

# Back to Basics: *Understanding Essential Methodist Doctrines*

Wednesday, September 22, 2010

Time: 3:15 pm – 5:15 pm

Place: Wilkerson Room

Facilitator: Rev. Dr. Ore L. Spragin, Jr.

# Back to Basics

## The Purpose

- The suggested scripture reference is Acts 2:42-47
- Primary Resource Books:
  - (1) *Essential Church?: reclaiming a generation of dropouts* by Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, 2008.
  - (2) *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials* by Ted A. Campbell, 1999.

An additional resource will be *John Wesley's Message Today* by Lovett H. Weems, 1991.

# The Purpose

- This session, designed for clergy and lay, looks at essential Methodist doctrine with a goal of helping learners understand the uniqueness of Methodism and how it relates to maintaining members and gaining new members.

# Questions We Will Seek to Address

- By observation at your local church, what is essential to CMEs, and why is it essential?
- From the scripture reference, what are the essentials? What are the fruit? What is the difference between the two?
- What does Rainer define as essential to retaining members and reclaiming dropouts?
- What is essential Methodism as defined by Campbell?
- What is John Wesley's message today? What is essential today as described by Weems?

# Questions We Will Seek to Address

- Where do the three interact; where do the three sets meet; what are the commonalities between the three?
- Is the CME Church/denomination an essential church?
- Is your local church an essential church? If so, how? If not, why not? – Discuss
- Do we want to maintain and reclaim members? If so, based on the understandings gained from this session, what must we do? (the same vs. differently)
- Do the principles, lessons, and knowledge learned in this session help us toward our goal? If so, how? If not, why not?

## **Book One – Essential Church?: reclaiming a generation of dropouts.**

- **Top Ten Reasons Church Dropouts Stopped Attending Church**
- Simply wanted a break from church.
- Church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical.
- Moved to college and stopped attending church.
- Work responsibilities prevented me from attending.
- Moved too far away from the church to continue attending.
- Became too busy though still wanted to attend.
- Didn't feel connected to the people in my church.
- Disagreed with the church's stance on political or social issues.
- Chose to spend more time with friends outside the church.
- Was only going to please others.
- --Rainer and Rainer, pp. 3-4

# What are growing churches doing?

- Churches that are retaining members “have demonstrated biblically the New Testament reality that God intended for local congregations.
- to gather,
- worship,
- disciple,
- minister,
- and evangelize.”
- (Rainer and Rainer, pp. 5-6)
- Compare the reference scripture, Acts 2:42-7-47. This is the biblical description of “essential churches.”

# What Is An Essential Church?

- Essential churches:
- Have learned to **simplify**. They have removed activities that have no clear purpose, and they have a clear process or structure for making disciples.
- **Deepen** their members' knowledge of God's word and do not "dumb down" biblical teachings. There is an emphasis on biblical literacy and doctrinal teaching.
- Have high **expectations** of their members. They expect much and thus they receive much.
- Help their members **multiply** spiritually by providing opportunities for evangelism through missions and ministry, including church planting.
- --from Rainer and Rainer, p. 6

# What defines a dying church?

- The American church is concluded to be dying when the number of baptisms within the past several years is compared with the number of baptisms several decades ago. Further, it was concluded that the church is losing influence in today's culture.

## Books One and Two- Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials and John Wesley's Message Today

- This session will concentrate on the four major Methodist bodies that were founded and continue to have their primary existence in the United States of America.
- These are the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME), the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ), the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), and the United Methodist Church (UM).

# Why Study Doctrine?

- “... so Christians can be clear about the faith they profess together.” (Campbell, p. 17)
- so we may better understand who we are as Methodists
- so we may better share our faith with those we seek to evangelize and to serve
- We cannot help to deepen those whom we bring into our congregations, if we ourselves are not deep.

# What Do We Mean By Methodist Doctrine?

- “... that which Methodists have agreed to teach.”  
(Campbell, p. 17)
- the empirical (most basic) and historical meaning of the Bible
- church doctrine, which is the application of biblical doctrine to the worship and life of a body of believers
- “ ... consensus about moral issues as well as formally ‘theological’ issues (issues about God, salvation, the church, and so forth). (Campbell, p. 18)

# What was essential for John Wesley?

- Doctrines that were commonly Christian
- Doctrines that defined “the particular spirituality and teachings of the Methodist movement ...” (Campbell, p.20)
- Controversies over minor points that would hinder the work of Christ were to be avoided
- Uniformity in doctrine and practice

# Affirmation of Doctrines Today

- The doctrines that we affirm and study today are a continuation of those doctrines held by the apostles
- All these doctrines are protected either by the constitutions or the *Disciplines* of these four denominations, and they continue to be expressed through means of preaching, teaching, prayer, song, ritual, and hymnal.
- Individual members may hold to beliefs that are not consistent with the corporate doctrines of our church, but they do not speak for the church.

# Doctrines About Religious Authority

- Bible
- Tradition
- Reason
- Experience

# Doctrines About God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit

- Trinity (One God in Three Persons)
- Real personhood of the Holy Spirit
- The love of God for all God's creation-human, inhuman, and inanimate

# Foundational Doctrines About Human Nature and Salvation

- Man was created in the image of God-sinless and pure
- The Fall destroyed man's original nature
- Original sin
- Willful sin
- Every human being stands in need of God's saving grace
- God's grace is available to everyone
- This is a distinctly Methodist doctrine; not all Christian denominations believe the grace of God to salvation is available for everyone.

# Distinctively Wesleyan Doctrines About The “Way of Salvation”

- Wesley formulated the “way of salvation” using a scientific method, carefully observing his own religious experiences, and observing and inquiring into the religious experiences of others.
- The Way of Salvation followed this pattern: from repentance to faith to justification to sanctification

# What Is Justification?

- Justification is more than just a good feeling. It is more than simple forgiveness of sins.
- First, “The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression of the soul.” (Weems, p. 37)
- “Second, there are fruits of the Spirit.” (Weems, p. 38)

# What is Sanctification?

- Sanctification is “... the transformation of our wills and affections.” (Campbell, p. 58)
- The goal of sanctification is entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, as described in Matthew 5:8 and 22:37, and is seen as attainable because Scripture affirms this and commands it.
- The process of sanctification was not believed to be achievable in isolation but was the work and goal of the class, bands, societies, and other groups.

# Doctrines About Church

- Our definition of “church” is found in Article 13 of the Articles of Religion. It contains three elements:
  - (1) the gathering or congregation of faithful men, or persons,
  - (2) the pure Word of God is preached, and
  - (3) the sacraments are duly administered according to the ordinance of Christ.
- Note that “congregation” is not defined by place or space, but by whom.
- The church in its ideal is one body, holy, and catholic, i.e. universal in its faith.

# Doctrines About Ministry

- As was seen in the reference scripture of Acts 2:42 and again in Acts 6:1-3, so in the Methodist Church, the administrative authority rests primarily with the ordained leadership.
- However, the ministry of the church belongs to the church and all its members, though some are called out to serve specific roles or functions.
- Our membership vows and installation ritual remind us of our interdependence upon each other to successfully support and fulfill the ministries of the church.

# Doctrines About Means of Grace

- John Wesley coined the term “... *means of grace, which he defined as ‘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.’*” (Campbell, p. 70)
- These means are to be used regularly and repeatedly by Christians.

# Particular Means of Grace

- Instituted Means of Grace (Works of Piety)  
public worship,  
preaching,  
the Lord's Supper,  
private and family prayer,  
Scripture study, and  
fasting or abstinence

# Particular Means of Grace

- In accordance with the teachings of John Wesley, church tradition and the experience of believers over the years, the CME Church adds to these:  
prayer meetings,  
class meetings,  
and love feasts.

# Particular Means of Grace Cont'd

- Prudential Means of Grace (Works of Mercy)
- The prudential means of grace, or works of mercy, are contained in General Rules and are summed up in the words:
  - do no harm,
  - do good, and
  - attend the ordinances of God

# Means of Grace vs. Sacraments

- The means of grace are outward, visible signs, words, or actions ordained by that help to bring God's grace to us; sacraments are outward, visible signs ordained by God that indicate or show that God's grace has been received in us and is at work in us.

# Means of Grace vs. Sacraments

- The Methodist Church observes two, and only two sacraments:
  - the Lord's Supper,
  - and baptism
- While the Lord's Supper is also a means of grace, baptism is not.

# Means of Grace vs. Sacraments

- According to Scripture, the Lord's Supper is repeatable: "this do as often as you do it."
- Baptism is not repeatable, but is a one-time event, and is therefore not listed with the means of grace.

# Doctrines About Sacraments- Baptism

- Wesley believed and taught that infants who are baptized are justified and born again, or regenerated, at the time of their baptism.
- But he also affirmed that “it is possible to deny the faith into which one was baptized.” (Campbell, p. 72)

# Doctrines About Sacraments-

## Baptism

- We continue to hold to this belief and insist that all persons who were baptized as infants be administered the rite of confirmation in which they confess their own adherence to the Christian faith.
- Methodists do not claim that those who are baptized are at that moment automatically saved as a result of being baptized, but that saving faith may come later.

# Doctrines About Sacraments -Baptism

- Methodists observe three modes of baptism: immersion, pouring, and sprinkling.
- Each of these has validity within the authority of Scripture, tradition, and experience, and thus reason.
- The oldest method of baptism and the only one about which there is no debate is immersion.
- Even infants were immersed in the period of the early church.

# Doctrines About Sacraments-Holy Communion

- Views on the nature of the elements (bread and wine) of Holy Communion fall usually into one of four categories
- 1. Memorialism – They are only a memorial or sign of Christ’s sacrifice and Christian fellowship; there is no power to be conveyed to the believer and Christ is not present in the elements in any way
- 2. Virtualism – They convey spiritual strength when received by faith; Christ’s virtue, or power is present and available through the elements to the believer who partakes

# Doctrines About Sacraments-Holy Communion

- 3. Corporealism – They convey the body of Christ to the communicant; Christ's human body is present with the elements; the elements serve as the vehicle, or means, through which Christ comes to the one who receives the elements; also known as consubstantiation
- 4. Realism – They are transformed into the human body and blood of Christ by means of the prayer of consecration; also known as transubstantiation

# Doctrines About Sacraments-Holy Communion

- The 18th Article of Religion declares the Methodist position on the nature of the elements to be inclusive of virtual and corporeal views. But it is clear that both the power and the presence of Christ are present only to those who receive by faith

# Doctrines About Judgment, Eternal Life, and The Reign of God

- The historic creeds, church tradition, the Articles of Religion, the sermons and hymns of the Wesleys, and historic Methodist doctrine are all consistent with Scripture in affirming the ascension of Christ, his second coming to judge the world, and the existence of a real heaven and a real hell.

# Methodist Doctrine and Ethos

- Ethos refers to the characteristic spirit of a people or institution
- Campbell said it is a “way of life” and that “... many of the Methodist doctrinal standards (especially the General Rules and the Social Creed) are concerned with Christian morality.” (Campbell, p. 84)
- Yet as Weems correctly observes, “The first task for Wesley was always evangelism, not reform.” (Weems, p. 63)
- Seven areas of mission for Wesleyans were: the poor, slavery, prisons, liquor, politics, war, and education

# Methodist Doctrine and Ethos Cont'd

- Historically, the Methodist ethos was not a reluctant yielding of oneself to do what someone else claimed to be good; rather it was a reflection of sanctifying grace, the sanctification of one's will and affections.
- The General Rules and other doctrinal statements gave guidelines for living a sanctified life.
- Methodist sermons and hymns also provided a motivation.
- Participation in small groups, especially for accountability and discipleship purposes. These were the societies, subdivided into bands and classes.

# Methodist Doctrines and Ethos

- “Methodists were expected to be above reproach in their personal conduct ...” (Campbell, p. 89)
- Methodists were to guard their speech, be sexually pure (avoiding even lewdness and compromising situations), be modest in dress, be good stewards in finance, be temperate in drink, and avoid all types and kinds of worldly amusements.
- The Methodist social ethos has also consistently included social outreach.

# Methodist Doctrines and Ethos

- “In a world that often seems to lack moral bearings ... it [is] important to stress the wholeness and balance of the historic Methodist moral vision, a vision that insists that both the individual and society must be transformed by divine grace. (Campbell, p. 99) Even the transformation of society and the world, though, begins and ends with the transformation of individuals.

# Sevens Sins of A Dying Church

1. Doctrine dilution – watered-down gospel; lack of strong biblical & doctrinal teaching and preaching
2. Loss of evangelistic passion – a lack of witness of any kind
3. Failure to be relevant – to the community in which it is situated
4. Few outwardly focused ministries – closed study groups and fellowships with little outreach
5. Conflict over personal preferences – such as font type, coffee brand, etc.
6. The priority of comfort – unwillingness to change or try something new; stuck in a rut
7. Biblical illiteracy – a lack of understanding or knowledge of the Bible; this is here distinct from doctrine (rules or guidelines based on an understanding of the Bible)

--from Rainer and Rainer, pp. 16-19

## Chapter 2: Looking for a Different Kind of Community

- Community is not something that just happens; it is intentionally created.
- How do we do this in the CME Church?
- Is it working?
- If not, why not?
- Do our communities simply become another clique within the larger clique?
- The creation of community requires the giving of effort, time, and personal space.

# Still Looking?

- Every church does not have to be the same, but in a denominational or connectional church, all of the churches ought to have some things in common.
- What are the things that matter, and which ones do not?
- What defines us, and what does not?
- If we say we are part of a connection or denomination, what does that mean?
- What are the expectations that are before us, and what are the liberties?

## Chapter 3: That's Life! It Changes

- “The myth of the university is broken; colleges are not responsible for church dropouts. The church is responsible for church dropouts.” (Rainer and Rainer, p. 89)
- What ministries do we have for students – in college, but also at other educational levels – in terms of both ministries to them, and ministries in which they may become involved in the local church and the surrounding community?

## Chapter 4: A New Spin on Hypocrisy

Children learn from their parents

- “ ... children are not receiving spiritual guidance from their parents ... doing church is not enough.
- Parents must talk to their children about why church and matters of spirituality are essential ... The doing of church must be accompanied by the telling of why it's important.” (Rainer and Rainer, pp. 95-96)
- Like monkey see, monkey do, so children also do what they see.

# New Spin on Hypocrisy Cont'd

- What do they see in you at home? Do they see you doing church, but rarely or never experience you sharing with them “the faith for which [your] church stands”? (Rainer and Rainer, p. 97)
- Family devotions and family prayer are also important to the sharing of faith, and the absence of these does not support the notion of church being important.
- Finally, sharing the struggles of your faith walk with them will help them not only to know that church is important to you, but also to know that you are being truthful with them.

# All Eyes On The Pastor

- The pastor must give leadership to the youth of the church holding them to high expectations of growth and participation, that is, discipleship
- If the pastor cannot, then it should be assigned to some other person.
- The pastor should continue to have some personal contact with the development of the impressionable youth of the church. To have a lack of ability in an area is not a fault, but to know it and not do something about it is.

# All Eyes On The Pastor

- Jesus said it were better that a millstone be hanged about a person's neck and he be drowned than that that person be knowingly responsible for the spiritual demise of those children in need of spiritual nurture. The grief caused by his death would be far better than the grief caused by his negligence in ministerial oversight.
- Essential churches show the young people why participation in church and assimilation into church are important in their lives.

# How Essential Churches Close the Back Door

- Simplify
- Deepen
- Expect
- Multiply

# Deepen

- Teach the Bible – all of it – to everybody. And make it applicable
- Have a clear and known process for making disciples.
- Preachers and teachers should be prepared and make lessons and sermons relevant, showing the importance of the lesson.
- Multiplication is seen most often where doctrine is seen (not just held) to be important.
- Churches should have both open and closed study groups

# The Significance of Methodist Doctrine to the Essential Church Summary Point #1

1. While Wesley believed and taught the primacy, or priority, of Scripture as the authority in the life of a Christian, he also placed value on tradition, reason, and experience.
  - These four make up what is widely known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. All four are interactive and interdependent, and each on its own fails to be a sufficient source of authority for the Christian life.

# The Significance of Methodist Doctrine to the Essential Church

- This does not mean the Bible does not contain all that is necessary for salvation, but Scripture must be properly understood and applied. This is where the other three are important. In fact, it was the other three that brought about the presence of Scripture.

# Summary Point #2

- 2. Knowing who God is and how God works on our behalf gives us encouragement and strength to trust him for our salvation and to do what he says he will do. Methodism distinctly says in the face of secular humanism, religious pluralism, and Calvinist exclusionism that God has not left us alone to fend for or to save ourselves; God knows that we are helpless without him, and he has not forsaken us.

## Summary Point #3

- 3. The Methodist doctrine of grace is significant when so many persons today believe they have no escape from their way of sin and self-destruction. Some persons could not care less about how they lead their lives because there is no hell awaiting them, or they will work themselves out of their punishment. Yet others believe themselves unlovable by God. What a wonderful Methodist privilege to tell them all, “Jesus loves you and will save you. Those who believe will never be turned away.”

## Summary Point #4

- 4. In the Wesleyan way of salvation it is clearly seen that both God and man have a role to play in a person's salvation: it is man's to believe and to seek after; it is God's to perform and to provide. For persons who do not believe it is possible that they might be saved and improve their walk with God and with their fellow human beings, Methodism provides a great hope that is grounded in the authority of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience – with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible to him who believes. (See Mark 10:26)

## Summary Point #5

- 5. We Methodists are often criticized for our seeming free way of defining and administering the church, and its ministry and sacraments, but there can be no doubt that through our doctrine and its practice we offer the full and free grace of God to all would receive it. The structure of our church is designed to further both personal and corporate growth in the perfection to which we have been commanded, and allows full participation at all levels of ministry to all persons. In the spirit and example foremost of Christ and then of John Wesley, by adhering to our doctrines we show forth the love of Christ to all humankind.

## Summary Point #6

- 6. We proclaim a coming judgment and eternal afterlife to all people, sharing with them in true gospel fashion the reality of both the joy and the pain, and offering to them in the name of the returning Christ the opportunity to choose life.

## Summary Point #7

- 7. Methodism offers a true opportunity to change the world one person at a time by emphasizing the personal nature of the Methodist ethos, each of us challenging the other through the proper and effective use of the Methodist class and other small groups.

# Conclusion

- The United States army has produced a television advertisement in which a young lady says she wants to see a difference in her life, be a part of something bigger than herself, and make a difference in the world.
- What better and more permanent way to do that than to use our structure and, on the basis of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, promote our doctrine inviting those who want to see a difference in their lives to come to know Christ through the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

- We omit so much passive teaching and direct opportunities to transfer our fundamental doctrine, both theological and practical, to others when we fail to use our structure, rituals, and other church instruments to the fullest degree possible.
- In a world where lines are constantly being drawn in the sand, we can take a lesson from our founder, John Wesley, and show the world a better, balanced way between the law and the grace of the Bible and the church

- If you accept and walk in the Methodist way of salvation, Christ will shine forth in your life, be lifted up, and will draw persons unto himself through you and your church. They will see Christ in you and ask you, “What must I do to be saved?” Yet we must be ever mindful, “The end or goal of Methodist teaching is not the advancement of Methodism. Our heritage has been used by God for a much greater end: the coming of God’s reign or kingdom.” (Campbell, p. 31)

- The establishment of the notoriety of our individual church is not nearly as important as the promotion of our common doctrines. We are part of a larger picture. When we see and take our place in the long line of kingdom-builders, and deepen the lives of others for Christ by helping them to know the truth of who he is and who they are in him, we will surely have built a lasting legacy for ourselves, by building for Christ.