, but) of anything invisible or eternal."

"And yet I dare not preach otherwise than I do, either concerning faith, or love, or justification, or perfection. And yet I find rather an increase than a decrease of zeal for the whole work of God and every part of it. I am borne along, I know not how, that I can't stand still. I want all the world to come to what I do not know."

Quoted in Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley, A Biography*; Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003, p. 168.