

Adult Sunday School Class “Our Christian Heritage” - Lesson 10

The Puritans

From the beginning of the Reformation in England, a number of people believed that the Reformation was not going far enough within the Church of England. Because of their demands that the church purify itself in accordance with New Testament practices and doctrines, they became known as Puritans.

While some Puritans remained in the Church of England, early on, some of them concluded that it would be impossible to purify the Church of England. They began to separate themselves from the organized church and became known as Separatists. Among this group, there arose a “prophecy movement” in the 1500’s. This group emphasized the moving of the Spirit and many spoke in tongues.

Separatists began the Congregationalist movement, believing in the congregational form of church government. Fleeing persecution, many Separatists emigrated to Holland, and from there to North America. The Pilgrims who founded Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620 were Separatists. Soon many Puritans from England settled in the area, and Separatists and Puritans joined to form New England Congregationalism.

The Baptists

Among the Separatists, some people began to re-examine the doctrine of baptism and to conclude that baptism is for believers only (not infants). This was particularly true of a group led by John Smyth. In 1608, Smyth baptized himself and about forty adults, beginning the Baptist movement.

Much like the Puritans, Baptists began to emigrate to the New World in search of freedom of religion. Unfortunately, they found that the Puritans in Massachusetts established freedom for themselves but no one else. Roger Williams, who helped begin the first Baptist church in America in 1639, founded the colony of Rhode Island, which granted freedom of conscience to all.

In 1678 a jailed Baptist preacher in England wrote the most popular English book of all time aside from the Bible. It was *Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan (1628-88).

The Quakers

In the 1600’s another important group arose out of the English Reformation: the Society of Friends, also called the Quakers. George Fox founded it in 1652. He taught that each Christian could have a personal experience with God and receive an inward direction or guide from him, which he called “the Inner Light.”

At a typical Quaker meeting there was no preacher or leader. The people would all sit down, pray, meditate, and wait for the leading of God’s Spirit. Anyone

who felt inspired could preach a message, read a passage of Scripture, or share a testimony.

In the early days, the Spirit of God often moved in their midst. Many of them literally trembled under the power of God; hence the nickname, “Quakers.” A number of them received the Holy Spirit, speaking in other tongues. Fox wrote about miraculous healings among them, even the dead being raised.

William Penn, an important Quaker leader, founded the colony of Pennsylvania as a refuge for Quakers and other groups.

The Quakers considered water baptism and communion to be spiritual in nature, so they did not practice either sacrament literally. They refused to speak of God as a Trinity, but emphasized that God is one and that Jesus is God manifested in the flesh. In England, William Penn found himself a prisoner in the Tower of London for denying the Trinity.

In later times, the Quakers became more traditionally Protestant in doctrine and more formal in experience. Some have become quite liberal. A famous Quaker was President Richard Nixon.

The Pietist Movement in Germany

In the late 1600’s, a movement called Pietism arose in Germany. Pietists felt that the church leaders were drifting away from faith and a relationship with God, making Christianity more intellectual and philosophical. Pietists refocused on spirituality and practical Christian living. Here are six points that Pietists sought:

1. More extensive use of the Scriptures, including Bible study in small groups.
2. Reemphasis on the spiritual priesthood of all believers.
3. Emphasis on spiritual experience and practice in Christian life rather than mere knowledge.
4. Conducting controversies in a spirit of charity.
5. Training of pastors in devotional literature and practice (pastors learn how to lead their people in Christian living and holiness).
6. Renewed focus on the purpose of the pulpit to edify the people.

Pietism began among the Lutherans, but it spread to the Calvinists. The movement did result in the formation of two new groups: the Church of the Brethren, and the Moravians. The Brethren were also known as Dunkers because of their practice of triple immersion.

Count von Zinzendorf and Holy Spirit Outpouring

Fleeing persecution, some of the Brethren from Moravia moved to Germany and settled on the estate of Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf in 1722 where they founded the village of Herrnhut. The count was a fervent Pietist who was devoted to Jesus Christ. He became their spiritual leader and organized the group to practice the concepts of Pietism.

On August 13, 1727, the Holy Spirit fell in a great way at Herrnhut. Zinzendorf called it “the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the congregation” and “the Pentecost.” One person testified about it saying, “The Holy Ghost came upon us and in those days great signs and wonders took place in our midst.”

Extraordinary prayer preceded and accompanied this move of God. Children prayed fervently and wept. Many people prayed all night long, and “great emotion prevailed.” One leader reported that the whole congregation fell to the dust “overwhelmed by a wonderful and irresistible power of the Lord: and experienced an “ecstasy of feeling.” They prayed, sang, and wept till midnight, and then they instituted a twenty-four hour prayer chain.

This great revival resulted in a flood of new songs. Nearly all these hymns spoke to Jesus, adoring Him as God. Following this great outpouring, the group sent out Protestant missionaries.

The Church of England

The Church of England has been the official faith of England for centuries. The Church of England broke away from the Catholic Church in the 1500’s under King Henry the VIII, but still retained a lot of Catholic elements. Over the next few decades, and especially under Queen Elizabeth I, the church stated more clearly its positions and was considered Protestant. It may be a little difficult for Americans who have no state promoted religion to understand countries that have a state religion. For much of history, this was the case around the world. Even in the American colonies before the revolutionary war, the Church of England was the state religion of the Colonies. After independence, the Church of England in America became known as the Episcopal Church (it was no longer the state church). Church of England clergy are required to swear allegiance to the British monarch, hence the change in America after the Revolutionary War from the Church of England to the Episcopal Church.

The Church of England is headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury who is its senior bishop. Incidentally, the ruling sovereign (who is now King Charles III) is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Archbishops and bishops are appointed by the ruling monarch, on the advice of the Prime Minister of England. As you can see, the government and the Church of England are very much intertwined.

The Church of England has its liturgy in English (a liturgy is a service that is written down and read each Sunday). The Book of Common Prayer was published in 1549 and contained the words of the structured (liturgical) services of worship, morning prayer, evening prayer, the Litany (the prayer used in services), Holy Communion, baptism service, confirmation service, marriage service, prayers for the sick, and the funeral service. The Book of Common Prayer also contained special services for the church calendar and Sunday readings of the Old and New Testament.

John Wesley's Early Life

John Wesley was born in England in 1703. He was the fifteenth child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. His family were members of the Church of England. In fact, in 1696, his father was appointed the rector of Epworth (he was the government appointed ruling clergy of that area). At the age of five, Wesley was rescued from the burning rectory. The escape made a deep impression on his mind, and he later wrote that he felt God had a purpose for him since he was “a brand plucked from the burning” (quoting Zechariah 3:2).

Wesley's parents gave their children their early education, and then at the age of eleven, he was sent to school in London. In 1720, Wesley entered Christ Church College, Oxford. He was eventually ordained in the Church of England.

John Wesley read two publications of the time, *Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, and these and other readings inspired him to pursue a rigid, methodical lifestyle of prayer, studying the Scriptures, and performing his religious duties. He began to seek after holiness of heart and life.



John Wesley

Wesley, along with his brother, Charles, and friend George Whitefield, were members of the Holy Club at Oxford, a group that met weekly to systematically set about living a holy life. It was here that they were branded “Methodists” because of the methodical way they ordered their lives.

After spending some time in America, Wesley returned to England feeling defeated about his lack of accomplishment in the mission work there. Wesley had been deeply moved by the report of the revival in Germany at Herrnhut with the Moravians. This revival had been marked by an intense move of the Holy Spirit. Count Von Zinzendorf, the head of the movement, focused on the spiritual relationship between the believer and Jesus Christ. He criticized the cold, intellectual approach of Christianity of the day, and emphasized the “religion of the heart.” During the great revival in Germany of that day, seekers would fall out in the

Spirit and speak in other tongues. The reports of this revival and move of God greatly affected John Wesley. After a visit to Herrnhut, Wesley returned to England and had his own spiritual experience. He then formed Methodist “bands,” which were groups that met weekly to pray, study Scripture, and encourage one another to holy, dedicated lives. Accountability to each other was a major part of the Methodist bands. Wesley also produced a collection of hymns for the groups, most of which were written by his brother, Charles.

“All the World My Parish”

Wesley did not preach often in England during this time, because most of the parish churches were closed to him - he was not legally supposed to preach in these churches. Wesley’s friend, George Whitefield had been having success preaching in the open air in fields. So for the first time, Wesley preached a sermon in the open air in April of 1739 to a group of about 3000 people. Although at first Wesley didn’t much like the idea of open air preaching, being dedicated to the church of England, yet he realized these types of services were successful in reaching men and women who would not enter most churches (the common coal miners and laborers of the day). Wesley’s open air preaching in the first few weeks was accompanied by the most extraordinary results! Here is one biographer’s description: *“People dropped to the ground as though felled by a sudden blow, they roared aloud, and were agitated by cruel, unsightly convulsions. After continuing in this deplorable state for a few minutes or a few hours, they came to themselves with a happy sensation of joy and relief; the weight of sin was lifted, and the wandering soul was called back to a knowledge of God.”* These types of experiences occurred in John Wesley’s meetings and were called conversion experiences. *Conversion* was a religious experience accompanied by a newness of being. The natural man was conquered by the spiritual man. When Wesley preached, these types of conversions with demonstrations of crying out, falling out, the “fits” and the “jerks” often occurred. Many of those who heard about it were offended. Men spoke angrily or scornfully, saying it was fake or a trick of the devil. However, those who observed it maintained that it was real and followed by great joy and peace. One 19th century historian writes: *At one time, there was a curious prevalence of uncontrollable laughter among women, exceedingly painful, and accompanied by a shocking violence of movement. We do not know of any cases in which the conversion experience was followed by death or madness, although the charge of driving people mad was one commonly directed against the Methodist preachers. The experience was followed, as a rule, by a state of religious well-being, of happiness and composure; nor was there any difficulty in resuming the ordinary business of life.*

It is interesting that John Wesley’s brother, Charles, was not convinced that these emotional scenes were real. These demonstrations seldom occurred under his preaching.

The demonstrations continued greatly during Wesley's first year of open air preaching, then diminished after that. In spite of this, the Methodist movement grew by leaps and bounds over the next fifty years of Wesley's preaching all over England and Great Britain. Wesley's friend, George Whitefield, preached many open air meetings in England and America, and these types of demonstrations were very typical in his meetings. Whitefield spoke of people seeming to be "slain in scores," and being "carried off like casualties in a battle." It is interesting as one studies the great Christian revivals in history, these types of manifestations are common (i.e. Cane Ridge, Kentucky; Azusa Street; etc.)

Wesley said of the open air preaching, *"I look on all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation."*

Wesley preached *"the love of God to man, because his own heart was filled with a great love and pity for his sinning and suffering fellows. Faith and salvation were his principal themes. He spoke always in the plainest manner, with measure, deliberation, and gravity; but never with the intention of frightening people into repentance."*

Wesley continued preaching for 50 years, preaching in churches when invited, and taking his stand in the fields, halls, cottages, and chapels when the churches would not receive him.

Not only did Wesley take a stand for spirituality and holiness, he also ruffled the feathers of the clergy of the Church of England by entering their territories to preach. The Church of England is governed by bishops, and each member of the clergy is assigned an area of ministry. Not just anyone was allowed to preach in designated parishes. So when Wesley or one of his fellow Methodist preachers came into an area to preach, ministers often attacked them in sermons and in print, and at times mobs attacked them. Methodists were denounced as "restless deceivers of the people," "insolent pretenders," "rapturous enthusiasts, assuming the language of the Holy Ghost," and "boasting of immediate inspiration." One clergyman cried, "Can it [Methodism] promote the Christian religion to turn it into a riot, tumult and confusion? to make it ridiculous and contemptible, and expose it to the scoffs of infidels and atheists? . . . Go not after these impostors and seducers; but shun them as you would the plague." However, Wesley and his preachers (men he himself commissioned to help preach the gospel) continued to preach and work among the common people of the day who had so many needs.

It is quite possible that the clergy were jealous of the Methodist revival. Very few people went to church, and those who did so were usually careless, irreverent, or sleepy. On the other hand, people flocked in vast numbers to listen attentively to the Methodist preachers in the open fields. Finally, there was the Methodist appeal to a new sort of religious experience - where people could have a relationship with their Creator. The Church of England believed that the poor and lowly (the "vulgar")

should be kept in servitude and should be left alone. Meanwhile, the Methodists preached the gospel to them and cared for them.

Matthew 11:5 *The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

Luke 4:18

"The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

Wesley felt that the Church of England failed to call sinners to repentance, that many of the clergy were corrupt, and that people were perishing in their sins. He believed he was commissioned by God to bring about revival in the church. He never wanted to form a new institution separate from the Church of England, but he wanted to reform it from within.

John Wesley became an itinerant preacher (meaning he travelled from place to place on a circuit). He travelled generally on horseback, preaching two or three times each day. He did not have the roads that we have today, but he rode on roads muddy, rocky and wet; grassy or marshy, full of pits, deep-rutted, and narrow. A day for Wesley never meant less than eighteen hours. Probably no man rode over more English miles than Wesley in the course of his lifetime. He rode 250,000 miles between 1738 and 1790. He read on horseback. He wrote on horseback. His longest ride was 90 miles in one day, which took about twenty hours. No man since the Apostle Paul had ever set out with a more burning desire to bring a knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ to ignorant, common people. Like Paul, preaching was not enough (although he preached more than 40,000 sermons in his lifetime). Wesley gave away £30,000 to people in need, formed societies (Methodist bands), opened chapels, commissioned preachers, administered aid charities, prescribed for the sick, superintended schools and orphanages, and received at least £20,000 to publish tracts and other works. A noble spirituality was combined with a masterly sense of administration and the value of method. This combination made Wesley a productive force.

Wesley's traveling was controlled by a carefully prepared schedule. His rare moods of irritation were almost always caused by loss of time. "There," he would say, "are ten minutes lost forever!" He always tried to avoid foolish people who might delay him by their trivial stories or idle curiosity. However, Wesley said, "*Though I am always in haste, I am never in a hurry because I never undertake more work than I can go through with calmness of spirit.*"

Methodist Preachers

Methodist preachers that were appointed by Wesley were simple, fervent, rough men, working chiefly among the working classes. One of his preachers named Olivers rode the same horse for 25 years for a distance of not less than 100,000 miles. The performance of the horse may be more astonishing than the preacher! John Pritchard covered 1200 miles on foot in one winter and spring. Many of the preachers were persecuted. One was thrown into a pond repeatedly. Another was beaten unconscious and left for dead. One had a house pulled down over his head. These are only a few stories of the persecution of the early Methodist preachers. Persecution did not hinder the movement at all. The number of those who were gained by the Methodist example of courage and manliness, and the coolness of Wesley himself, was exceedingly great.

Wesley gave this advice to his preachers:

“Endeavor to speak in public just as you do in common conversation.

“Labour to avoid the odious custom of coughing and spitting while you are speaking. And if at some times you cannot wholly avoid it, yet take care you do not stop in the middle of a sentence, but only at such times as will least interrupt the sense of what you are delivering.

“To drawl is worse than to hurry.

“The good and honourable actions of men should be described with a full and lofty accent; wicked and infamous actions, with a strong and earnest voice, and such a tone as expresses horror and detestation.

“The mouth must never be turned awry; neither must you bite or lick your lips, or shrug your shoulders, or lean upon your elbow; all which give just offense to the spectators.

“Never clap your hands, nor thump the pulpit.

“Your hands are not to be in perpetual motion: this the ancients called the babbling of the hands.

“And when, by such assistances as these, you have acquired a good habit of speaking, you will no more need any tedious reflections upon this art, but will speak easily and gracefully.”

Wesley gave this rule to his preachers: No preacher was to ride hard, and every preacher, having arrived at a hostel, was to see with his own eyes that his horse was properly rubbed, fed, and bedded.

One other practice of the early Methodists was congregational singing, with a vast collection of their own hymns. The words were often sung to lively and well-known, popular tunes. This brought into the movement that cheerful element of concerted praise. The hymns were easy to memorize. Nothing tends to unite people in loyalty and affection more than singing together.

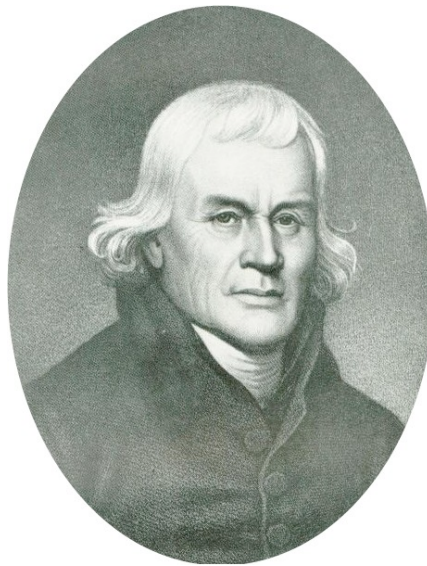
Wesley himself preached, on an average, about fourteen times every week. The first sermon was delivered at 5:00 in the morning, whenever possible, and after that Wesley might cover a distance of fifteen or twenty miles. His plans were always made beforehand, and nothing short of conditions which made travel impossible could prevent him from being on time.

Methodism taught people to be industrious, clean, efficient, and trustworthy. Wesley always stressed the importance of order, being on time, and cheerfulness in the normal occupations of life. He taught a code of inflexible honesty. This set the stage for raising up Englishmen who were ready for the coming industrial revolution - workers who were honest, hard-working, and cheerful.

Wesley never intended to start a new movement but to reform the Church of England from within. The Methodists sent preachers to America to set up Methodist Societies there. The resulting Methodist Episcopal Church shows by its name that Wesley wanted the church to reform from within. Today it is called the United Methodist Church.

Methodism Comes to America

Francis Asbury was one of the first two bishops sent to America. He, like Wesley, traveled by horseback and carriage for thousands of miles to deliver sermons to those on the frontier.



Francis Asbury

When he came to America, there were 600 Methodists, and when he died the denomination had grown to 200,000. Asbury himself rode over 250,000 miles on horseback, crossed the Appalachians sixty times, wore out six horses, preached 16,000 sermons, ordained 4000 ministers, and presided over 224 conferences. He never married and owned little more than a horse and what was in his saddlebags. He was known as the “Johnny Appleseed of the Gospel,” and he personally made one of the biggest impacts of anyone on the American Christian church.

Today the Methodist churches are much changed from their roots. However, Wesley's influence can be seen in the United Methodist Church, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Wesley's teachings also were the basis for the Holiness Movement of the 1800's out of which came the Wesleyan Church, the Free Methodist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The Pentecostal movement of the 1900's then came primarily through people from these groups. As you can see, Wesley's influence reaches far. John Wesley was listed as 50 on the list of BBC's 100 Greatest Britons.

The 1700's Bring Spiritual Revival

The Methodist revival inspired new hymn writers. Isaac Watts, a Congregational pastor, became the founder of the modern hymn with the publication of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* in 1707. Prior to his time, the English churches had used psalms in public worship, with limited musical styles. Two of Watts' best known hymns are *Joy to the World*, and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. John Wesley's brother, Charles Wesley, wrote many, many hymns including *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*, *Jesus Lover of My Soul*, and *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*. Fanny Crosby, the well-known, blind hymn writer, wrote a famous hymn with a Wesleyan theme: *Blessed Assurance*.

Many English Christians worked fervently for the improvement of social conditions in that country, including the abolition of slavery. John Newton, former captain of a slave ship, wrote the hymn, *Amazing Grace*, after his conversion. In 1807, due to the untiring efforts of William Wilberforce, the slave trade was abolished in Great Britain.

The Great Awakening

Revival also came to North America where it became known as the Great Awakening (1734). This spiritual movement was known for its mass evangelism, revival meetings, and personal conversions, all of which became characteristic of American Protestantism. The Great Awakening began with the preaching of Jonathan Edwards. He preached powerful sermons such as *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. George Whitefield also preached revival meetings across America, with physical demonstrations such as falling, shaking, crying, and shouting accompanying these meetings. The universities of Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth, began under the impetus of the Great Awakening. The blacks in America - both slave and free - embraced Christianity. The first major black denomination was the African Methodist Episcopal Church, formed by members who began withdrawing from a Methodist church in 1787 due to racial discrimination.