

Lesson #11

Great Awakenings

(18th and 19th Centuries)

The First Great Awakening

The Reformers were like Gideon's pitchers with lamps inside. When they broke open, the light invaded the darkness and the enemies began to flee. By releasing the word of God and letting its light shine, the reformation served notice to the antichrist system that its days were numbered. However, the anti-anointing plan that had built a hierarchy of religious elites was not ended or immediately destroyed.

Someone once said, "Each new move of God carries with it the seeds of its own destruction." After 200 years, the protestant churches were showing that to be true by manifesting some of the same hierarchal structure and centralization that they had protested against. More truth and more life was needed. It was time for the restoration of another foundational principle. This next move of God has historically been called The Great Awakening.

John Wesley

Though there are many significant historical figures between Martin Luther and John Wesley, including their contemporaries, the work of Wesley and what he preached represents a major step in the strategy to restore truth to the Church.

John Wesley (1703-1791) was born in England at a time when the initial surge and expansion of the Protestant reformation had stagnated. He was an ordained priest in the Anglican Church which had, in many ways, become corrupt and had many of the same anti-anointing characteristics and overgrown human mediation that were in the Roman Church.

The moral and religious condition of England was badly decayed. It was a time of spiritual bareness. The advancement of the faith and the establishment of new churches was virtually non-existent. Religion was a "fashion statement" instead of a practical way of life. Sermons in the churches focused on happiness as the aim of the individual instead of the life sacrificed for Christ. The idea of the Holy Spirit actively working in the souls of men was commonly dismissed by preachers as a first century phenomenon to be unexpected in the eighteenth. Immorality and drunkenness were widespread in the society and fashionable extravagance resulted in the prisons being filled with debtors who had overstepped their incomes. England was spiritually sick, but the Great Physician was about to respond. England was a nation ripe for revival.

Wesley, who believed deeply in living a life devoted to holy and pure living, became the leader of the Holy Club which was started by his brother Charles. Although he did the works the Bible spoke of (visiting the sick and the prisoners, helping people, etc.) and accepted the doctrine of justification by faith, he had not yet received that justification and the assurance of his own salvation.

While on a missionary trip to America, Wesley became acquainted with a group of Christians known as Moravians. He longed for the deep inner peace that he saw in their lives. After the missionary trip,

which was basically a failure, he returned to England where he again met a group of these Moravians who challenged his faith. On May 24, 1738, at one of their meetings, he experienced the assurance of salvation.

The Moravians

The Moravians had their beginnings in central Europe, in the area now known as the Czech Republic. Their roots can be traced to the work of early reformer John Huss, who planted seeds for the reformation a century before Martin Luther.

The group experienced a renewal in the 18th century under the leadership of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who had felt the Lutheran Church of his day was dry and lacked what he perceived as a biblical model of New Testament church. He pointed men to the historical Christ and sought to recapture the spirituality of the early Apostolic Church.

Zinzendorf had allowed persecuted Protestants from Moravia to live on his land, and through his generosity and leadership, the Christian community of Herrnhut was formed. It was on August 13, 1727, that this community experienced a visitation of the Holy Spirit similar to the visitation on Pentecost recorded in Acts Chapter Two. It is said that they learned to love one another that day and the revival began to spread.

The Moravians established a model community that would be reproduced in at least 30 places around the world. They sent out hundreds of missionaries around the globe, and formed many hundreds of small renewal groups operating in existing churches that encouraged personal prayer, worship, Bible study, confession of sins, and mutual accountability. One of the most remarkable achievements of the Moravians was the establishment of a 24 hour prayer watch that continued uninterrupted for 100 years!

In 1741, Count Zinzendorf visited Pennsylvania, thus becoming one of the few 18th century European nobles to have actually set foot in the Americas. In addition to visiting leaders in Philadelphia such as Benjamin Franklin, he also arranged missionary activities with the indigenous Iroquois tribes.

Other Revivalists

After John Wesley's conversion experience with the Moravians, his Bible-based practice of Christianity was found to be unwelcome in the established church that had ordained him. He was soon kicked out of the Anglican Church, but continued to minister. Traveling on horseback, he often preached outdoors to crowds as large as thirty thousand. Because of his systematic and organized methods, Wesley and those with him were called, Methodists. At the time of his death there were 153,000 adherents to Methodism and over 500 itinerant preachers.

The work of John Wesley, his brother Charles, and George Whitfield (Whitfield had also had experiences similar to Wesley's) began a revival campaign that swept England, Scotland, Ireland. But the fire of the Holy Spirit was not contained to England. The awakening jumped the Atlantic to North America where Jonathan Edwards was a key figure in this move of God which is known as the Great Awakening. This period of history is typically understood to have begun around 1730 and lasted up to the American Revolution. It was the force that shaped the thinking of the founding fathers of the United States of America.

An Exceptional Nation is Born

This period of awakening, which has been dubbed The Great Awakening, served as a gestation period for the birth of a new nation that would be unique to all of history. The early reformers gave rise to a people in Europe who tasted freedom from centralized power and oppressive government. Their quest for freedom brought on persecution by those who sought to control them. As a result many ended up fleeing Europe and settling in what they called, The New World in North America.

The first permanent English colony in the New World was Jamestown, settled in 1607. However it was the Plymouth colony of 1620 that is generally considered to be the planting of the Church in North America. The Plymouth bay settlers were in search of religious freedom and sought to expand the Christian faith. While crossing the Atlantic on a ship named the Mayflower, the Plymouth settlers drafted a governing document called The Mayflower Compact. Below is a portion of that document.

We whose names are under-written having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colonie in the Northern parts of Virginia do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick..

- Mayflower Compact

Though they intended to land in Virginia, they were blown off course by a storm and ended up on the shores of what is now Massachusetts. Their landing location was providential. As it turned out, the native inhabitants of that region who would have been hostile to the settlers, had been wiped out by sickness. The only survivor was a Indian named Squanto, who had been captured, taken to England, learned English, and had been returned to his home to find his people gone. Squanto befriended them and taught them how to survive in the New World.

Over the next 150 years or so, these settlements grew stable and became 13 established English colonies. However, the antichrist system of overgrown human mediation was still oppressing freedom seekers by marrying church with civil government through the King of England and his church, just as it had with Rome and the early church through Constantine. But because of the seeds of freedom sown by the reformers and the influence of the Great Awakening, the breath of God was consuming the man of sin. A people longing for freedom in a new land were about to throw off the shackles of King George III of England.

On July 4th, 1776, representatives from the 13 colonies confronted the abuses of England's King by presenting a Declaration of Independence. Much like Luther's 95 thesis listed the abuses of the Pope and his church, the Declaration of Independence was signed and listed the abuses of the King of England committed against the colonies. This Declaration was revolutionary, asserting that individual's have certain unalienable rights because these rights come from God, not human government - and the purpose of government was to protect those rights. In the resulting war with England, God's providence was seen many times to bring about the establishment of a new nation under God - The United States of America.

After winning the Revolutionary war, a Constitution was drafted and ratified in 1789 which provided a protection against the antichrist system of centralized government. That constitution, based on Isaiah 33:22, established a new government that was decentralized into three branches, a legislative branch, a judicial branch, and an executive branch. Ten amendments, known as The Bill of Rights, were immediately added, the first of which guaranteed that this government would not prohibit the free exercise of religion and that no particular church would be favored by the government above another.

The Constitution and the nation it created are not perfect, but an overview of history shows that this new nation and the principles upon which it is founded are indeed exceptional. Such a government based in the people, declaring that rights come from God, not from pastors, popes, governors or kings, shows that the plan of God is marching forward. This new nation continues to face struggles, but as long as we remember God and return to our foundations, we will advance.

The Second Great Awakening

In the twilight of the 18th century, John Wesley finished his leg of the race and took his place among the cloud of witnesses who are watching us now. However, God's plan was already in motion and what is called The Second Great Awakening began as the 18th century neared its close and stretched into the 19th century.

Charles Finney

One of the key figures of The Second Great Awakening was Charles G. Finney, born on August 29, 1792. Finney (1792-1875) was to be a sort of "John the Baptist" who would light revival fires in the northeastern United States and England. As he studied law, his interest in Scripture was apparently sparked by references to scripture in Blackstone's law commentaries. After coming under conviction by the power of the Holy Spirit, at the age of 29, Charles Finney was gloriously converted while praying in the woods. That night he encountered Jesus in a back room of the boarding house where he was living. He describes the experience.

There was ... no light in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly lit. As I went in and shut the door. ... It seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face ... as I would see any other man. He said nothing but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet. ... [I]t seemed to me a reality that He stood before me and I poured out my soul to Him. I wept like a child ... I bathed His feet with my tears...

[He continues describing the events that followed.]

But as I turned and was about to take my seat by the fire I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without expecting it ... the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me body and soul. I could feel the impression like a wave of electricity going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love ... like the very breath of God ... it seemed to fan me like immense wings. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and ... I bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. The waves came over me and over me and over me one after the another until I recollected I cried out ... "Lord, I cannot bear any more."¹

Immediately, people began to come under deep conviction as Finney shared his experience with Jesus. He terminated his law practice and refused to take any more clients saying that he was now on retainer to plead the case of Jesus Christ to a lost world.

¹Miller, *Charles Finney*, Dimension Books, p.23

In many ways Finney was a pioneer. After his conversion, he was encouraged by some of the local clergy to study theology in the schools of the day. He refused, expressing his firm belief that they had been wrongly educated. He wanted nothing of the training that had taken their zeal from them. His energy and zeal came from the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Finney had an unyielding commitment to prayer and seeking the presence of God. Finney preached repentance from sin, that man must choose to turn from sin to receive God's grace. He reasoned that since God has commanded us to be holy and God would not command us to do something that we could not do, we must therefore be holy.

Finney was indeed a champion for God who not only carried the baton through the middle years of the 19th century, but passed it on to many. He was president of Oberlin College for many years and equipped many for the work of service. Charles Finney finished his leg of the race and joined the cloud of witnesses in August of 1875 having placed the baton in the hands of many.

The 1857 Prayer Meeting Revival

What is often called the Prayer Meeting Revival of 1857 was directly linked to Finney. It was initiated by the efforts of Jeremiah Lanphier, a 48-year-old business man from New York City who was converted under Finney's ministry about nine years earlier.

Times were difficult. Businesses and banks were failing, factories were shutting down and thousands of people were out of work. In his book on revival, Winkie Pratney describes the beginnings of this revival.

Seeing the terrible need of the city for God, he [Lanphier] gave up his business to be a city street missionary. With social collapse staring the city in the face, Lanphier walked the streets passing out adds for a noonday prayer meeting to be held Wednesdays at the Dutch Church on the corner of Fulton Street in downtown New York. For five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five minutes, he waited alone, his faith tried. But then, at 12:30, six men came in, one after another. By the next week, there were twenty. By the first week in October (just before the stock market crashed) they decided to meet daily instead of weekly. Within six months over ten thousand businessmen were meeting everyday in similar meetings, confessing sin, getting saved, praying for revival.²

Within six months, ten thousand business men were gathering daily for prayer in New York, and within two years, a million converts were added to the American churches.

D. L. Moody

D. L. Moody was one of the brightest lights carrying the baton to the end of the century. Moody was converted by his Sunday School teacher in Chicago, Illinois. In 1858, when he was barely past the age of 20, he started his own Sunday School in a vacant saloon with street kids that had been rejected by the churches. It grew and eventually became a church. In 1860, Moody gave up his business and devoted himself to ministry. Moody died in 1899, but Moody Bible Institute is still in existence today.

²Pratney, *Revival, Its Principles and Personalities*, Huntington House Pub., p. 108

A Common Thread

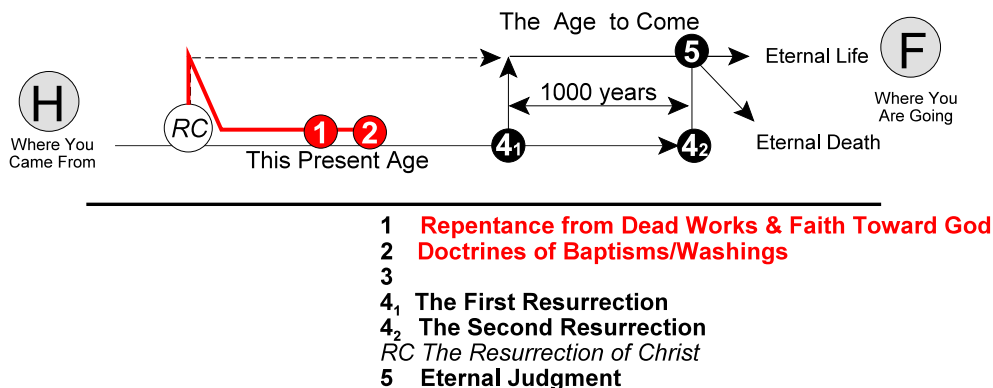
An overview of the life and work of the key figures of the great awakening period reveals a common thread that seems to link them all together. Wesley emphasized sanctification. The Moravians encouraged confession of sins and personal accountability. Whitfield, Edwards and Finney carried a strong message of repentance. They all believed in the foundational truth established by the early reformers, that man is justified by faith alone, but the common thread that was woven into the fabric of the church during their ministries was holiness and sanctification.

We are justified by faith, apart from works, but we are not to continue in sin as we did before we believed. The grace that preceded our faith, is the same grace that justifies us in God’s eyes when we believe, and it is that same grace that enables us to walk in holiness. True faith and genuine repentance always causes a positive change in behavior. Paul addressed this issue saying, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:1-2).

Yes, temptations abound in this world and there are no perfect Christians. But true Christians do not practice or continue in sin. Sin is our enemy. If we stumble and fall into sin, we must confess it, forsake it, and renew our pursuit of holiness because, without holiness, we will not see the Lord (see Heb 12:14). True faith produces an observable transformation in the life of the believer.

Therefore, the two Great Awakenings, which so greatly influenced the 18th and the 19th centuries, are seen historically as when the doctrine of Christian sanctification, or holiness was restored in the Church as established doctrine. This is embodied in the foundational teaching of baptisms or washings and is reflected in the Destiny Diagram below.

Destiny Diagram #11



The next lesson will reveal the hand of God in history restoring the practical application of the doctrine known as the “laying of hands.”