

Methodism—History

- 18th century England—John Wesley (and brother Charles) want to reform Church of England
- Concerned to live disciplined Christian lives and make doctrine more practical—formed “Holy Club”
- Working against indifference and formalism in Church of England
- 1738—J Wesley has religious experience, starts Methodist revival in England and British Isles
- Methodist originally an epithet



Methodism—History

- Church of England persecuted the Methodists
- Wesley began to approve local preachers (as opposed to ordained priests)
- Methodism spread to America, where it thrived during the periods of the “Great Awakening”(1730-1740) and Second Great Awakening (1790-1840)
- Methodism split over slavery prior to the Civil War
- Methodists played integral role in the Temperance/Prohibition movement



Methodism—History

- Today the most prominent Methodist body is the United Methodist Church
- There are more than 40 denominations descended from the original Methodists, including several African-American Methodist groups
- UMC is the largest mainline Protestant denomination in the US, second largest Protestant (after Southern Baptist Convention)



Methodism—Overview

- Doctrinally, Methodism is closely connected to John Wesley's theology
- Wesley was Arminian—a response to Calvinism (sharing many doctrinal aspects with Baptists)
- Total depravity, but a will free to respond to God (given by God's grace)
- Grace can be resisted and election has conditions
- It is possible to lose salvation



Methodism—Overview

- Wesley stressed holiness and believed that practical perfection was possible through the Holy Spirit
- Prevenient grace—grace allows us to overcome corruption of original sin and choose to respond to God in faith
- Justifying grace—Grace is a gift received through faith
- Sanctifying grace—ongoing experience as God transforms us into the person we should be



Methodism—Overview

- Methodists believe that the Holy Spirit gives assurance of salvation through an inner experience
- Methodists practice infant baptism and confirmation in adolescence
- UMC is a strong denominational body—judicial decisions, doctrinal decisions, preacher placement
- Women in many positions of authority within UMC



Methodism—Toward Understanding

Common ground:

- Focus on holy living, seriousness
- Desire to live out faith
- Free will, need to respond, possibility of apostasy (challenging important aspects of Calvinism)



Methodism—Engaging

- The main issue: Does faith alone save?
- We must address the fundamental, unstated assumption of Methodism (and Protestantism generally)
- I agree that we have the ability to believe—but where is the passage that says that's *all* we have to do?
- If faith alone saves, then why baptize infants?
- If faith alone saves, then why live a holy life?



Methodism—Engaging

- The NT does not teach that faith alone saves us—
James 2:24
- Methodists themselves emphasizes *repentance*—which
God also puts as a condition of salvation (Acts 17:30,
Acts 2:38, 2 Pet 3:9, et al)
- Faith and baptism are conditions for salvation (Mark
16:16)—and this means that infant baptism is
pointless because it cannot be combined with faith



Methodism—Engaging

- Other issues to be discussed—church structure, necessity of inner experience of Spirit before salvation—but whether faith alone saves is the central one

