

METHODISM

The History Of Methodism

The beginning of Methodism is traced to one particular individual - John Wesley. He was born about 1703, and died at the age of 88 in 1791. He received his higher education at Oxford, in England, and was ordained as a 'clergyman' in the church of England in 1728.

After a brief absence to help his father at Epworth, John returned to Oxford to discover that his brother Charles had founded a Holy Club composed of young men interested in spiritual growth. John quickly became a leading participant of this group, which was dubbed the Methodists. Some also referred to them in derision as "Bible Bigots" and "Bible Moths" or "Bible-eaters."

In 1735 both Wesleys accompanied James Oglethorpe to the new colony of Georgia, where John's attempts to apply his then high-church views aroused hostility. Discouraged, he returned (1737) to England. At a small religious meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, on May 24, 1738, John Wesley had an experience in which his "heart was strangely warmed."

After this spiritual conversion, which centered on the realization of salvation by faith in Christ alone, he devoted his life to evangelism. Beginning in 1739, he established Methodist societies throughout the country. He traveled and preached constantly, especially in the London-Bristol-Newcastle triangle, with frequent forays into Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. He encountered much opposition and persecution, which later subsided.

Whenever he died at age 88, he was still preaching and still considered a "clergyman" in the Church of England. In 1784, however, he had given the Methodist societies a legal constitution, and in the same year he ordained Thomas Coke for ministry in the United States; this action signaled an independent course for Methodism.

His brother, Charles Wesley, wrote more than 5,000 hymns, among them "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" and "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." After a "religious experience" similar to John's, he continued for many years in close association with the Methodist movement.

Another key figure in this movement was George Whitefield. He, in conjunction with the Wesleys, brought the Methodist movement to what it basically is to this day. Although centered in the British Isles and North America, Methodism has spread worldwide. The total world community is estimated at more than 38 million; the largest single group is the United Methodist Church in the United States, with about 10 million members.

In 1738, under the leadership of the Wesleys, there were organized small societies within the Church of England for religious sharing, Bible study, prayer, and preaching. Doctrine was based on a moderate theological revision of Calvinism (called Arminianism) that limits the significance of predestination, and so interprets the Thirty-nine Articles. In addition, they emphasized personal experience of conversion, assurance, and sanctification. (The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion were drawn up by the Church of England in 1563, and subscription to them by the "clergy" was ordered by an act of Parliament in 1571.)

Whitefield and the Wesleys traveled widely, preaching to large and enthusiastic crowds of working people. The movement spread through most of England. Whitefield conducted several preaching tours in North America. Wesleyan Methodism was later established in America by unofficial "lay" persons and by missionaries appointed by John Wesley. In 1784, Wesley's actual ordination of two missionaries and appointment of Thomas Coke as 'superintendent' for America led to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore. (Coke's adoption of the title bishop was not approved by Wesley: the British church did not adopt an episcopal structure.)

When John Wesley died in 1791 the relationship between the Methodists and the Church of England was unclear, although Wesley's ordination of "clergy" for work in America made a breach likely. The separation was formalized when the Conference of 1795 asserted that Methodist preachers could administer "sacraments" without ordination by the Church of England.

In 1830, in a controversy over episcopal authority, the Methodist Protestant Church was formed by a strongly liberal minority. In 1843 the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America was started by a group of anti-slavery Methodists. The next year the General Conference split over issues related to slavery and episcopal authority, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was formed at the Louisville convention in 1845. In 1860 came the Free Methodist Church, which was anti-slavery and theologically perfectionist. The Methodist Episcopal Church was troubled by controversy over sanctification and interpretation of the Bible (fundamentalism). Three large black churches were also organized, largely in protest against racial prejudice: the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1820), and Colored (later Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church (1870).

A number of divisions soon took place among the Methodists. The Methodist New Connection, the Primitive Methodist Church, and the Bible Christians separated from the Conference between 1797 and 1815. They were reunited in two mergers (1907, 1932) with the main branch to form the Methodist Church in Britain, which today has a membership of about 800,000. The central organization is the British Conference. This church has recently engaged in ecumenical negotiations with the Church of England.

With the formation of the Methodist Church in 1939 by the Northern and Southern branches and the Methodist Protestants, reunion was achieved. A racially identified central jurisdiction remained a source of controversy until its abolition in 1968. In that year the church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form the United Methodist Church. The church maintains a large Methodist publishing house, Abingdon Press, hospitals and homes, and institutions of higher learning, including 13 theological seminaries.

The Doctrines Of Methodism

The Founders of Methodism

The "founders" of Methodism were "John and Charles Wesley" (Methodist Discipline, Historical Statement). Christ said HE would build HIS church (Matthew 16:18), and HE is the One Who founded it (Ephesians 1:22,23). Thus we must conclude that Jesus is not the One Who founded the Methodist Church.

Discipline Revelation of Holy Spirit

In the greeting section of the Discipline, it is claimed that the Discipline would be administered as a "revelation of the Holy Spirit working in and through our people" (Methodist Discipline, page 1). If, as it is claimed, the Discipline is such a revelation, it is the same claim that the Bible makes for itself in 2 Timothy 3:16,17. Peter says that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.' (2 Peter 1:20,21) Listening to the claim of the Discipline, one is led to accept it as equal with the Bible. One who believes the Bible to be the revealed Will of God cannot in any fashion accept this, but will reject such assertions as utterly false.

Discipline a Book of Law

Judicial Council Decision number 96, dated June 26, 1953, states that 'The Discipline of The Methodist Church is a book of law, and the only official and authoritative book of law of The Methodist Church - 'a body of laws pertaining to church government,' regulating every phase of the life and work of The Methodist Church, including regulations relating to its temporal economy and to the ownership, use and disposition of church property.' No doubt, there are many Methodists who would say that the Bible is the book to which they turn for direction from God, but according to this statement, the Methodist Discipline is '**the only official and authoritative book of law of The Methodist Church.**' What role does the Bible play whenever the only book of law is the Methodist Discipline? "The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proven thereby, is not to be required as an article of faith, or be thought

required or necessary to salvation.” (Discipline, Articles of Religion, Article 5). Note, the quote says, “The Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation.” One immediately asks, why the Discipline then, if this statement about the Bible be true? Furthermore, the quote says, ‘whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proven thereby, is not to be required. By their own statement then, whatever is not according to the Scriptures in their Discipline is not required.

They also require the members to adhere to and obey the Apostle’s Creed (Original Methodist Discipline, Article 69, ¶442). The earliest record of the Apostle’s Creed, to which they are to adhere, is in 180 A.D., being quoted by Irenaeus. The present Creed is much larger and has been changed in 16 different places. The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice for us today (Isaiah 8:20; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 John 9). Christ is our ONLY creed (Matthew 16:16,18; Acts 8:37). The Methodist creed is a human creed, written and periodically revised by men and is NOT from God. We are reminded of the words of our Lord in Matthew 15:8,9 “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

One of Many Branches

Methodists teach that the Church is composed of many branches, of which the Methodist Church is one. (Preamble of the Constitutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.) Christ established one church (Matthew 16:18) and only purchased one church with His blood (Acts 20:28). This idea of the vine and the branches comes partially from a misconception of what Jesus taught in John Chapter 15. Jesus was speaking of individuals being the branches that are attached to Him as the “true vine.

If, as they claim, the Methodist Church is one of the branches, what is the trunk and the other limbs? The Methodist Church had its beginnings in the Church of England, and the Church of England has its roots in the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church is the trunk, and the denominations that came from her are the branches. This is a plant which the Heavenly Father has not planted. And according to Jesus, it will be uprooted (Matthew 15:13).

Church Government

They teach that the church is to be governed by a general conference which has full power to make rules and regulations for the church (¶ 46. Book of Discipline. 1928). The church which Christ built was purely congregational in government. There was no such thing as an episcopacy in the New Testament. Each local congregation had a plurality of elders, but never one elder or bishop over a plurality of congregations (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5).

It is not the duty nor the privilege of the church to make laws. Rather, each congregation, and each individual member must obey the laws made by the Head of the Church, which is Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18,24; Matthew 28:18).

Methodists also teach that the officers of the Church are Presiding Elders, circuit riders, class leaders, stewards, etc.. The New Testament only recognizes elders and deacons in any “official” sense within each local congregation (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13).

Justification by Faith Only

The Methodist Discipline says; “Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.” (Methodist Discipline, Articles of Religion, Article 9) The Bible teaches that salvation IS by “faith” (Romans 5:1), but denies that it is by “faith only”(James 2:24). James points out that a man without works, though he has faith, cannot be saved (James 2:14). Such “workless faith” is pictured as being “dead.” (James 2:17) If faith alone could save, then even the demons would be saved - for they believe that there is one God! (James 2:19) Faith is perfected by works (James 2:22) and faith empowers us to become the sons of God - it does not MAKE us the sons of God (John 1:12).

Man Without Free Will

Like John Calvin, the Methodists maintain that man has no free will to do good without the grace of God by Christ “preventing” him. (Articles of Religion, Article 8, Methodist Discipline) God made man a free moral agent in the garden (Genesis Chapters 1-6). Thus the “whoever” of John 3:16 & Revelation 22:17 opens the door of opportunity to any who would obey the gospel of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8). ALL men must, of their OWN FREE WILL, repent or be damned (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9).

Baptism Not Essential

“Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized...is also a sign of regeneration of the new birth.” (Methodist Discipline, Articles of Religion, Article 17). Baptism is never referred to as a profession, sign or mark in the Bible. The Bible clearly teaches that baptism is the final act of primary obedience in becoming a Christian, a child of God by faith. It is not something one does as a Christian. ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16: 16).

Infant Baptism

Without any explanation, the Methodist Discipline states that ‘The baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.’ (Methodist Discipline, Articles of Religion. Article 17) In this same article, it is stated that baptism is “a sign of regeneration or the new birth.” Then we find them saying: “We hold that all children, by virtue of the unconditional benefits of the atonement, are members of the Kingdom of God, and therefore graciously entitled to Baptism...” (§ 49, Methodist Discipline). The Bible teaches that infants are innocent of sin and not in need of Baptism or church membership. (Deuteronomy 1:39; Luke 18:15-17). The Bible requires hearing the Word of God, believing in Christ, repentance, and confession as prerequisites to baptism (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:35-38; Romans 10:9,10; Acts 18:8). Infants *CANNOT* and *NEED NOT* comply with any of these for they are not *LOST!*

Choice of Baptism

Regarding the subject of baptism, we find them stating: “Let every adult person, and the parents of every child to be baptized, have the choice of either sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.” (The Ritual Of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Chapter 1, Introduction). According to the Bible, baptism is a burial in and a resurrection from water. (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Acts 8:38; John 3:23). The concept of sprinkling or pouring water upon the head of one is not found in connection with the one baptism of which Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:5.

The Lord’s Supper

It is stated that: “There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.” (Methodist Discipline, Articles of Religion, Article 16) The word “sacrament” never appears in any form in the New Testament. The word means ‘an oath.’ Certainly the Lord’s Supper is *NOT* an “oath.” It is called “The breaking of bread “ (Acts 2:42; 20:7), a “communion” (1 Corinthians 10:16), the “Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:20), and “the Lord’s Table” (1 Corinthians 10:21). The word “sacrament’ is rooted in Catholicism, and *NOT* in the Word of GOD.

They observe the Lord’s Supper once each quarter. The church of the New Testament observed it on a weekly basis (Acts 20:7). In “John Wesley’s Awakening,” by James Richard Joy, it is observed that the “Holy Club,” met weekly to observe the “sacrament.” Perhaps his early theology was more affected by the Bible than by popular practice among the religionists of the day. It is interesting that the same terminology found in regard to the observance of the Lord’s Supper is found in 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 concerning the contribution. They understand this - why not Acts 20:7?

Perversion of Worship

They have perverted the worship of God by introducing mechanical instruments of music into the worship.

These instruments of music are left completely out of God’s plan for worship in the church of our Lord. God has only authorized singing in worship to Him today. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15). There is not one passage in the New Testament that can be found giving authority for this practice.

POINTS OUR METHODIST FRIENDS SHOULD CONSIDER

1. The Methodist church began 1700 years after Christ began His church as recorded in the New Testament. (Matthew 16:18)
2. The last book of the New Testament was written in 96 A.D. and there is **NO** mention of the Methodist Church or a Methodist in the entire Bible.
3. Jesus Christ did **NOT** begin the Methodist Church - John & Charles Wesley did!
4. The Methodist church began in 1729 in London, England - the New Testament church began in the city of Jerusalem in the land of Palestine in 33 AD. (Acts Chapter 2). Thus they could NOT be the same church!
5. Many of the doctrines and practices of the Methodist Church are **not** taught nor mentioned in the Bible, and in fact, contradict them.
6. None of the apostles of Christ and none of the thousands of Christians of the apostolic era ever called themselves, nor were they called “Methodists.”
7. The church that you read about in the Bible, the church of Christ, never had functionaries calling themselves ‘a Council of Bishops,’ “Superintendents,” “District Superintendents,” “Circuit Riders,” etc..
8. If you are a Methodist, you are (1) wearing a religious name that Jesus never told you to wear; (2) a member of a church that Jesus never told you to be a member of; (3) believing in, subscribing to, and upholding doctrines not taught in the Word of God; (4) staking your soul’s salvation on human doctrines and a human, man-made church that God’s Word says nothing about. If you want to be saved from sin and go to heaven, you will have to do and be what Jesus wants you to do and be, **NOT** what John Wesley or any other man would have you to do or be. Obey God, not man (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:8,9).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What two individuals are most closely associated with the founding of the Methodist Church? _____

2. How does this make the Methodist Church distinct from the church which Christ said He would build (Matthew 16:18)? _____

3. What is the minor revision of Calvinism that Wesley makes? _____

4. What is the claim which the Methodist Discipline makes for itself in the “greeting” section, which the Bible makes for itself? _____

What are some of the implications of such a claim? _____

5. By what law are Christians governed today, and how does this compare to the “book of law” used by the Methodist Church? _____

6. Explain the error in the claim that the Methodist Church is but one branch of the Church. _____

7. How is their concept of church government different from what we find in the Bible? _____

8. What does article 9 of the Methodist Discipline say about justification and faith, and how does this compare with the Bible? _____

9. What point of Calvinism is exemplified by the Methodist doctrine concerning the free will of man? {Consider this carefully in light of the fact that Wesley made a moderate revision in Calvinism that limits the significance of predestination.} _____

10. How do the Methodists view the purpose of baptism, and what is the error they have fallen into? _____

11. What type of reasoning is given for practicing infant baptism? _____

12. How many options of baptism are offered in Methodist doctrine, and how does this compare to what we read in the Word of God? _____

13. What is the word used to describe the Lord's Supper and Baptism, and where did it have it's origin? _____

14. How often do the Methodists observe the Lord's Supper, and how does this compare with what we read in the Bible? _____

15. What have they introduced into the worship that is not authorized by God? _____
