

The United Methodist Church

Introduction

1. **Jesus said: “*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32). Knowing the truth about the gospel will make us able to identify error.**
 - A. It is also good to have some background concerning some of the more popular religious denominations so that we can know some of their doctrine in order to be better prepared to refute it with the truth.
2. **This afternoon, I want to present some information concerning the Methodist church.**
3. **The late Ralph Stockman, noted author and Methodist minister of the twentieth century wrote: “*The Methodist Church is a unique blend of New Testament Christianity, the Protestant Reformation and the influence of John Wesley.*”**
4. **A brief survey of the 270 year history of the Methodist movement will enable us to better understand this “*blending*” of Christianity with the ideas of men as we examine the organization and some of the doctrinal errors of the United Methodist Church.**

History of Methodism

1. **Originated with John (1703-1791) and Charles (1707-1788) Wesley.**
 - A. **Two of nineteen children**
 - B. **Father and Grandfather were Anglican clergymen.**

2. **The name “Methodist” can be traced to incidents at Oxford University in 1729.**
 - A. **Charles Wesley organized a “Holy Club” at Oxford**
 - B. **Their systematic routine (or method) of work and worship resulted in them being labeled “Methodists”**
 - C. **John Wesley later referred to his followers as “*people called Methodists.*”**

3. **Methodist movement didn’t really take shape until 1739.**
 - A. **John Wesley is reported to have experienced a “*spiritual awakening.*”**
 - 1) **Formed his first “United Society”**
 - 2) **Began his outdoor preaching movement “*Wesleyan Revival*”**
 - B. **Because of his greater exposure to the public, John quickly overshadowed Charles as the leader of the Methodist movement.**
 - C. **The first Conference of Methodism convened in London in 1744 - providing the forerunner of today’s conferences.**
 - D. **By the mid-eighteenth century, a new denominational sect was in full development.**

4. **The Methodist religion was a denomination of people who broke away from the Church of England.**
 - A. **John Wesley and his followers remained true to the Anglican church, however, a conference in 1784 acted to officially form the Methodist Episcopal Church.**

4. **Other divisions within the Methodist church have taken place over the years.**
 - A. **Disputes over “holiness,” “slavery,” and “lay participation” caused most.**
 - 1) **By 1975 there were 23 different Methodist bodies in the U.S. consisting of approximately 14 million members. 10 Million were in the United Methodist Church.**
 - a) **In 1939 the Methodist Episcopal Church, the MEC South, and the Methodist Protestant Church merged to form the “Methodist Church.”**
 - b) **In 1968 the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical united Brethren Church (of similar practice and origin) to form the most common “United Methodist Church.”**

Organization of the United Methodist Church

- 1. The government of the UMC closely resembles America's democratic government.**
- 2. They have three governmental branches which serve as checks and balances.**

A. Legislative Branch

- 1) Local Conference** - Meets annually to elect officers, etc.
- 2) District Conference** - Meets annually to make recommendations to the Annual Conference.
- 3) Annual Conference** - Meets annually to act on District recommendations.
- 4) Jurisdictional Conference** - Meets every 4 years to recommend items of discussion to the General Conference.
- 5) General Conference** - Meets every 4 years and is the most powerful.

B. Judicial Branch

- 1) The church has formal provisions for trials, counsel for the defendant, appellate courts, and investigative committees.**
- 2) The “supreme court” of the UMC is its Judicial Council. They judge the constitutionality of actions taken by the General Conference.**

C. Executive Branch

- 1) Built around the authority of the Bishops**
 - a) Bishops elected by the Jurisdictional Conference and ordained at the General Conference.**
- 2) District Superintendents are chosen**
- 3) Pastors (preachers-in-charge) are appointed**
- 4) Deacons are elected**

NOTE: Though some of these offices are familiar in name to us, the Methodist hierarchy has nothing in common with the scriptural pattern of a plurality of bishops in each local church (*Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1-3*).

Multiple Standards of Authority

- 1. One of the boasts of Methodism has been that no peculiar church doctrines or opinions are to be bound upon its members.**
- 2. Wesley and others have contributed writings and statements of belief that have become accepted standards of authority in today's UMC.**
 - A. The Bible is claimed to “stand supreme” in “all matters of faith and morals.”**
 - B. Yet it obviously does not stand ALONE.**
 - 1) Methodist authority includes:**
 - a) The Book of Discipline
 - b) Twenty-five Articles of Religion
 - c) The Confession of Faith
 - d) Fifty-two Sermons of John Wesley
 - e) Notes on the New Testament by John Wesley
 - 2) In addition they have four guidelines of interpreting “Christian” beliefs:**
 - a) Scripture
 - b) Christian Tradition
 - c) Experience
 - d) Reason
 - 3) Their Personal Experience and Tradition provide for a constantly changing doctrinal system - determined at their conferences.**

“Some” Doctrines That Contradict Bible Truth

1. Old Testament Ceremonial Ordinances have been removed, but Moral Laws are still binding today.

A. Methodist Bishop Nolan B. Harmon writes: “The moral laws are taken to comprise the Ten Commandments, as well as the deep natural principles written in the hearts of honest and just people everywhere.”

B. The Bible Teaches:

- 1) The law was to be fulfilled (completed) in Christ
Luke 24
- 2) Christ came to fulfill the law
Matthew 5:17 - New law in Him
- 3) New law introduced
Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13)
- 4) No longer under a “Tutor.”
Galatians 3:25
- 5) Christ changed the priesthood
Hebrews 7:11-16

2. Justified by Faith Only.

A. “Twenty-five Articles of Religion” states “that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.”

B. The Bible Teaches:

- 1) **Saved by Grace and Faith (but not ONLY)**
Ephesians 2:8-10
- 2) **Must also be accompanied by works of God**
James 2:20-24

3. **Baptism is only Symbolism and not necessary for salvation.**

A. Article 17 of the Articles of Religion: “Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth.”

1) To avoid misrepresentation of the Methodist meaning on this point, let’s notice a statement by Bishop Nolan B. Harmon on this:

“This article calls baptism a sign of profession and a sign of regeneration - not regeneration itself. To be sure, baptism is an institution of our Lord and so is to be kept and carried out as he commanded. But Protestantism has never put heavy emphasis upon the rite of baptism as having of itself any regenerative value. It signifies something beyond itself. In Christian minds it symbolizes the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and all baptismal prayers uttered by the Church are to the effect that the one who is baptized shall also be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

a) It is obvious that entrance into the church is accomplished before one is baptized.

2) Leland Scott, an early American Methodist wrote this:

“The sacrament of baptism was administered to those adults who had experienced the pardoning grace of God. Since this ordinance was performed somewhat infrequently — at quarterly meetings, usually, by the presiding elder or a circuit — it was not considered prerequisite to entrance into the Methodist fellowship of believers.”

a) We learn that;

- 1) Baptism is just a sign**
- 2) Administered to people who had already experienced “the pardoning grace of God,”**
- 3) Has no regenerative value**
- 4) Not necessary for salvation**
- 5) Not a prerequisite of church membership.**

B. The Bible Teaches:

- 1) **Baptism saves us**
1 Peter 3:21
- 2) **Baptism washes away our sins**
Acts 22:16
- 3) **Baptism needed to have sins forgiven**
Acts 2:38
- 4) **After Baptism, then one is added to the church**
Acts 2:47
- 5) **Cannot enter fellowship of believers until after entering Christ**
Galatians 3:26-27
- 6) **Baptism is an immersion**
Romans 6:3-4
John 3:23
Acts 8:38
 - a) **In addition, the Methodist religion teaches one can be baptized by immersion or by sprinkling - it does not matter which.**

Conclusion

1. **John Wesley did not intend to start a new denomination, however, his Wesleyan Revival did just that.**
2. **As we strive to practice New Testament Christianity, we need to be aware of the unauthorized practices of the Methodist church.**
3. **We can clearly see what Jesus meant when He said *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”***
4. **By practicing the things listed in the Articles of Faith and Disciplines of the UMC, one will become a Methodist. *By practicing the things contained only in the Bible, one will become a Christian, nothing more, nothing less.***

