

## **Baptists and Methodists**

The roots of Methodism lay in the eighteenth century Church of England. In 1729 a group of “methodically” religious students of famed Oxford University gave birth to the Methodist movement and later the Methodist church.

John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were the central leaders of this effort. John and Charles, the sons of a Church of England minister, emphasized ministry to the poor and desperate. John spent two unhappy years as a missionary to the Indians of Georgia and returned to England discouraged declaring, “*I went to save the Indians; but oh, who will save me?*” During a storm at sea he met a group of peaceful Moravian Christians and was deeply impressed by their faith and humility. Though highly religious, John’s salvation experience did not occur until 1738. In the meeting of a religious society in London on Aldersgate Street, he heard the preacher read Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, and he felt his heart “strangely warmed” as the meaning of the Reformer’s doctrine of “justification by faith” sank into his soul. Methodism came to America in 1766 in New York.

**The Scripture: Methodist doctrine is generally more open to change in their basic core beliefs than are Baptists.** Though Methodism preaches and teaches the doctrines of the Trinity, the natural sinfulness of humankind, man’s fall into sin and need for conversion and repentance, freedom of the will, justification by faith, sanctification and holiness, future rewards and punishments, and the sufficiency of the Scriptures for salvation, the enabling grace of God, and ultimate perfection, Methodists have more readily embraced what would commonly be called liberal theology.

Among Methodists the door to doctrinal and theological change is left open. The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted this statement in 1988, “**In theological reflection, the resources of traditions, experience, and reason are integral to our study of Scripture without displacing Scripture’s primacy for faith and practice.**” Notice the difference in The Baptist Faith and Message statement about scripture. “**The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will**

**remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.”**

**Jesus Christ: Methodism preaches and teaches that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, that He lived sinlessly, died for our sin, and rose from the dead.** Our doctrine about Christ is markedly similar and thus we would count a Methodist who openly confesses personal faith and surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ as a brother or sister in Christ.

**Salvation: Methodists like Baptists view salvation as act of God’s grace received by faith in Christ.** However, in recent years some Methodists have put less emphasis on the evangelical need to bring all people to a personal conversion experience choosing rather to emphasize the more universal view of all people being “the children of God.” Baptists teach that one does not become a “child of God” until one comes to personal faith in Christ (John 1:12).

**Unique Emphases: One unique distinction of Methodists has been their emphasis on benevolent ministries.** Methodists have led the way in benevolent ministries allowing them to stand simply on the merit or benefit such ministries bring to society. Baptists have more commonly viewed benevolent ministries as needing to be more directly related to evangelistic witness.

**Another distinction of Methodists from Baptists is their method of governing the church.** Three methods of church government are common. (1) The Episcopal Method places the authority of the church in the Ordained Bishops. This is the structure used in Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist churches. The Methodists practice the simplest form of this style of government. (2) The Presbyterian Method places authority in representative rule by elders appointed or elected by the people. The Presbyterians and the Reformed Church use this method of church government. (3) The Congregational Method of government emphasizes the autonomous governing of the church by the congregation and not by boards or bishops.

Please keep these “Know What You Believe” articles as tools for future reference.

**Next Week: Baptists and Catholics**