



Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY'S

JOHN WESLEY

AND THE EARLY METHODIST REVIVAL



A Kingswood Course



Wesley's Breakthrough:

Aldersgate, Moravians, and the Means of Grace



A Kingswood Course

The Year 1738: Milestones and Continuing Journey

- Wesley arrives back in London from his missionary experience in Savannah.
- Tutelage of Peter Böhler, the young Moravian missionary and preacher.
- Formation of the Fetter Lane Society in London on May 1st.
- Aldersgate experience in London on May 24th.
- Preaches the sermon, “Salvation by Faith,” at the University Church in Oxford on June 11th.
- Trip to Herrnhut in Saxony in late summer/early fall.
- Studies the Book of Homilies in November, particularly on the topics of salvation, faith, and good works.



Peter Böhler
(1712-1775)



Count Nicolaus von
Zinzendorf (1700-1760)

John Wesley and Peter Böhler

- Wesley met the Moravian leader Peter Böhler shortly after his return to England on February 7, 1738.
- Böhler's advice to Wesley in the midst of his crisis of confidence: "Preach faith *till* you have it, and then, *because* you have it you *will* preach faith" (March 5, 1738).

“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”

—John Wesley (May 24, 1738)

Wesley's Issues with the Moravians

- Evidence of Salvation: Can peace and joy be mixed with fear and doubt?
- Degrees of Faith: Can believers have faith that looks different? Is there such a thing as weak faith?
- Means of Grace: Are there such things as means of grace that can assist believers to know Christ?

The Nature of Grace

What is grace—is it pardon or power?

The Nature of Grace

“Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that **we have conducted ourselves in the world**, and especially in our relations with you, with integrity and godly sincerity. We have done so, **relying not on worldly wisdom but on God’s grace.**”

2 Corinthians 1:12 (NIV)

“By ‘the grace of God’ is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means **that power of God the Holy Ghost** which ‘worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure’. As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested to our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein.”

John Wesley, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit,” ¶15

The Nature of Grace

Grace as Pardon

“For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith” (Romans 3:22b-25; NRSV).

Grace as Power

“He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9; ESV).

“... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be **strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to **the power at work within us**, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ throughout all generations, forever and ever, Amen.”

Ephesians 3:16-21

“the *grace* of God, the power of his Holy Spirit”

John Wesley, “The Good Steward,” ¶1.8

Q. What is Grace?

A. The Power of the Holy Ghost, enabling us to believe and love and serve God.

John Wesley, “Instructions for Children”

What is Grace?

Grace is the manifest presence of God poured out upon the believer (or assembly, or church, etc) through the person of the Holy Spirit.

What are the Means of Grace?

“Outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”

John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” ¶II.1

“... And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)

What is the Rationale for the Means of Grace?

The “ordinances of God” are each intended as “a means of conveying the grace of God to all” which is something that we can see “both from Scripture **precept and example.**”

[Drawn from Wesley’s Journal in June 1740, at the height of the “Stillness” Controversy with the Moravians]

Categories of the Means of Grace

Instituted Means of Grace

- Prayer
- Searching the Scriptures
- Fasting
- The Lord's Supper
- Christian Conference

Prudential Means of Grace

- Class and Band Meetings
- Works of Mercy (cf. Matthew 25)

General Means of Grace

- Self-Denial
- Taking up the Cross
- Watching
- Exercise of the Presence of God

Instituted Means of Grace

From Wesley's *Large Minutes*, Q48:

I. The Instituted Means of Grace are:

(1.) Prayer; private, family, public; consisting of deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving. Do you use each of these? Do you use private prayer every morning and evening? if you can, at five in the evening; and the hour before or after morning preaching? Do you forecast daily, wherever you are, how to secure these hours? Do you avow it everywhere? Do you ask everywhere, "have you family prayer?" Do you retire at five o'clock?

Instituted Means of Grace

(2.) Searching the Scriptures by,

(i.) Reading: Constantly, some part of every day; regularly, all the Bible in order; carefully, with the Notes; seriously, with prayer before and after; fruitfully, immediately practicing what you learn there?

(ii.) Meditating: At set times? by any rule?

(iii.) Hearing: Every morning? Carefully; with prayer before, at, after; immediately putting in practice: Have you a New Testament always about you?

Instituted Means of Grace

(3.) The Lord's supper: Do you use this at every opportunity? with solemn prayer before; with earnest and deliberate self-devotion?

(4.) Fasting: How do you fast every Friday?

(5.) Christian conference: Are you convinced how important and how difficult it is to “order your conversation right?” Is it “always in grace? seasoned with salt? meet to minister grace to the hearers?” Do not you converse too long at a time? Is not an hour commonly enough? Would it not be well always to have a determinate end in view; and to pray before and after it?

Prudential Means of Grace

- 1. Works of Mercy (Matthew 25)**
- 2. Classes and Bands**
- 3. Arts of Holy Living**

Wesley on the Class Meetings

“It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to bear one another’s burdens, and naturally to care for each other. As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for one another.”

From A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists (1749)

The General Means of Grace

“These [instituted and prudential] means may be used without fruit: But there are some means which cannot; namely, watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, exercise of the presence of God.”

John Wesley, *Large Minutes*, Q.48

“Go on to universal self-denial, to temperance in all things, to a firm resolution of taking up daily every cross whereto you are called. Go on, in a full pursuit of all the mind that was in Christ, of inward, and then outward holiness; so shall you be not almost, but altogether, a Christian.”

John Wesley, “On Redeeming the Time,” ¶III.7

Wesleyan Convictions about the Means of Grace

1. It is the blood of Christ alone that atones for sin (“the merits of the Son”)
2. Outward means are worth nothing if separate from the Holy Spirit (“the power of the Spirit”)

“In using all means, seek God alone. In and through every outward thing look singly to the *power* of his Spirit and the *merits* of his Son ... Remember also to use all means *as means*; as ordained, not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness.”

John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” ¶V.4

Ways to Draw Near to God

“We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord’s Supper; but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby through any of these there is any blessed conveyed to our soul.”

John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” ¶ II.3

The Discipline of the Spiritual Life

“Do you use all the means of grace yourself, and enforce the use of them on all other persons? ... Do you endeavour to set God always before you; to see his eye continually fixed upon you? Never can you use these means but a blessing will ensue. And the more you use them, the more you will grow in grace.”

John Wesley, *Large Minutes*, Q.48