

Review: Ownership: The Evangelical Legacy of Slavery in Edwards, Wesley, and Whitefield

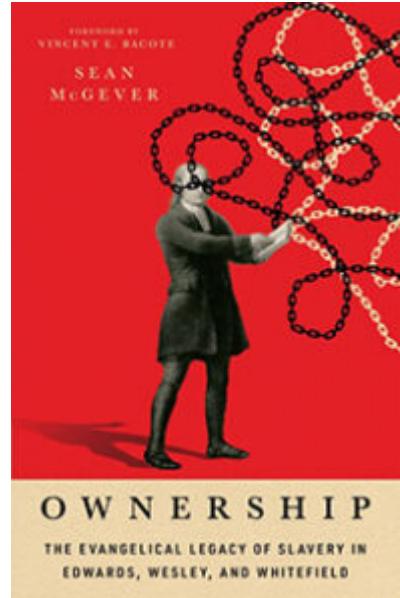
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Ownership: The Evangelical Legacy of Slavery in Edwards, Wesley, and Whitefield

By Sean McGever (IVP)

We like our heroes perfect, especially our religious heroes. But since they can't be perfect, we tend to ignore, discount or excuse their imperfections. Sean McGever reminds us our heroes are whole people and must be taken as such—even and especially our religious heroes.

Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and George Whitefield are not heroes to all of us. Nevertheless, their preaching, teaching and theology have influenced all of us to a greater or lesser degree. They also influenced each other—a fact shown in McGeever's history.



Despite their differences, Edwards, Wesley and Whitefield held at least one thing in common, besides being contemporaries. They each accepted the *institution* of slavery, however much they objected to the slave *trade*—another fact McGeever makes clear throughout *Ownership*.

Their acceptance of slavery extended to Edwards and Whitefield owning slaves themselves. All three men benefitted directly from slavery. Furthermore, their acceptance of slavery was based on the Bible. Any qualms they had with how slavery was practiced in their time was its departure from how Paul and others in Scripture instructed masters to treat their slaves.

McGeever points out the two slaveholders lived in the American colonies, while the one who did not own slaves lived in England. That one, Wesley, also outlived the other two, a detail that matters considerably, since it was during his latter years when the tide turned toward abolition of slavery.

As Wesley's views on slavery changed, secular sources provided more support for his argument than did the Bible, with the exception of the Golden Rule—do to others as you would have them do to you.

When so many decry historical accounts related to race and slavery as “woke” and revisionist, McGever’s history is fair and balanced. He relays the facts without making value judgments of the men. In so doing, he fleshes out a period of church history often atomized.

McGever makes his most powerful point in the final chapter when he challenges us to own our own histories, actions and legacies. The tendency today, as noted above, is to criticize our forebears—yes, *our* forebears—without facing the fact we are no more heroic than they were. We simply don’t see our imperfections as clearly as we think we see theirs.

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