



# **The Most Influential People in the Church**

**from the Middle Ages to the present  
(c. 1100-2000)**

In the previous series, we considered ten of the most influential leaders of the Christian church within (approximately) the first one thousand years of the church. In this series, we'll consider another group of influential church leaders who lived and served during the course of the next thousand years, roughly from 1100 to the present. All the characters we'll study were highly influential individuals; the church would have been much different without them. Most of them had a positive impact on the church, but some of them also had a negative influence. Some of these men held viewpoints very similar to our own, while others held doctrines significantly different from ours. The fact that we are studying these characters does not imply endorsement of or agreement with them, but merely that we recognize their influence on the church. As always when studying history and historic figures, we can learn from both good and bad examples.

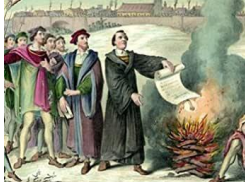
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## **Primary resources:**

*Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Moody, 1988)

Gerald Priest, class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary



## The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

Thomas Aquinas (1225 -1274)<sup>1</sup>

Saint Thomas Aquinas, an Italian Dominican Catholic priest and doctor of the church, “the Angelic Doctor,” was an immensely influential teacher and philosopher toward the end of the Middle Ages. He is by far the most influential theologian in the Latin Church since the days of Augustine,<sup>2</sup> the most significant voice on theology and biblical interpretation of the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> *Thomism* refers to his brand of theology, in which he sought to synthesize/combine the philosophy of Aristotle with Christian theology (i.e., Augustine). He is highly esteemed in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) as one of the church’s greatest theologians and philosophers. His works have been historically used in defending Catholicism against Protestant claims.

Thomas is generally regarded as a scholastic, that is, a schoolman. The scholastics systematized the faith, produced formal statements of the faith, and approached the faith academically. They generally promoted two great thinkers—Aristotle (384-322 BC), the famous Greek philosopher, and Augustine (354-430 AD), the famous Christian theologian. They wanted to blend or bridge faith and reason; their aim was to defend and explain the faith in rational, academic terms. They used Scripture, the early church creeds, the writings of the church fathers, and the thoughts of philosophers to accomplish this goal. Scholastics include men like Alselm (1033-1109), Peter Lombard (1105-1169), and Peter Abelard (1079-1142). The greatest of them all was Thomas Aquinas.

No one has ever suggested that Thomas Aquinas got famous on his looks. He was colossally fat, suffered from edema (dropsy), and one huge eye dwarfed his other. Nor was he a particularly dynamic, charismatic figure. Introspective and silent most of the time, when he did speak, it was often completely unrelated to the conversation. His classmates in college called him “the dumb ox.” Today, recognized as the greatest theologian of the Middle Ages, he is called “the doctor of angels.”<sup>4</sup> The Roman Catholic Church adopted Thomas’ teaching as an accurate representation of the Christian faith.



Thomas is still regarded as a great hero to many within the Christian tradition, for good reasons. Much of what he wrote was biblically accurate and helpful. He defended orthodox expressions of faith (e.g., the Trinity, deity and humanity of Christ, original sin, substitutionary atonement of Christ, etc.) and retained a strong God-centeredness in his teaching. He advocated for biblical forms of

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the information on Aquinas is from Keven Swanson, *Apostate: The Men Who Destroyed the Christian West*. 2nd edition (Generations: Parker, CO), 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 171.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew R. Talbert, “Hermeneutics, History of,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> “Thomas Aquinas: The Brilliant “Dumb Ox.” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/thomas-aquinas.html>

morality. We would agree with much of what he said, and we should commend him for all the good he did.

### **Famous Aquinas quotes:**

“Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. Amen.”

“Give us, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy affection may drag downwards; give us an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; give us an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. Bestow upon us also, O Lord our God, understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

### **Aquinas’ errors**

We must admit that some of Aquinas’ work was deeply flawed, especially when we consider the way his teaching undermined the foundational tenets of Christianity.

Aquinas’ main error came from his attempt to merge classical, Greek philosophy and Christian theology. He was determined to extract from Aristotle’s writings what was acceptable to Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Between 1270 and 1272, he produced a series of disputations to make his case. The result of his teaching was a separation of reason from revelation, philosophy from theology. Although both realms of knowledge were connected and did not contradict each other, and both come from God, the two realms are distinct. Aquinas opened the door for human autonomy, or at least, the autonomy of the human mind/reason.

Aquinas believed man needs divine help to understand anything at all, but also that humans have the natural capacity to know many things without special divine revelation. Human nature, in and of itself “is sufficient for knowing certain intelligible things, [namely] those we can come to know through the senses.” He held that all knowledge starts with the sense perceptions and the facts of the natural world.<sup>6</sup> Human reason, not revelation, is the starting point. In other words, human senses alone, without reference to Scripture, can come to know truth. We can reason from man to God, using human reason to prove God’s existence.

Thomas blended Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine by suggesting that rational thinking and the study of nature, like revelation, were valid ways to understand truths pertaining to God. According to Thomas, God reveals himself through nature, so to study nature is to study God. The ultimate goals of theology, in Thomas’s mind, are to use reason to grasp the truth about God and to experience salvation through that truth. The central thought is that grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.<sup>7</sup> The idea itself sounds fairly innocuous, but the implication is that human reason works independently from God and His revelation. This small crack in the door in time led in time to a huge chasm between Scripture and nature as sources of truth. If man can find the truth without God, why retain belief in God?

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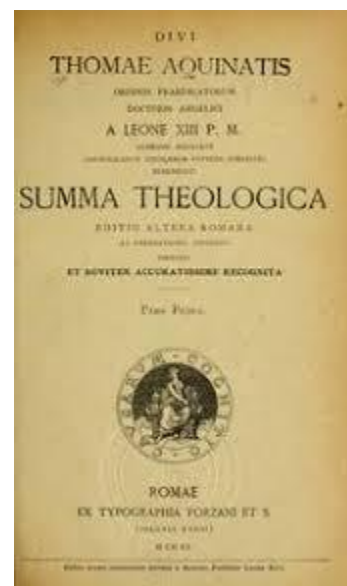
<sup>5</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/thomas-aquinas.html>

<sup>6</sup> George Thomas Kurian, *Nelson’s New Christian Dictionary: The Authoritative Resource on the Christian World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Aquinas#Modern\\_influence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Aquinas#Modern_influence)

## Aquinas' effects

Thomas Aquinas had an extraordinary influence on the Western church, especially the RCC, but his ideas seeped into Protestantism as well. Even though it has been over 750 years since his death, most Christian academic leaders speak of him in glowing terms. Aquinas' magnum opus is his *Summa Theologica*. Much of his teaching may be helpful for the defense of an orthodox, Trinitarian faith. His main error was separating human reason from theological reason, the secular from the sacred. He asserted that Scripture has nothing to say about "philosophical science," that which human reason alone attains. Theology differs in kind from natural philosophy (science). The two sources of knowledge are separate and distinct.



Note the connection—here's a quote from Galileo Galilei (1564-1642): "The Bible shows the way to go to heaven, not the way the heavens go." Implied is the idea that knowledge should be divided into secular and sacred realms instead of being a unified whole. This idea is very common and well-accepted today.

Aquinas taught that one need not appeal to Scripture alone to discover proper moral guidelines. Nature itself, and reasoning from nature, should lead us to proper moral standards. Specifics about God come only from Scripture, but beyond that, nature and reason provide much truth about God. Aquinas did not believe that man's reason was seriously tainted by the fall into sin.

For Aquinas, divine revelation is necessary but not sufficient. Human wisdom, often taken from pagan sources like Aristotle, must fill in the gaps. Philosophy for him must remain independent from revelation. The natural man is unhindered in his intellect and must not rely upon revelation for guiding his thoughts. Man can reason toward truth and morality without Scripture.

## Aquinas' weaknesses

The Bible repeatedly insists that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10). All knowledge should begin with and assume the existence of God and the truth of His Word. In Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). Aquinas seems to ignore this dependence when he insists that the unaided human mind can find truth without reference to God. Aquinas leans too confidently on man's natural capacity to determine truth apart from God's special revelation.

Aquinas learned of salvation through faith and revelation but defended his faith externally and independently through the rationalism of Greek philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

The Apostle Paul warns us against the "vain and deceptive philosophies" taught by the pagan philosophers of his day (Col 2:8). Man's fallen reason is completely incapable of producing a system of knowledge unaided by God. Aquinas ignored that advice and sought to reconcile the Scriptures with the deceptive philosophies so common among pagans.

<sup>8</sup> Selden, 186, quoted in Priest.

Contrary to what Aquinas taught, the Bible does not advocate two different kinds of thinking or knowledge (Prov 2:1-6, Col 2:1-3). God is the ultimate source of all truth and wisdom. God's revelation comes to us in various ways (i.e., natural/general and special), but truth is one. All truth is God's truth. There may be various forms of revelation, but the source of all knowledge is God Himself. Anything that contradicts God's revelation is little more than worldly wisdom, which "descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15; cf. 1 Cor 1:19-24). The apostles intentionally avoided mixing this kind of "wisdom" with true wisdom.

### Responses to Aquinas

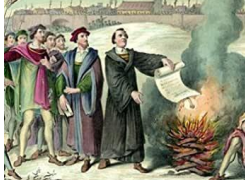
While many in the church followed Aquinas, others denied his teaching. Martin Luther described Aquinas as "the fountain and original soup of all heresy, error and Gospel havoc, as his books bear witness." Luther compared Aquinas with "the star of the book of Revelations which fell from heaven," as well comparing, "the empty speculations of Aristotle to the smoke of the bottomless pit, the universities to the locusts, and Aristotle himself to his master Apollyon."<sup>9</sup> He perhaps exaggerated just a bit but had a legitimate point.

We certainly cannot deny that humans have discovered many things not revealed in Scripture. In virtually every field of human endeavor, research has uncovered incredible facts, and most of these have little to do with biblical revelation (e.g. medicine, mathematics, physics, astronomy, electronics, mechanics, etc.). Do Christians reject all knowledge not directly tied to the Bible? Obviously not. What we reject is the idea that divine revelation and human reason are two different, separate kinds of knowledge. We deny a fundamental distinction between the secular and the sacred. We deny the idea that religious thought has no place in the wider world. We refuse to restrict theology to the church and the home. All truth, no matter where it's discovered or who discovers it, comes from God and is compatible with divine revelation. Christ is Lord over all things, for the glory of God.

Aquinas upheld and defended a form of Christianity, much of which we would agree with. He cannot properly be charged with entirely separating faith and reason, but he cracked open the door for others to make that separation. He provided the theoretical framework for later generations to go where Aquinas did not go—a total separation of faith and reason. Aquinas' ideas undercut Christian authority and paved the way for further corruptions. He also championed errors such as salvation by faith plus works (i.e., merit) and the sacramental system that the RCC (and others) still promote. As with many other influential Christian leaders, Aquinas proves to be a mixed bag of both positive contributions and negative errors. We would do well to avoid his errors and appreciate his contributions.

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5:288.



## The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

John Wycliffe (c. 1320 – 84): Morning Star of the Reformation

Think for a moment what it would mean to you if you could not own a Bible or if the Bible was not even available in your language. What if you were taught that the Bible was only for church officials to study and to interpret? That was the exactly the case in John Wycliffe's England.<sup>10</sup>

John Wycliffe was born into a world much different from ours. The Roman Catholic Church held ultimate authority in the lives of the people of Europe and the British Isles. Unfortunately, the church was rife with corruption and false doctrine. This period wasn't called "the Dark Ages" for nothing.

Wycliffe is called the "Morning Star" of the Reformation or the "the pioneer of the Reformation"<sup>11</sup> because he was one of the first to speak out against the abuses of the church and call for reform. One author calls Wycliffe "the Forerunner of all the Reformers, and the Father of all the Reformations of Christendom."<sup>12</sup> Another author asserts that Wycliffe was the first of the truly evangelical reformers in England, and that he "did more than any other man to change the course of English history." Wycliffe exerted a more powerful influence upon the English Reformation than did Martin Luther. Wycliffe was the father of the Reformation in his homeland.<sup>13</sup>

The Reformation has had an immense impact on where we stand theologically today. It's good for us to understand where we came from, and much of what we have today we received from the reformers. And one of the first and foremost of the reformers was John Wycliffe.

### I. Wycliffe's Life and Times

- A. Times (1300s): Wycliffe lived during the so-called "dark ages" (5<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe); several important things were going on during Wycliffe's time.
  - 1. Starting in 1348, the "Black Plague/Black Death" swept across England and Europe, and wiped out one-third of the European population—about 100K in London alone.
  - 2. What was known as the "100 Years War" between England and France raged from 1339 to 1453 and sapped energy and resources from those kingdoms.
  - 3. The control of the RCC over the nations of Europe was almost absolute at the time. And the abuses of the Church were well-known and widely resented.

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<sup>10</sup> Christian History Institute, *Glimpses* #13

<sup>11</sup> History of Protestantism, Book Second. *Wicliffe and His Times, or Advent of Protestantism*, 149.

<sup>12</sup> *Wicliffe and His Times*, 151.

<sup>13</sup> Grace Seminary, *Grace Theological Journal Volume 7* (Grace Seminary, 1986; 2002), 7:153.

- a) During the Dark Ages, the church was the absolute center of human existence in Europe. Nearly everything in culture revolved around the church. The church was the single greatest, most influential institution in western civilization at that time. The church owned over one-third of the land in England.
  - b) Clergy were often illiterate and immoral. Biblical education was not even required for priests. Men going into the ministry studied philosophy and church tradition, not Scripture. They were often quite ignorant of what the Bible taught.
  - c) High offices in the church were sold for enormous sums of money or given out as political favors. Those holding high church offices had enormous power.
  - d) The doctrines of the church had departed from biblical moorings. The church affirmed the existence of purgatory, sold indulgences, and taught the doctrine of transubstantiation. The church had become thoroughly corrupt, materialistic, and immoral.
  - e) One historian called the Dark Ages a time of “groveling superstitions.”<sup>14</sup>
  - f) The Pope in Rome tightly controlled the church and kingdoms throughout Europe. Many of the English people greatly resented the Pope’s attempts to control people and extract money from them. The desire to be free from papal control was beginning to stir.
- B. Wycliffe was born around 1320 into this environment. As a teenager, he studied Theology at Oxford. It was likely during his tenure at Oxford that Wycliffe was genuinely saved.
- C. He earned the Doctor of Divinity degree in 1359. He had the reputation of being the most brilliant man at the University.<sup>15</sup> He taught the Bible there from 1360 to 1365. He also served as the pastor of a nearby church.
- D. From 1376 onward, Wycliffe published tracts which decried the secularization of the church and the corruption of the Pope.
- E. In 1377, the Pope issued a Bull (an official document which prohibits the publication of certain writings) condemning the writings of Wycliffe.
- F. Because of the Pope’s opposition to Wycliffe, church authorities had him banished from his university teaching post at Oxford.
- G. Shortly after being put out of Oxford, he turned his attention to translating the Bible into English.



<sup>14</sup> Wycliffe and His Times, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105:446.



Quote: “The Bible is the faith of the Church, and the more widely it becomes known the better it will be. Therefore, since the laity should know the faith, it should be taught in whatever language is most easily understood.”

1. Some of his former students joined him at the parish church in Lutterworth where he had served as pastor.
2. There they undertook the monumental task of translating all the Scriptures into English, working from a Latin MS that was over 1000 years old.
3. Wycliffe believed that personal transformation was the result of access to the Bible. Real reformation began when the people had the Bible in their own language. Withholding the Bible from the common people was a fundamental sin.

Quote: “Forasmuch as the Bible contains Christ, that is all that is necessary for salvation; it is necessary for all men, not for priests alone. It alone is the supreme law that is to rule Church, State, and Christian life, without human traditions and statutes.”

4. Wycliffe’s NT was published in 1380 and the OT in 1382.
5. The common people received this English Bible with open arms, and many copies were spread; although the church tried to suppress it.<sup>16</sup> Today only about 250 copies of Wycliffe’s translation still exist.
6. His translation was consulted by later translators like Tyndale, Coverdale, the Bishops, and of course the King James translators.
7. Long before the appearance of the KJV, Wycliffe’s translation had a remarkable influence on the English language. Wycliffe’s Bible and popular tracts set the form for what would become modern English.

- H. About the same time as he was working on translating the Bible, Wycliffe began training some of the common folks to be Christian preachers. These “poor preachers,” known as Lollards, took the Word out to the common people across the land. He armed them with the Bible, tracts, and sermon outlines. They were very influential throughout England. Because of them, true conversion among Englishmen began to spread around the country.

The popularity of the Lollards became so great that it was said that one out of two persons was a Lollard, and the English Bible was widely spread and widely read.<sup>17</sup>

- I. From 1378 to 1379, Wycliffe published his theological system in a series of tracts. The RCC condemned Wycliffe as a heretic.
- J. Before the church could kill him, Wycliffe died of a stroke on New Year’s Eve in 1384.

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<sup>16</sup>*Bib Sac* 105:450.

<sup>17</sup>*Bib Sac* 105:452.



- K. His memory and influence continued so strongly that the RCC formally condemned him again thirty years later at the Council of Constance (1414).
1. Orders were given for his writings to be destroyed, his bones exhumed from the grave and burned, and the ashes to be thrown into a nearby river.
  2. But even such bizarre and extreme actions could not stop the hunger for God's Word and truth that Wycliffe had uncompromisingly advocated.<sup>18</sup>



Wycliffe serves as a tremendous example of dedication and commitment to the Scripture. He faced intense persecution for his faith, yet he refused to back down.

## II. Wycliffe's Principles

Although Wycliffe lived almost two centuries before the Reformation officially began (1517), his beliefs and teachings had much in common with later reformers like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. In fact, we might say that the reformers built on the foundation that Wycliffe laid.

What was this foundation? The doctrines that we almost take for granted today as evangelical and biblical.

### A. Wycliffe's doctrine of the Scripture

1. Wycliffe promoted an idea that was quite novel at the time, that Scripture must be the foundation of all doctrine. Scripture must be the final authority for faith and practice. Later reformers like John Hus, Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin would adopt the view of Wycliffe—sola Scriptura.
2. Wycliffe believed that studying the Bible was more important than listening to it read by the clergy in Latin. He believed every Christian should study the Bible in his own language.

He once said, "Christ and his apostles taught the people in that tongue that was best known to them. Why should men not do so now?"

### B. Wycliffe's doctrine of salvation

1. Salvation is by grace through faith and not by works.
2. He taught that man was fallen through Adam's transgression and that he was utterly unable to merit Divine favour or forgiveness by his own power.
3. He taught that Jesus died as a substitute for the sinner and that the sinner is justified through faith in Jesus' sacrifice.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Glimpses* #13.

<sup>19</sup> *Wicliffe and His Times*, 148.



- C. Wycliffe's doctrine of the church
1. He saw the church as a spiritual institution and not a political one. Wycliffe longed for a pure church, a return to a more biblical and modest form.
  2. Wycliffe taught that the church was the body of the elect whose head is Christ. Within the visible church there may be unsaved people, but no unsaved person is within the true church. The true church is a spiritual body under the headship of Christ, not the Pope.
  3. The church has only two offices: pastor and deacon. All the other offices that the RCC recognized were unbiblical.
  4. Although the church at this time was exceedingly corrupt, Wycliffe had no desire to break away from it; he only wanted to reform it, not to start a new church. He worked for the church's purification but did not advocate breaking up the church. In this, he was like many of the other reformers.
- D. Much of Wycliffe's writings were critical of RCC doctrines.
1. He protested the idolatry and superstition of the mass.
    - a) The RCC church believed that Christ was really, physically present in the bread and wine. After consecration, the bread was no longer bread. It looked like bread, smelled like bread, and even tasted like bread, but these things were only appearances, while the substance had been changed into the literal, actual body and blood of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> This idea is called transubstantiation.
    - b) Wycliffe strongly criticized this idea. Transubstantiation, he said, was the greatest of all heresies and was contrary to logic, grammar, and science. To Wycliffe, the mass was idolatry and transubstantiation was a lying fable.
    - c) Wycliffe believed in the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, the view which Calvin later held, and what many Protestants hold today. Christ's body is in heaven. The elements in the Supper are symbolic. The Supper is a remembrance, not a reenactment of Christ's sacrifice.
  2. Wycliffe attacked indulgences, the teaching that a person could reduce his time in purgatory or release a person from purgatory by paying money to a priest.
    - a) Regarding the use of indulgences, Wycliffe asked the following:

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<sup>20</sup>*Bib Sac* 105:449.

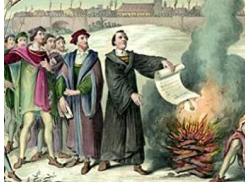
“Will a man [turn] from acts of licentiousness and fraud if he believes that soon after, with but the aid of a little money bestowed on friars, an active absolution from the crime he has committed may be obtained?”

- b) Many years later, Luther also reacted intensely against indulgences (by posting his 95 Theses). The abuse of indulgences was one of the main motivations for the Reformation.
3. Wycliffe preached against papal authority.
- a) The RCC taught that the Pope had dominion over the church and over the whole world. All Christians were to be subject to him for salvation, and all governments were to be subject to his political authority.
  - b) Wycliffe taught biblical authority, not papal authority. Final authority rests in God’s word.
- E. Wycliffe also had great impact on the political landscape in England. He taught that if a leader was a bad man, he gave up his right to authority. A man’s character, not his office, entitled him to leadership.<sup>21</sup>

The significance of Wycliffe can hardly be overstated. His beliefs about Scripture as the final authority and the Church as spiritual society were the foundation stones on which the later Reformation would be founded. Wycliffe was personally responsible for initiating Reformation in England and for the first English translation of the Bible. He was a translator before Luther; a theologian before Calvin; and a reformer before the Reformation. He truly was the “morning star” and pioneer of the Protestant Reformation. We owe him a great debt of gratitude.

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<sup>21</sup>*Bib Sac* 105:448.



# The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

Martin Luther (1483-1546)<sup>22</sup>

Martin Luther was a giant of history. Some believe he was the most significant European figure of the second millennium. He was the pioneer Reformer, the one God first used to spark a transformation of Christianity and the Western world. He was the undisputed leader of the German Reformation. In a day of ecclesiastical corruptions and apostasies, he was a valiant champion of the truth; his powerful preaching and pen helped to restore the pure gospel. More books have been written about him than any other man of history except Jesus Christ and possibly Augustine.<sup>23</sup>

“He trod like a giant through his age, tramping to earth what a thousand years had held in veneration; but everywhere new life blossomed in his footsteps.”<sup>24</sup>

## I. Martin Luther’s Life

### A. Early life - formative years (birth to 1517)

1. Luther was born and died at Eisleben, the son of Hans and Margaretta Luther. His father was a hardworking, middle class silver miner and business man. Both parents were Roman Catholic, his mother more sincere and superstitious than his father. His father hoped that Martin would be a lawyer.
2. Latin school at Mansfield (1494); Magdeburg, School of the Common Brethren (1497); grammar school at Eisenach (1498).
3. University of Erfurt (1501) to study law, earning a B.A. in 1502 and M.A. in 1505. It was providential that the University of Erfurt, where Luther “discovered” the Bible, distinguished itself above other European universities for its emphasis on biblical exegesis.
4. In July of 1505, the twenty-one-year-old Luther was caught in a thunderstorm and frightened by a nearby lightning strike. He cried out, “St. Anne, help me! I will become a monk.” He followed through on his vow and entered an Augustinian monastery. His father was furious that Martin dropped his plans to become a lawyer.

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<sup>22</sup> Most of this timeline and material is directly from Jerry Priest’s church history notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Lawson, “Fortress for Truth: Martin Luther.” <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/fortress-truth-martin-luther/>. Other information on Luther also from this article.

<sup>24</sup> Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, II:221. Quoted in Priest.

5. At the monastery, Luther was taught that one finds acceptance with God through good works and self-discipline. He wrote: "I tortured myself with prayer, fasting, vigils and freezing; the frost alone might have killed me... What else did I seek by doing this but God, who was supposed to note my strict observance of the monastic order and my austere life? I constantly walked in a dream and lived in real idolatry, for I did not believe in Christ: I regarded Him only as a severe and terrible Judge portrayed as seated on a rainbow." Elsewhere he recalled: "When I was a monk, I wearied myself greatly for almost fifteen years with the daily sacrifice, tortured myself with fastings, vigils, prayers, and other very rigorous works. I earnestly thought to acquire righteousness by my works." He further said of himself, "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, I would have gotten there."
6. Fortunately, Luther came under the influence of Johann von Staupitz (c. 1469-1524), vicar-general of Augustinian order. Staupitz became a spiritual mentor to Luther and was responsible for bringing Luther to Wittenberg in 1508. He gave Luther sound advice: study and teach the Bible.
7. April, 1507 - ordained into priesthood. He almost fainted the first time he celebrated the mass, feeling himself unworthy to participate in the mystery of transubstantiation.
8. 1508 - transferred to University of Wittenberg.
9. In November, 1510, Luther was sent to Rome on university business. He came away from the experience saying, "If there is a hell, Rome is built on it." Popery was an "institution of the devil." He wrote he would not have missed "seeing Rome for 100,000 florins; for I might have felt some apprehension that I had done injustice to the Pope, but as we see, so we speak." His experiences in Rome left him even less satisfied with his religious life.
10. 1512- received the Doctor of Theology degree at Wittenberg and was named professor of the Bible there. He retained his position there for the next 34 years.
11. 1515 - converted while studying Romans 1:17  
Luther had understood the righteousness of God to mean His active righteousness, His avenging justice by which He punishes sin. On those terms, he admitted that he hated the righteousness of God. But while sitting in the tower of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Luther meditated on this text and wrestled with its meaning. He writes:

“Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith Thereupon I felt, myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”

The time of Luther’s conversion is debated. Some think it took place as early as 1508, but Luther himself wrote that it happened in 1519, two years *after* he posted his Ninety-five Theses. More important is the reality of his conversion. Luther came to realize that salvation was a gift for the guilty, not a reward for the righteous. Man is not saved by his good works but by trusting the finished work of Christ. Thus, justification by faith alone became the central tenet of the Reformation.<sup>25</sup>

12. In 1517, a Dominican monk named John (or Johann) Tetzel began to sell indulgences near Wittenberg with the offer of the forgiveness of sins. This crass practice had been inaugurated during the Crusades to raise money for the church. Commoners could purchase from the church a letter that allegedly freed a dead loved one from purgatory. Rome profited enormously from this sham. In this case, the proceeds were intended to help Pope Leo X pay for a new St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

Tetzel’s famous quip, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs,” enraged Luther. He could see that the corrupt practice of selling indulgences was leading the people of his area astray. He determined to post a series of statements questioning the validity of the practice in the hopes of spurring a public debate.

13. October 31, 1517 - posting of Ninety-Five Theses

Posting notices on the door of public places was a common practice at the time. Luther posted his 95 Theses, otherwise known as *Disputation on the Power of Indulgences*. The work was quickly translated from Latin into German and soon was being read throughout Germany and Europe. Luther became famous within weeks, and his act of posting the 95 Theses is widely considered to be the birth of the Protestant Reformation.

Luther’s 95 Theses made the following main points:<sup>26</sup>

1. An indulgence can only be the remission of an ecclesiastical penalty, not a penalty imposed by God.
2. An indulgence can never remove guilt.
3. An indulgence cannot remit divine punishment for sin.

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<sup>25</sup> Lawson.

<sup>26</sup> T.M. Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*, I:229. Quoted in Priest.



4. An indulgence can have no efficacy for souls in purgatory.
5. The Christian who has true repentance has received divine pardon and needs no indulgence.
6. The true treasure-house of merits is the holy gospel of the grace and glory of God.

B. Schism leading to break with Rome (1517-1521)

1. Luther's teaching about justification by faith contradicted the Roman Catholic Church's teaching of salvation by faith plus works.
2. October, 1518—Luther engaged in a debate with Cardinal Cajetan, master general of the Dominican order, at Augsburg, who tried to persuade Luther to recant. Luther wrote home that the cardinal was “no more fitted to handle the case than an ass to play a harp.”
3. July, 1519—Leipzig debate with Johann Eck, a leading Catholic theologian and university professor. Eck cleverly forced Luther to agree with Huss and therefore identify himself with a well-known heretic. Luther admitted that popes and councils have erred. Neither pope nor council can establish articles of faith; these must come from Scripture.

I will tell you straight what I think. I am a Christian theologian; and I am bound not only to assert, but to defend the truth with my blood and death. I want to believe and be a slave to the authority of no one, whether council, university, or pope. I will confidently confess what appears to me to be true, whether it has been asserted by a Catholic or a heretic, whether it has been approved or reproved by a council.

4. June 15, 1520—The pope issued a bull (edict) of excommunication: *Exsurge Domine*. About forty of Luther's writings were deemed by the Church to be heretical, scandalous, or false. Luther was given sixty days to recant and submit to Rome. But the document took three months to “find” Luther. He burned bull on December 10, just before deadline. Although many supported Luther's rebellion against the pope, Luther became a criminal in the eyes of the church.
5. June-October, 1520—Luther published three great treatises in which he asserts the cardinal doctrines of the Reformation: authority of Scripture, justification by faith, and priesthood of the believer.

*Address to the German Nobility* – political in nature. Attacked the “three walls” of the Catholics: (1) temporal power has no jurisdiction over papal power; (2) no one may interpret Scripture but the pope, and (3) no one may call a church council but the pope.

*Babylonian Captivity of the Church* – doctrinal and ecclesiastical in nature. Attacked the Roman Catholic sacramental system. Held only to baptism, eucharist, and penance as sacraments. Attacked the “captivities” of withholding cup from laity, transubstantiation, and communion as a sacrifice.

*On the Freedom of the Christian Man* – practical in nature. Thesis: “A Christian is perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Apparent contradiction. First has to do with conscience; second with matter of service.

6. In April, 1521, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, ordered Luther to appear at the Diet of Worms. The religious authorities were attempting to apply pressure on Luther to get him to recant of his errors. Luther’s works had been assembled and piled on a table. Luther was asked if he would recant of the heresies contained in his works. Luther’s response became one of the classic statements of church history.

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.

Some accounts have Luther saying “I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.”

7. May 1521—the Edict of Worms issued by Charles V pronounced Luther an outlaw and placed a large reward for his arrest. Luther was given 21 days of freedom before any official could arrest him. On the way home from Worms, some of his supporters “kidnapped” him and took him to the Wartburg Castle. He hid there for eight months. During this time, he translated the Bible into German. With the Bible in the language of the common people, Reformation ideas spread even more rapidly.
8. In 1525, Luther married a former nun, Katherine “Katie” von Bora. Luther was forty-two and Katherine was twenty-six. They produced six children. Luther’s home life was exceedingly happy, which probably helped him maintain a robust ministry.
9. Luther maintained a heavy workload until the end of his life—preaching, lecturing, writing, and debating. He became ill in 1537, and his friends feared for his life. He soon recovered but again became ill in 1541. He was plagued with various illnesses and ailments throughout the rest of his life. In 1546, while traveling near his hometown, he again fell ill and this time did not recover. He died on February 18 within sight of the church in which he was baptized. His body was taken to Wittenburg where he was buried in front of the pulpit of the castle church.

C. Luther’s literary contributions

1. Translation of the Bible (NT in 1523; OT in 1534), which helped standardize German language
  2. Important doctrinal treatises. E.g., *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525) against *On the Freedom of the Will* (1524) by Erasmus
  3. Music. Thirty-five hymns. E.g., “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”
  4. Large and Short Catechisms
  5. Commentaries and Sermons
  6. Amazing total of published works: 544
- D. Luther’s struggles
1. Against the papacy for its avarice and its subversion of the souls of men.  
On March 10, 1522, Luther explained the mounting success of the Reformation in a sermon. With strong confidence in God’s Word, he declared: “I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept ... the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.” Luther saw that God had used him as a mouthpiece for truth. The Reformation was founded not on him and his teachings, but on the unshakeable footing of Scripture alone.<sup>27</sup>
  2. Against the Anabaptists (Schwarmer) for their radical militancy and rejection of sacramentalism and state church.
  3. Against Erasmus for his Pelagianism and rejection of doctrinal reform.
  4. Against the rebelling peasants for their radical behavior, viz., *Against the Thieving and Murderous Hordes of Peasants* (1525).
  5. Against Zwingli and his followers at Marburg Colloquy (1529) for their memorial view of the Eucharist.
- E. Luther’s theology
1. Scripture
    - a) Canonicity: Within the traditional canon, he sought the true canon; rejected canonicity of Apocrypha, yet included it in translation. Canon developed by church; Scripture is above church. Little use for six books of the Bible: Esther, Ecclesiastes, Jude, Hebrews, James, and Revelation. Luther never thought that these books were part of inspired Scripture. He often used the Word of God to mean various things: Christ, the living Word, preaching, and the Bible. However, there is no question that Luther equates the Word with the Scriptures.

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<sup>27</sup> Lawson.

- b) Authority: Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) to be the rule of the church. Scriptures are all-sufficient for faith and practice. Luther taught, as well as the other Reformers, the perspicuity of Scripture (i.e., understandable, self-explanatory). Literal, grammatical interpretation is normally the safest and best.

At Wittenberg, Luther began using the Medieval allegorical method, then adopted the biblical theological method, allowing the Scriptures to teach themselves; this was the “new theology” of Wittenberg, and of the Protestant Reformation. Every believer has the tools available to interpret Scripture for himself. Every single passage must be seen in the light of the whole Bible. The Bible has one subject matter—the redeeming Christ.

2. Priesthood of the believer: Every believer is a priest before God, has direct access to God, and needs no mediator.
3. Justification by faith: This is the imputed righteousness of God to the sinner. It is the forensic declaration of righteousness at the time of faith. Faith was not a human virtue, nor a work, but a gift of God.
4. Christology: Christ is the full atonement for our sins. He is principally redeemer.
5. Sacraments: Luther taught infant baptism, although admitted that believer’s baptism by immersion was taught in the NT. He said, “To be sure, children are brought to baptism by the faith and work of others; but when they get there and the pastor baptizes them in Christ’s stead, it is Christ who blesses them and grants them faith and the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>28</sup> He taught that Christ was present “in, with, and under” the elements of the Lord’s Supper (consubstantiation).
6. Church and State: While the State cannot be a theocracy, it can and should provide, under the leadership of its Christian magistrates, godly paternal guidance. Therefore, practically speaking, there is no real separation of Church and State in Lutheranism.

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<sup>28</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, p. 94. Quoted in Priest.



# The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

John Calvin (1509–1564)<sup>29</sup>

John Calvin played a huge role in the Reformation and continues to have a major influence on Protestant theology. He remains a controversial and divisive character, even though nearly 500 years have passed since his death. Normally, people either love Calvin or hate him. To some, he's nearly the fourth person of the Trinity, while to others, he's the devil incarnate. If you believe what he wrote, you are either affirming the pure Gospel or you are denying it. People have very strong opinions about this Reformer and his ideas.

No matter what your views about Calvin, you cannot deny that he, along with Martin Luther, were the central figures of the Protestant Reformation. Since Calvin played such a major role in the Reformation, we must not neglect him or his teaching, even though he remains a controversial figure.

Just like the other reformers, the fact that we are looking at his life and times doesn't imply that we endorse everything he taught or stands for. We can appreciate what is good about him and criticize or ignore what we don't appreciate. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, clear vision in some areas and blind spots in others.

Calvin, a theologian, teacher, and statesman, is seen by many as the greatest influence on the church since the first century. Apart from the biblical authors themselves, Calvin stands as one of the most influential churchmen the world has ever seen. Luther's colleague, Philip Melancthon, revered him as the most able interpreter of Scripture in the church, and therefore labeled him simply "the theologian." And Charles Spurgeon said that Calvin "propounded truth more clearly than any other man that ever breathed, knew more of Scripture, and explained it more clearly." His influence remains strong within numerous branches of the church.

## I. Early Life

Calvin was born in 1509, in France, some sixty miles north of Paris. His family was devoutly Catholic and fairly prosperous. At age fourteen, John entered the leading educational institution of Europe, the University of Paris. There, he was immersed in the principles of the Renaissance, humanism, and scholarship. A serious and remarkably learned young man, he graduated with a master's degree in 1528, a mere 19-year-old.

Soon after Calvin's graduation, he began studying the law because his father wanted him to become a lawyer. He learned Greek and sharpened his skills in analytical thinking and persuasive argument. But Calvin never enjoyed the law, and when his father died, he turned to the study of classical literature. His aim was to become a scholar and teacher.

## II. Suddenly Converted

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<sup>29</sup> Some of this is based on an article from Steve Lawson, "John Calvin: Theologian for the Ages." [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org).

While he was a student at the University of Orléans, Calvin encountered some of the early reform ideas through Martin Luther's writings, which were widely discussed in academic circles. Subsequently, Calvin was converted to Christ. Calvin recorded a testimony of his conversion in the preface to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (1557):

At first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame .... Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor.

Because he adopted Reformation ideas, and because such ideas were both controversial and illegal, Calvin fled Paris before he could be arrested. He withdrew to the estate of a wealthy friend who owned an extensive theological library. Calvin read the Bible along with the writings of the Church Fathers, most notably Augustine. By hard work, genius, and grace, Calvin was becoming a self-taught theologian of no small stature.

In 1534, Calvin moved to Basel, Switzerland, which had become a Protestant stronghold, in order to study in peace. In Basel, he penned the first edition of what would become his theological masterpiece and the single most important book written during the Reformation, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In it, he outlined the fundamentals of the Protestant faith and presented a compelling argument for the Reformed interpretation of Scripture. Amazingly, Calvin began this work at age twenty-five, only one year after his conversion. It was published when he was twenty-six.

A couple years later, Calvin moved to Strasbourg, in southwest Germany, to further his studies as a quiet scholar. During this trip, he was forced to detour to Geneva, where he intended to spend only one night. But when he entered the city, he was immediately recognized as the author of the *Institutes*, which was a best-seller by that time. Those sympathetic to the Reformation took him to meet William Farel, who had led the Protestant movement in Geneva for ten years. Geneva had recently voted to leave the Roman Catholic Church and become a Reformation city, but it was in dire need of a teacher who could promote Reformed truths to the people. Calvin thought of himself as a scholar rather than a pastor, and he didn't want to stay in Geneva. But Farel convinced him to remain. In Calvin's words:

Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, ... and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter [a prayer] that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I [gave up] the journey which I had undertaken.

Calvin began his ministry in Geneva as a lecturer, then as a pastor. Along with Farel, he began the task of bringing the life and practice of the church into accord with the teaching of Scripture. He reorganized the church and its worship. Among the reforms he implemented was the exercise of church discipline at the Communion table. He insisted that secular magistrates (i.e., the police) enforce the rules of the church. Everyone in the community was expected to affirm the teachings of the church. This did not sit well with prominent Geneva citizens, many of whom were living in open sin. This crisis reached the boiling point on Easter Sunday of 1538, when Calvin refused to administer Communion to certain leading people because of their sinful behavior. The tensions grew so great that both Calvin and Farel were forced to leave Geneva (23 April 1538).

### III. Exile and Return

Calvin withdrew to Strasbourg, where he had intended to go two years earlier. His hope was to pursue his scholarly interests in peace. But Strasbourg's chief Reformer, Martin Bucer, insisted that Calvin continue in public pulpit ministry and threatened him much as Farel had earlier. Yielding to Bucer, Calvin became the pastor of nearly five hundred Protestant refugees from France living in Strasbourg.

This situation gave Calvin time and freedom to write. Calvin wrote his *Commentaries on ... Romans* and enlarged his *Institutes*, translating it into French. Also during his time in Strasbourg, he married Idelette de Bure, a widow of an Anabaptist man, who, with two children, brought him much happiness.

After Calvin had spent three happy years in Strasbourg, the city fathers of Geneva wrote to ask him to return as their pastor. Initially, Calvin had no interest in returning. In fact, he said that he'd rather "submit to death a hundred times" than to return to Geneva. But Calvin eventually changed his mind and returned to his pastorate in Switzerland, believing it was God's calling on his life.

Calvin arrived in Geneva in the fall of 1541, after an absence of three and a half years. In his first sermon, he resumed his exposition of Scripture at the next verse after the last one he had covered before being exiled. This continuation was intended as a bold statement that verse-by-verse preaching of the Word would hold the primary place in his ministry.

Calvin's second Genevan pastorate had two periods. The first was the years of opposition (1541–1555), when he endured much resistance and difficulty. Some of the oldest, most influential families of Geneva disliked Calvin and his reforms. Those living in open sin and immorality didn't appreciate Calvin's preaching against them. These years were also full of theological controversies and personal tragedies.

Calvin instituted policies in Geneva that forbade cursing, gambling, sexual immorality, playing cards, drunkenness, singing dirty songs, and dancing. Children must attend catechism, then communion. Church attendance was mandatory. It's no wonder that many in the city opposed him.

The last nine years of Calvin's life (1555–1564) were more tranquil and enjoyable. At long last, Calvin gained the support of the city fathers. With this backing, he established the Geneva Academy. The academy had a private school for elementary instruction and a public school offering more advanced studies in biblical languages and theology to train ministers, lawyers, and doctors. Also in 1559, the fifth and final edition of the *Institutes* was published. In 1560, the *Geneva Bible* was published, an English translation that was the first Bible with theological notes in the margins. This monumental work, produced by men under Calvin's teaching, presented a worldview of the sovereignty of God over all creation.

Calvin's Geneva worked so well that when John Knox visited Geneva, he wrote a friend that the city "is the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the apostles."

Calvin sent out French-speaking pastors, whom he had trained for the gospel ministry, to other French-speaking provinces in Europe. Most went to France, where the Reformed movement grew to encompass about one-tenth of the population. Eventually, thirteen hundred Geneva-trained missionaries went to France. By 1560, more than a hundred underground churches had been planted in France by men sent out from Geneva. By 1562, the number of churches had multiplied to as many as 2,150, with more than 3 million members. The membership of some of the churches numbered in the thousands. This growth produced a Huguenot church that presented a large challenge to the Roman Catholic dominance of France. Further, Geneva-trained missionaries planted churches in Italy, Hungary, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and the Rhineland—even Brazil. Geneva under Calvin produced many Gospel-preaching, church-planting missionaries. Calvin and his teaching emphasized evangelism and missionary work.

#### IV. A Farewell Address

Calvin drove himself beyond his body's limits. When he could not walk the couple of hundred yards to church, he was carried in a chair. When the doctor forbade him to go out in the winter air to the lecture room, he crowded the audience into his bedroom and gave lectures from there. To those who would urge him to rest, he asked, "What? Would you have the Lord find me idle when he comes?"<sup>30</sup>

His afflictions were intensified by opposition he sometimes faced. People tried to drown his voice by loud coughing while he preached; others fired guns outside the church. Men set their dogs on him. There were even anonymous threats against his life. Calvin did not often respond to this opposition with much grace, patience, or good humor. One of his well-known character failures was his rather crabby, grumpy demeanor, which didn't win him many friends or supporters.

In early 1564, Calvin became seriously ill. He preached for the last time from the pulpit of Saint Peter's Cathedral in February of that year, and by April, it was obvious that he did not have long to live. Calvin, age fifty-four, faced death as he had faced the pulpit—with great resolution. The strength of his faith, built on the sovereignty of God, appears in his last will and testament. On April 25, 1564, Calvin dictated the following words:

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/john-calvin.html>



I render thanks to God, not only because he has had compassion on me, His poor creature, to draw me out of the abyss of idolatry in which I was plunged, in order to bring me to the light of His gospel and make me a partaker of the doctrine of salvation, of which I was altogether unworthy, and continuing His mercy He has supported me amid so many sins and short-comings. ... He has so far extended His mercy towards me as to make use of me and of my labor, to convey and announce the truth of His gospel.

Three days later, on April 28, 1654, Calvin called his fellow ministers to his bedchamber and issued his farewell address to them. He cautioned them that the battles of the Reformation were not over, but only beginning: “Take courage and fortify yourselves, for God will make use of this church and will maintain it, and assures you that He will protect it.”

Calvin died on May 27, 1564, in the arms of Theodore Beza, his successor. Calvin’s last words—“How long, O Lord?”—were the very words of Scripture (Pss. 79:5; 89:46). He died quoting the Bible he had so long preached. Appropriately, this humble servant was buried in a common cemetery in an unmarked grave—at his own request. To this day, no one is sure where Calvin is buried.

Calvin’s contributions to the church and to western civilization can hardly be overestimated. He influenced politics, education, economics, ethics, and of course, theology. Calvin presented more clearly and more masterfully than anyone before him the essential elements of Protestant theology.<sup>31</sup>

In 1909, the people of Geneva commissioned a monument to the great leaders of the Reformation. At the University of Geneva, which Calvin founded, stands statues of Calvin alongside Farel, Knox, and Beza. Calvin stands as the tallest among the four, although in real life, he was probably the shortest.



## V. Unique Contributions and Influence

Calvin remains controversial particularly because of his views on predestination and election. Calvin’s supreme belief was that God is sovereign, not man. He taught that God knows the future because God has planned the future. God’s plan encompasses the salvation of the saved and the damnation of the lost. His views on salvation are commonly called “Calvinism,” but his theology extends far beyond the issues of salvation. His distinct brand of theology is usually called Reformed theology, and a large segment of Protestants, especially Presbyterians, but also many Baptists, endorse his views, either in whole or in part.

Calvin’s *Institutes* became very influential both because of Calvin’s clear and lucid writing style. While other theological works remained in Latin, Calvin’s book was widely translated, and thus became widely known by students of theology throughout Europe. Colleges and seminaries still assign the *Institutes* as required reading. It is one of the most influential handbooks of theology ever written.

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<sup>31</sup> Timothy George, quoted in Priest.

Outside the church, his ideas have been blamed for and credited with (depending on your view) the rise of capitalism, individualism, and democracy. In the church, he has been a major influence on leading figures such as George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards, as well as entire movements, such as Puritanism.<sup>32</sup> By the end of his life he had become the leading voice in the wider Reformed world as it began to develop in Scotland, England, France, and the Netherlands.

Calvin, of course, is largely responsible for what has come to be known as Calvinism. Although this is a broad issue defined in different ways by different people, the basic viewpoints of Calvinism are summarized in five main points under the TULIP acronym (also often called the Doctrines of Grace, usually by Calvinists):

T—total depravity: the entire human condition is corrupted by sin; sinners have no power within themselves to turn from sin or follow God. Man is not good; he is dead in sin.

U—unconditional election: God chooses who will be saved based on His own sovereign choice (not based on anything humans do)

L—limited atonement: Christ died only for the elect; his death paid only for the sins of the elect, and those for whom Christ died will certainly be saved.

I—irresistible grace: the elect will be saved; God's saving grace enables elect sinners to repent and believe the Gospel. God's electing, saving grace never fails.

P—perseverance of the saints: Christians persist in faith and in good works; salvation is eternal and cannot be lost. Those who fail to persevere were never genuinely saved in the first place.

In reality, the five points of Calvinism were not produced as such by Calvin himself, but by his followers in response to five points of doctrine promoted by Jacob Arminius (i.e., Arminianism). Arminius published five points of disagreement with Calvin's teachings, and Calvinists answered those points with the five points above. At meeting in 1618, called the Synod of Dordrecht (Holland), reformed leaders approved of the five points of Calvinism as a response to the errors of Arminianism. If you want to start a fight, engage someone in a debate over Calvinism and Arminianism!

## VI. Criticism

Some loudly proclaim that if you hold Calvinistic views, you must not be saved. Others loudly proclaim just the opposite. To this day, Calvinistic ideas are controversial and the subject of heated discussion among scholars and scoundrels. Calvin's theology is largely accepted among the Reformed and Presbyterians and among many Baptists. Many in the evangelical world would confess to be followers of Calvin, to one degree or another. But his views on the sovereignty of God, the depravity of man, election, and the scope of the atonement continue to be controversial.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/john-calvin.html>

Besides his theology, Calvin suffers great criticism over his agreement to the execution of a heretic named Servetus. During Calvin's time in Geneva, the civil authorities were enforcing the policies of the church on the whole community. A man named Servetus fled Catholic authorities and escaped to Geneva. Before long, he began teaching false theology and leading people astray. Calvin and others warned him to stop teaching or to leave Geneva, but he refused. Eventually, Servetus was arrested and found guilty of teaching heresy. Calvin gave his approval of Servetus' execution, which, from a modern perspective, seems extremely harsh and unnecessary. But in that era, it was not at all unusual to execute heretics—the RCs did it, and so did some of the reformers. Calvin was a man of his age in that regard. But it certainly was a regrettable decision.

Calvin never lost his deep conviction that, as God's creation, he was put on earth to glorify God. He deliberately avoided the limelight and the sensational in order that nothing might detract from the message of God's grace in Christ. Humility and self-denial were his principal Christian virtues. He lived modestly, had few possessions, lived in borrowed quarters, and stubbornly refused salary increases. In theology, he was completely awed by the concept that sinful human beings had been "reckoned righteous" in Christ and accounted worthy to serve the incomprehensibly holy and sovereign God of the universe. [As one historian put it,] Calvin was "the most Christian man of his time."<sup>33</sup>

"Let us not," Calvin admonished, "take it into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in his Sacred Word, or to think anything about him that is not prompted by his Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word."<sup>34</sup>

"The old truth that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, that Paul preached, is the truth that I must preach today, or else be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape the truth; I know of no such thing as [smoothing off] the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel. That which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again."<sup>35</sup>

"It is no novelty, then, that I am preaching; no new doctrine. I love to proclaim these strong old doctrines, that are called by nickname Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> B.G. Armstrong, "Calvin, John," ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 133.

<sup>34</sup> B.G. Armstrong, "Calvin, John," ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 131.

<sup>35</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *A Defense of Calvinism*

<sup>36</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (ed. 1893).



# The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

John Wesley (1703–1791)<sup>37</sup>

John Wesley, along with his brother, Charles, established a movement within the Church of England called Methodism. The Methodist church is largely the result of their work. The evangelistic zeal of the Wesley brothers lit a fire throughout Great Britain that led to the conversion of thousands of souls. It's estimated that John Wesley covered over 250,000 miles on horseback, often traveling in bad weather and in dangerous conditions, to bring the Gospel to needy souls. Today, about eighty million people worldwide claim some affiliation with the Methodist church. Unfortunately, Methodists have strayed far from the teachings of the Wesleys and is in danger of fracturing and losing its distinctives.

## I. Birth and early life

Born in Epworth, Lincolnshire, England, John Wesley was the fifteenth child and second surviving son of Susanna and Samuel Wesley. Samuel was a former Nonconformist<sup>38</sup> and rector at Epworth who, with Susanna, raised his children in an atmosphere of piety and Puritan discipline. John's dramatic rescue at age five from a fire that destroyed his father's rectory gave occasion for him in later life to refer to himself as "a brand plucked from the burning [fire]."



John Wesley

## II. Education

A. Wesley was educated at the Charterhouse School, London, and at Christ Church, Oxford. He was elected fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford in 1726, and received his M.A. in 1727. Wesley's short tenure as assistant to his father as curate at Wroote (1727–1729) was his only experience in a parish. A letter from the rector of Lincoln brought Wesley back to his duties at Oxford, where he joined his brother Charles, George Whitefield, and others in a venture that was to be the cradle of the Methodist movement.

B. These earnest young men caused a sensation at Oxford by frequently meeting together for Bible study, communion, and prayer. They were derisively referred to as the Holy Club, Sacramentarians, Bible moths (feeding on the Bible as moths on cloth), Bible bigots, and Methodists. John was called the "curator" or "father" of the Holy Club.

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<sup>37</sup> Much of this material is from D. Partner, "Wesley, John," ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 709–712.

<sup>38</sup> That is, a dissenter or one who does not conform to the teaching or practices established for those within the Church of England. Sometimes these people were called Free Churchmen. Any Protestant not part of the Church of England (e.g., Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist) may have been thought of as a Nonconformist.

- C. Charles had started the group while John was away serving at Wroote. He said the word Methodist “was bestowed on himself and his friends because of their strict conformity to the method of study prescribed by the university.” John did not care for the nickname but wore it as a badge of honor and in an early sermon spoke of his associates as “the people in derision called Methodists.” Later, in his English Dictionary, he defined a Methodist as “one that lives according to the method laid down in the Bible.”

### III. Initial ministry

- A. On January 1, 1733, in the midst of the controversy surrounding the “Oxford Methodists,” John preached his second university sermon, “The Circumcision of the Heart.” This sermon helped establish him as a theologian because it won approval from both the vice-chancellor and the rector of Lincoln. In it Wesley set forth the two doctrines that were basic to his position at that time: Christian perfection and the witness of the Spirit (that we are the children of God—Rom. 8:16).
- B. Although the Methodist fracas cost him the loss of earnings, of friends, and of reputation, John Wesley placed higher value on “a clean heart, a single eye, a soul full of God! A fair exchange, if by loss of reputation we can purchase the lowest degree of purity of heart!” In 1735, John and his brothers were summoned to the deathbed of their father. There Samuel Wesley said to John, “The inward witness, son, the inward witness—this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity.”

### IV. Failure in America

- A. That same year the Holy Club began to dissolve when John, Charles, and two others of its members sailed for the American colony of Georgia. John was to be missionary to the native Americans and pastor of the Savannah parish, but his naïve pursuit of a romance with Sophia Hopkey, niece of the chief magistrate of Savannah, contributed to the failure of this endeavor. Sophia, rejected by John, married another man, and Wesley excluded her from Holy Communion. Wesley had faithfully served his flock but had exhibited a stiff high churchmanship that antagonized the parish. The Hopkey affair produced enough misunderstanding and persecution to cause John to flee Georgia and return to England.
- B. Wesley’s experience in Georgia proved to be a failure, but set the course of his future career. The preface to this American disaster came during a violent storm on the voyage from England. Wesley was cowering in fear of death yet witnessed the unexplainable peace experienced by a group of Moravian Brethren who were his fellow travelers. An interview with the Moravians’ leader upon landing in Georgia set in motion John’s search for the living reality of the doctrines he preached.

- C. Wesley left Georgia on December 2, 1737. On January 24, 1738, he wrote in his Journal: "I went to America to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me? Who, what is he that shall deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, 'To die is gain.' ... I show my faith by my works by staking my all upon it.... O who will deliver me from this fear of death?"

V. Genuine conversion

Back in London John met Peter Bohler, a Moravian who instructed him in the assurance of salvation by faith. This and his reading of Luther's commentary on Galatians, which emphasized justification by faith alone, prepared him for the day he attended a Moravian meeting near his old school, Charterhouse. What followed is described in the famous entry for May 24, 1738, in John Wesley's Journal:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

VI. Revival leader

- A. Charles Wesley had preceded John in forming the Holy Club and in true faith in Jesus Christ. But now at last they were together prepared to lead the great Methodist revival that revolutionized English society. On June 11, 1738, eighteen days after Aldersgate and one week before his thirty-fifth birthday, John preached at Oxford University his famous sermon "By Grace Ye Are Saved through Faith" and struck the chord that was to be the theme of his life thereafter.
- B. Wesley immediately left for Germany, where he visited the Moravian Brethren leader Count Zinzendorf. He returned to England in September 1738, joining Charles in preaching the truth of the gospel wherever he was permitted. Such places were becoming harder to find, since the Anglican congregations soon closed their doors to the Wesleys because of their enthusiasm, but they were invited to the religious societies that existed at that time within the Church of England. In May 1738 they had founded their own "little society" on Fetter Lane, London. By autumn the Fetter Lane society numbered fifty-six men and eight women.
- C. Encouraged by an account of the Great Awakening in New England by Jonathan Edwards and by George Whitefield's successes at outdoor preaching, Wesley swept away his ecclesiastical and High Church views and began preaching in fields at Bristol (1739). The Methodist revival in England had begun. "I look upon the world as my parish," he wrote, "Thus far, I mean, that in whatever part I am in, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation."

- D. Wesley was a member of the Church of England until his death. He would not schedule Methodist meetings to conflict with Anglican services. During the following fifty years John Wesley rode 250,000 miles on the roads of England, Scotland, and Ireland to preach 42,000 sermons. Besides this he published 233 books. His tireless and incessant activity changed the face of British society and the nature of its religion forever.
- E. In 1739 Wesley bought and renovated an abandoned cannon foundry near London. Seating fifteen hundred, the foundry served as the Methodists' headquarters for thirty-eight years until, in 1777, City Road Chapel was built.
- F. John followed his younger brother Charles in evangelical conversion and George Whitefield in outdoor preaching, but his unique practical genius, seen in his ability to organize, preserved his work as the Methodist societies. In 1742 he organized "class meetings," with admission only to those holding "society tickets," to exclude undesirables. He published Rules for the Methodist societies in 1743 to avoid the scandal of unworthy members. In 1744 the societies imitated the primitive church in holding love feasts and broke new ground by gathering in the first annual conference. This gathering of preachers at Wesley's invitation developed into a sort of parliament deciding doctrinal and administrative questions.
- G. The Methodist Revival caused great tumult in England. Rioting mobs often threatened the lives of Wesley and his followers. Methodism eventually emerged as an evangelical order within the Church of England, though it was never appreciated or approved by the Church hierarchy. Church doors continued to be closed to Wesley's teaching. This produced a poignant and triumphant scene at Epworth in May 1742. Refused the pulpit in the parish where he was born and where his father devoted nearly forty years to the service of God, John stood on his father's tombstone in the churchyard and preached for eight evenings to the greatest crowds Epworth had ever seen. He returned to London and described the scene to his ailing mother. Susanna Wesley died in July 1742, happy to have witnessed the revival of religion her husband had long desired.
- H. Wesley broke the mold of the settled Anglican curate and became a widely traveled itinerant preacher. Most ordained clergymen of the day had no taste for this approach to the service of God. So Wesley was forced to enlist a band of dedicated laymen who also became itinerant preachers and administrators of the Methodist societies. These Methodist "circuit riders" became an important element in American life after the American Revolution.

- I. His rejection of the doctrine of election caused a temporary split with George Whitefield in 1741 and the division of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists in 1743. Wesley organized societies in Ireland and in Scotland beginning in 1751. In 1770 he sent Francis Asbury to America to strengthen and enlarge the societies there and in 1772 ordained Thomas Coke as general superintendent of the Methodists in America. Coke then ordained Asbury. This development horrified Charles, who said that his brother had “assumed the episcopal character.” John later ordained several others “to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper according to the usage of the Church of England ...” yet continued to hold that Methodism was simply a society of Christians who would remain loyal to their own church or denomination.
- VII. Personal life
- A. Wesley endured a difficult marriage. His wife, Mary, had a troubled spirit. She lied about her husband, destroyed his papers, and resented the regimen he followed in his work. In 1771 she left without warning. Attempts at reconciliation were made, but when his wife was buried on October 12, 1781, John had not even heard of her death.
  - B. Wesley enjoyed good health for most of his long life. His Journal records the sources of his bodily strength: (1) the power of God, fitting Wesley for his calling; (2) traveling four or five thousand miles a year; (3) the ability to sleep at command, day or night; (4) having risen at four in the morning for over sixty years; (5) having preached at five in the morning for over fifty years; (6) “Lastly, evenness of temper. I feel and grieve, but by the grace of God I fret at nothing. But still, ‘the help that is done upon earth He doeth it Himself.’ And this He doeth in answer to many prayers.”
  - C. His “desire to furnish poor people with cheaper, shorter and plainer books” caused Wesley to become a prolific author of educational treatises, translations from Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, histories of Rome and England, an ecclesiastical history, biblical commentaries, and even a medical handbook. He gave away virtually all the income he made from writing.
  - D. Beginning in the days of the Holy Club until his death Wesley was concerned “to reform the nation.” He pioneered or participated in most of the good causes of his day: legal and prison reform, the abolition of slavery, civil rights, and popular education. In fact, his last act was to dictate a letter to William Wilberforce, who was fighting in Parliament to abolish the slave trade. He encouraged the young man’s “glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England and of human nature ... O be not weary in well doing! Go on, in the name of God in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.”



- E. At age eighty-six Wesley preached a hundred sermons in sixty towns in nine weeks. On October 7, 1790, he preached his last outdoor sermon under an ash tree in the churchyard of Rye in Kent. On February 23, 1791, he preached from Isaiah 55:6, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near," in Kingston House in the country village of Leatherhead. This was the last time the world heard John Wesley raise his voice to proclaim the glad tidings of Jesus Christ.
- F. At ten o'clock on Wednesday morning, March 2, 1791, John Wesley spoke his final word, "Farewell," and the beloved servant of God entered the joy of his Lord. Thousands filed by his open coffin in City Road Chapel. Memorial services were held throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland. Newspapers and magazines published scores of sermons and articles.

#### VIII. Methodist distinctives<sup>39</sup>

- A. Methodism in America is associated with a number of groups. The mainline denomination is the United Methodist Church (the UMC), which was formed in 1968 as the result of a merger between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Another major branch is the African Methodist Episcopal Church (the AME), a largely black church, which split from the main line in 1816 over alleged racism within the Methodist Episcopal Church. A conservative branch is the Free Methodist Church. These groups share the name "Methodist," but have no official affiliation.
- B. Methodism spawned many other groups, which together are sometimes referred to as "holiness churches," due to their emphasis on piety/holiness. These other groups include the Wesleyan Church (which split from the Methodist Church in the middle of the nineteenth century over slavery); the Church of the Nazarene (which split from the Methodist Church in the early part of the twentieth century); and the Salvation Army (started by Methodist minister, William Booth in England at the end of the nineteenth century).
- C. Some Methodist churches believe and preach the gospel, but many do not. The UMC has, for the most part, departed from the gospel and no longer follows the NT pattern.
- D. The Methodist church in America is currently experiencing great division. One part of it wants to endorse the LGBT lifestyle and welcome practicing homosexuals and trans-genders into all aspects of church life. The other part wants to retain at least a basic traditional understanding of morality. It seems likely that the church will split into two separate denominations in the near future.
- E. Some erroneous Methodist beliefs
  - 1. Episcopal form of church government
    - a) Within Methodism, authority resides in the bishops, not in the local church pastor.

<sup>39</sup> Most of this is from *What's the Difference?* Sunday school curriculum by Scott Estell.

- b) This is one of the things Methodism retained from its Anglican heritage—one person retains authority at the top of the entire organization.

2. Baptismal errors, such as baptizing infants (paedobaptism) and baptizing by sprinkling

The following statement from the UMC's website appears to advocate baptismal regeneration: "We are initiated and incorporated into this community of faith [Christ's universal church] by Baptism, receiving the promise of the Spirit that re-creates and transforms us."

3. Liberalism

- a) The early Methodists were known for their holy lifestyles but not for robust orthodox theology. In a classic case of "getting the cart before the horse," Methodists assert the following: "Theology is the servant of piety. . . . Devising formal definitions of doctrine has been less pressing for United Methodists than summoning people to faith and nurturing them in the knowledge and love of God."
- b) Piety (i.e., holy living) must be built on the foundation of sound doctrine. Many of the American mainline denominations succumbed to theological liberalism/modernism a century ago because they elevated piety (behavior) over theology (belief). Ironically, theological neglect led to decay in piety among Methodists.

4. Arminianism<sup>40</sup>

Methodism is Arminian in its soteriology (doctrine of salvation). Arminianism, named after a sixteenth century theologian named Jacobus Arminius, is essentially a man-centered system, teaching the following:

- a) God's election of the believer is conditional, based only on man's free response. God looks down through time, sees who will believe, and chooses them (based on their choice of Him).
- b) Man has an absolutely free will and has the ability to cooperate with God in salvation or resist. Man accepts or rejects God's call by his own free will. The ultimate choice is man's.
- c) God extends "prevenient" (i.e., preparatory) grace to all, thus neutralizing the sinner's anti-God predisposition and making him capable of coming to Christ of his own free volition apart from any special work of God's Spirit. Prevenient grace supposedly removes the guilt and condemnation of Adam's sin and enables any person to respond to the gospel.

<sup>40</sup> Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1997, c1989), 491.

- d) A genuine believer may fall from grace and lose his salvation. Since salvation is dependent on man's own unaided choice, man can turn away from God, recant his faith, and throw off salvation if he so chooses.

Note: Arminian theology was condemned at the Synod of Dort (Holland) in 1619, but that has not prevented Arminianism from wide circulation and popularity. Arminian doctrine is found in widely diversified groups today: Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, Anglicans, Pentecostals, Free Will Baptists, and most charismatic and holiness believers.

5. Second work of grace/second blessing

Methodism, like many other "holiness" groups, teaches that the believer should seek a special post-conversion sanctification experience. John Wesley taught that this second work of grace brought the believer into a state of "perfection," i.e., "perfect love" and freedom from voluntary transgression of known law.

The Bible does not teach or require a second work of grace. God gives all believers all things required for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). All believers have "the anointing" (1 Jn 2:27), that is, the presence of the Holy Spirit within them. All believers are baptized by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) and can and should be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). All believers can grow spiritually through the means God gives to every believer—the Word of God, prayer, the church, worship, fellowship, etc. No aspect of the Christian life requires a "second blessing."

It should go without saying that perfectionism is an unrealistic and unbiblical expectation. Even the most mature believers still struggle to do right and avoid doing wrong (Rom 7; Gal 5:17). We'll never experience sinless perfection this side of heaven.



## The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)<sup>41</sup>

“I am tempted, perhaps foolishly, to compare the Puritans to the Alps, Luther and Calvin to the Himalayas, and Jonathan Edwards to Mount Everest! He has always seemed to me the man most like the Apostle Paul.” – D. Martin Lloyd Jones

Jonathan Edwards is rightly considered one of the greatest theologians and thinkers that America has ever produced. As a pastor, writer, theologian, missionary, philosopher, and educator, Edwards made a remarkable impact during his short fifty-five years of life, and his influence still persists today.

### Birth and Early Life

Born into a prominent New England Puritan family<sup>42</sup> at East Windsor, Connecticut, Edwards displayed a prodigious intellect from his early years. He was reading philosophy, making scientific observations, and keeping journals in his teenage years. After being educated at home under the tutelage of his father, who was a congregational minister, he entered Yale College in 1716 at the age of thirteen.

He studied Greek and Hebrew, literature and philosophy, math and science. Edwards read the latest philosophical works by men such as John Locke and Isaac Newton. He also studied theologians such as John Owen and John Calvin, even memorizing William Ames’s *Marrow of Theology*. This was a true liberal arts education, intended to produce an educated gentleman more than prepare students for specific vocations.<sup>43</sup>

He also was a young man with profound spiritual sensitivities. At age 17, after a period of distress, he said holiness was revealed to him as a ravishing, divine beauty. His heart panted “to lie low before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and that God might be all, that I might become as a little child.” This combination of intellect and piety characterized Edward’s whole life.<sup>44</sup>

I love to think of coming to Christ, to receive salvation of him, poor in spirit, and quite empty of self, humbly exalting him alone; cut off entirely from my own root, in order to grow into, and out of Christ; to have God in Christ to be all in all; and to live by faith in the Son of God, a life of humble, unfeigned confidence in him.

After graduating in 1720 at age 16, he remained at the college to study for the ministry until August of 1722, when he went to serve as a minister to a Scottish Presbyterian church in New York. In 1723 he returned to Yale, passed the examination for an M.A. degree in September and assumed the office of tutor in May of 1724. He resigned two years later due to illness. In 1726 he

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<sup>41</sup> Much of this from C. Mitchell, “Edwards, Jonathan,” ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who’s Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 224–226. Also helpful was Ryan Martin’s summary of Edwards’ life, “The Life and Thought of Jonathan Edwards.”

<sup>42</sup> Edwards had ten sisters; he was the only boy! The daughters were all tall; people spoke the Edwards family as having “sixty feet of daughters.”

<sup>43</sup> Ryan Martin, “The Life and Thought of Jonathan Edwards”

<sup>44</sup> “Jonathan Edwards: America’s Greatest Theologian.”

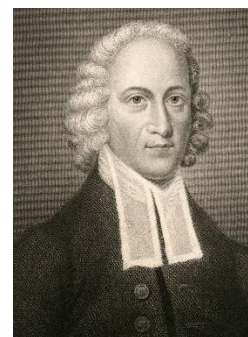
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/jonathan-edwards.html>

accepted a call to become the colleague of his aging grandfather, the Reverend Solomon Stoddard, at Northampton, Massachusetts. He assumed full ministerial duties when Stoddard died in 1729.

He married Sarah Pierrepont in July, 1727. He wrote of her, “she has a strange sweetness in her mind...is most just and conscientious in all her conduct...you could not persuade her to do anything wrong or sinful if you would give her all the world.... She will sometimes go about from place to place, singing sweetly and seems always to be full of joy and pleasure; and no one knows for what.” Edwards described his relationship with Sarah as an “uncommon union,” and it proved to be deeply satisfying to them both. They had 11 children—eight girls and three boys.

### Revival

Under the influence of Edwards’ preaching, Northampton and neighboring parishes experienced a powerful spiritual awakening in 1734–1735. In December there were six sudden conversions. By spring there were about thirty a week. It was not due to theatrics. One observer wrote, “He scarcely gestured or even moved, and he made no attempt by the elegance of his style or the beauty of his pictures to gratify the taste and fascinate the imagination.” Instead, he convinced “with overwhelming weight of argument and with such intenseness of feeling.”<sup>45</sup>



He did not rant. The sermons were carefully written out, reasoned, doctrinal statements based upon solid biblical exegesis. By all accounts, Edwards delivered them in a dry, matter-of-fact monotone.<sup>46</sup>

Beginning in 1739, again under the influence of Edwards’ preaching, another more extensive religious revival occurred, known as the Great Awakening. During this time Edwards met George Whitefield, another preacher directly associated with the Great Awakening. Edwards wrote Whitefield to invite him to preach in Northampton while he was in the colonies. Whitefield’s preaching in New England beginning September 1740 was extremely successful.

The Great Awakening lasted only a few years. From Edwards’s perspective, he could write to a friend already in 1743 of a “great decay” in God’s work. Though short-lived, the Awakening had a profound effect on religion in the English-speaking world.

### Sacked

Edwards’ emphasis on visible religion eventually placed him in conflict with his congregation at Northampton. By limiting church membership and participation in Communion only to those who professed their Christian faith as founded upon a definite religious experience, he reversed the position instituted by his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who had eliminated tests for Communion. Stoddard had implemented a “half-way covenant,” allowing those who had been baptized to take communion even if they had not made a personal profession of faith. Edwards attempted to return the church to the understanding that only those who personally profess faith in Christ can take communion. For his efforts, he was dismissed from the church in 1750.

In the summer of 1751 Edwards resettled in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he spent seven of the most productive years of his life working among the Mohican and Mohawk Indians.

<sup>45</sup> “Jonathan Edwards: America’s Greatest Theologian.”

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/theologians/jonathan-edwards.html>

<sup>46</sup> *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, 283.

Although engaged in pastoral and missionary duties, he found time to write his most important theological and philosophical works.

### **Theologian and Intellectual**

Regarded as the leading theologian of his day and one of the greatest thinkers America has yet produced, Edwards' importance rests primarily upon his contributions in the areas of practical and theoretical religion and his championing of evangelical Calvinism. Two early sermons laid the groundwork. "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," delivered in Boston in 1731 and published a month later, attacked the liberal notions of sin and salvation, attributing them to the destructive developments of Arminianism. Edwards insisted that sin was inherent antagonism against God, and that salvation meant a radical change of the heart that was totally dependent upon the absolute sovereignty of God. In the second sermon, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," preached in 1733 and later published in 1734, Edwards described the true nature of religious experience. Salvation does not involve simply a rational understanding of God and biblical truth, but rather, the impartation by God of a "true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God." It is essentially a regenerative experience that affects the heart, imparting a new "sense" of divine things that cannot be obtained by natural means. True religion, Edwards insisted, is essentially a matter of the heart, not the mind. These sermons set forth a theological platform from which Edwards never wavered.

### **Writings and Sermons**

Edwards was a tireless worker, normally rising from bed at 4:00 am and studying for thirteen hours a day. Because of his efforts, his reputation and influence as a preacher and advocate of experiential religion grew quickly. In 1734 Edwards preached two sermons on the subject of justification, which caused a spiritual awakening among his and neighboring congregations. News of the revival spread as far as Britain and elicited from Edwards a written account of the events that was published in 1737 as *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. In it Edwards interpreted the revival as a genuine work of God's redemptive grace among the people of New England. Several of his most popular sermons were collected in a book titled *Justification by Faith* (1738), and these were widely read in America and in England. During the first Great Awakening, Edwards wrote two influential works in defense of the revival that established him as the leading theologian of the movement. *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* was published in 1741 and set forth a theological defense of the revival, defending it as authentic by distinguishing "true signs" of religious experience from "false signs." In 1743 this work was expanded and published as *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival*. In addition to answering the critics of the revival, here Edwards also stressed the aberrant nature of religious experience in order to temper revival enthusiasts.

In addition to his writings, Edwards' preaching also was used to promote revivalism. While it is true that Whitefield's preaching more than anything else set the colonies ablaze with revival, the most famous sermon preached during the Great Awakening, and likely the most famous sermon in all American history, was Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," delivered in Enfield on July 8, 1741.

Excerpt from *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*:

There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God. The sword of divine justice is every moment brandished over their

heads, and 'tis nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God's mere will, that holds it back. The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation don't slumber, the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them, the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened her mouth under them. Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they won't bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day; the sharpest sight can't discern them, God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending 'em to hell. Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf.

How did the audience respond to this message? The historical accounts record that Edwards was often forced to pause because people were shrieking and crying out in fear of immediately plunging into hell. Many in the audience professed faith in Christ that day.

Edwards' most mature analysis of religious experience, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, was published in 1746, several years after the revival was spent. The work asserts that true religion is seated in the affections or inclinations rather than in the mind or intellect. Edwards also identifies and examines those manifestations that are not sure signs of true religion. He further describes twelve marks that arise from a genuine religious conversion. True religion is essentially a changed heart that manifests itself in Christian practice. In 1754, Edwards published *Freedom of the Will*, a brilliant defense of God's sovereignty. In the book, Edwards uses arguments of unsurpassed, relentless power, the result of his ability to reason things out for himself.<sup>47</sup> Edwards defends this view of human nature in *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*, published in 1758. The subject of these two monumental works is carried on in the shorter but no less significant work *The Nature of True Virtue*, published posthumously in 1765.

## Death

Edwards reluctantly accepted the position as president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1758, but did not occupy that office for long (about a month). After volunteering for a smallpox vaccination, he suffered a severe reaction and died at age 55. A month later, one of his daughters died, and then his wife died in October of the same year.

Edwards' entire life and ministry were inextricably tied up with the investigation, identification, and promotion of a right understanding of religion. In his estimation the pursuit of true religion was the "greatest and most fundamental" duty of the Christian. The question of how to judge genuine from spurious piety was an interest so basic to Edwards that it has been suggested that the whole of his thought might be viewed as one magnificent answer to the question, "What is true religion?" This is the heart of Edwards and the reason for the continued interest in his life and thought.

## Lessons from the life of Jonathan Edwards<sup>48</sup>

1. We must have high affections for God.

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<sup>47</sup> *Great Leaders*, 284.

<sup>48</sup> All of these from Ryan Martin, edited slightly.

- a. In *RA* he said, “True religion, in great part, consists in the affections.” He said, “That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless [wishing], raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in His Word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion” (*WJE* 2:99). This was a constant theme for Edwards. All around him, the Enlightenment spirit was saying that moderation was the best approach to religion. Edwards would have none of it.
  - b. The Bible exhorts us, “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13). Our faith should be vigorous and fervent, not lukewarm (Rev 3:16).  
*Matt 22:37 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*
2. God is glorious, even in the midst of doctrines the world finds unpopular.
- a. Edwards took it upon himself to defend the Bible’s teachings, no matter how unfashionable those doctrines had become. People questioned whether a loving God could send sinners to eternal hell, and people question the same thing today. People questioned the doctrine of justification by faith alone, just as they do today. People questioned the deity of Christ and the Trinity, just as many do today. Whether defending the doctrine of original sin, or that God damns sinners to an eternity in hell, Edwards gladly defended the doctrines, and often did so with the glory of God profoundly in view.
  - b. Many professing Christians today compromise with the world and with error. We must separate from error and not indulge in the love of this world. We must retain our commitment to accurate teaching and to orthodox doctrine no matter what others think.  
*2 Cor 2:17: For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*
3. Stand unflinchingly by your convictions.
- a. This is seen in controversy over the Half-Way Covenant. Edwards was willing to suffer the political and economic consequences for his understanding of the Christian doctrine.
  - b. As the culture lurches increasingly toward paganism and away from even basic standards of decency, we should expect increasing opposition and even persecution. Like the early believers, “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).  
*2 Tim 4:3-5: For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*
4. Devote yourself to study and meditation.



- a. In his only journal entry during his early years in Northampton he wrote, in January 1728, ‘I think Christ has recommended rising early in the morning, by his rising from the grave very early.’ Edwards routinely awoke at 4 AM and studied or worked for twelve hours each day. Discipline was part of a constant, heroic effort to make his life a type of Christ. He began the day with private prayers followed by family prayers, by candlelight in winter. Each meal was accompanied by household devotions, and at the end of each day, Sarah joined him in his study for prayers. Jonathan kept secret the rest of daily devotional routine, following Jesus’ command to pray in secret. Throughout the day, his goal was to remain constantly with a sense of living in the presence of God, as difficult as that might be. Often he added secret days of fasting and additional prayers.
- b. One of the keys to a vibrant, persevering Christian life is regular devotional life. Bible study and prayer should be part of our lives. We must listen to God as He speaks to us in His Word, and we must “let [our] requests be made known unto God” (Phil 4:6) in prayer. And family devotions should also be a normal part of home life.

1 Tim 4:7, 10: *Train yourself for godliness. . . . For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe.*

### **Final Interesting Notes:**

David Brainerd, the famous missionary to the American Indians, stayed at Edwards’ home for a time. One of the Edwards’ daughters, Jerusha, fell in love with him and would likely have married him had not Brainerd died of tuberculosis in October of 1747. Edwards published Brainerd’s diaries.

Aaron Burr, Jr., who became vice president of the US, and who also shot and killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel, was Jonathan Edwards’ grandson.

In 1900, American pastor and educator Albert Winship wrote a book titled “Jukes-Edwards: A Study in Education and Heredity.” In it he traced the posterity of two men—Max Jukes and Jonathan Edwards. Here are the findings of that investigation:

Max Jukes, an atheist, lived a godless life. He married an ungodly girl, and from the union there were 310 who died as paupers, 150 were criminals, 7 were murderers, 100 were drunkards, and more than half of the women were prostitutes. His 540 descendants cost the State one and a quarter million dollars.

Jonathan Edwards lived at the same time as Max Jukes, but he married a godly girl. An investigation was made of 1,394 known descendants of Jonathan Edwards of which 13 became college presidents, 65 college professors, 3 United States senators, 30 judges, 100 lawyers, 60 physicians, 75 army and navy officers, 100 preachers and missionaries, 60 authors of prominence, one a vice-president of the United States, 80 became public officials in other capacities, 295 college graduates, among whom were governors of states and ministers to foreign countries. His descendants did not cost the state a single penny. ‘The memory of the just is blessed’ (Prov. 10:7).

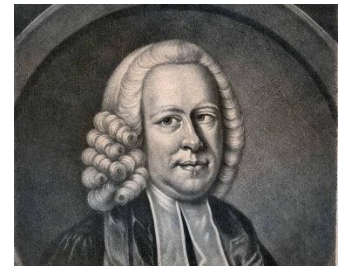


## The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

George Whitefield (1714–1770)

George Whitefield was an itinerant preacher and evangelical leader during the Great Revival in Great Britain and the Great Awakening in America. During his time, some considered Whitefield to be the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul.<sup>49</sup> He was one of the most famous religious leaders of his day. Newspapers called him “the marvel of the age,”<sup>50</sup> and he was called “the apostle of the English empire.” Most of his preaching was done, not in ornate churches, but in the out of doors, in fields and in farmyards. Long before the day of electrical amplification, Whitefield’s voice projected to thousands of listeners. He often preached three or four times a day, and he did so from his early twenties until his death at fifty-five. He traveled throughout the British Isles and also had a very productive ministry in America. His essential message was “Ye must be born again,” and perhaps ten million people heard that message directly from him.

Whitefield was a very busy man for most of his adult life. He would usually rise a 4:00 am and have his first preaching service at 5:00. People would come to hear him before the sun rose, carrying their lanterns with them. His days were filled with studying, preaching, letter writing, and meeting with those who wanted to talk to him. He closed the day by preaching to anyone who was nearby. Whitefield had a huge impact on Protestant Christianity both in Britain and in America.



### I. Early Life

- A. Whitefield was the fifth son of a prosperous innkeeper in Gloucester, England. George had an excellent memory, excelled in school, enjoyed reading, and excelled in drama and theater. He entered Pembroke College at Oxford at eighteen years of age and worked to pay for his education. He soon became a member of John and Charles Wesley’s group, the Holy Club. He was converted to Christ in March of 1735 and fervently proclaimed his newfound faith. The next year, he was ordained to the ministry in the Church of England and preached his first sermon at the church he attended as a boy.
- B. Whitefield was such a dynamic preacher that people flocked to hear him speak. He began preaching to packed assemblies in Bristol and London. People sought him out for spiritual advice, so much so that he hardly had time to eat or sleep. He became quite a celebrity throughout Great Britain.

His were no ordinary sermons. He portrayed the lives of biblical characters with a realism no one had seen before. He cried, he danced, he screamed. Among the enthralled was David Garrick, then the most famous actor in Britain. “I would give a hundred guineas,” he said, “if I could say ‘Oh’ like Mr. Whitefield.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, 295.

<sup>50</sup> “George Whitefield, Sensational Evangelist of Britain and America.” *Christianity Today*.  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/george-whitefield.html>

<sup>51</sup> “George Whitefield, Sensational Evangelist of Britain and America.” *Christianity Today*.

Some did not appreciate Whitefield's vivid style of preaching. Anglican ministers at that time were dignified and rather scholarly in their speaking style. Whitefield was just the opposite; he was intense, emotional, and dramatic. On one occasion, someone complained that Whitefield had driven fifteen people insane by his sermon. Whether his messages drove them insane or not, great throngs of people came from far and wide to hear Whitefield speak.

## II. America

Although he could have remained in England and enjoyed great acclaim and popularity, Whitefield decided to sail for America and work in Georgia with the Wesley brothers. He spent only a short time there before returning to England to raise funds to start an orphanage in Savannah. Whitefield collected funds for his orphanage everywhere he went, but the expenses for his orphanage left him in debt for most of his life.<sup>52</sup>

## III. Preaching

- A. Whitefield preached at any opportunity and in virtually any place. If a church were available, he would preach there. If not, he would preach on whatever was available—a stone wall, a horse, a roadside table, a barrel. He began preaching to coal miners outdoors in 1739, and soon hundreds came under the convicting message of the Gospel.

Rather than waiting for people to invite him to preach or hoping that sinners would come to hear, he adopted the more aggressive strategy of going out and calling to them, in the “highways and byways,” rejoicing that this tactic had Gospel precedent and [biblical] sanction (Luke 14:23). ... The grey skies of London, Bristol, and other cities became like the dome of his very own cathedral into which thousands of people poured to hear this curious and dramatic Anglican clergyman.<sup>53</sup>

- B. Whitefield was a spellbinding speaker. Crowds would elbow one another, shove, and trample in order to listen to him. Once he started speaking, crowds would become silent to as to hear his every word. He once preached to an estimated crowd of 23,000 at Boston Commons, perhaps the largest gathering in America to that point.

Whitefield was neither a theologian nor the organizer that John Wesley was, but for sheer oratory he was unsurpassed, and as a preacher he did not allow doctrinal issues to determine where he would minister. He freely crossed ecclesiastical boundaries, and though Anglican, he cooperated readily with all denominations and was equally at home in America and in England.<sup>54</sup>

- C. Whitefield's friends and colleagues, John and Charles Wesley, often cooperated with him in his evangelistic campaigns. But a division arose between Whitefield and the Wesleys over theology. Whitefield was a committed Calvinist, while the

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<sup>52</sup> This orphanage, now called the Bethesda Academy, is the oldest charity in America.

<sup>53</sup> Lee Gatiss, “George Whitefield—The Anglican Evangelist,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2014): 75–76.

<sup>54</sup> C. Mitchell, “Whitefield, George,” ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 716.

Wesley's accepted a more Arminian form of theology. This difference drove a wedge between the friends and caused a separation in their ministries.

#### IV. Back to America

- A. Whitefield returned to America in 1740, at the age of twenty-four. He established the orphanage he had raised funds for and soon began preaching throughout the colonies. This was the beginning of the First Great Awakening in America. On one occasion, Benjamin Franklin heard Whitefield preach, and was so persuaded of the need for an orphanage that he emptied his pockets of his gold and silver coins. Others in the audience were so moved that they tried to borrow money to give. Franklin and Whitefield became close friends, although it seems that Franklin resisted Whitefield's efforts at converting him to orthodox Christianity.
- B. Whitefield's most powerful ministry occurred in New England. Jonathan Edwards had been influential there, and under Whitefield's preaching, the Great Awakening continued and expanded.



In 1740 during a six-week tour of New England, in just forty-five days he preached over one hundred and seventy-five sermons to tens of thousands of people, leaving the region in a spiritual uproar, marking one of the most remarkable periods of American Christianity. His aggressive method of preaching wherever and whenever the opportunity presented itself was new to America and especially to Puritan New England.<sup>55</sup>

#### V. Back to England

- A. Upon arriving back in England, Whitefield found that the Wesleys had been speaking against him, and many pulpits were now closed to him. So he began experimenting with outdoor preaching, and that strategy became his normal method. In parks and fields throughout England, he spoke to large crowds of people who normally did not attend church. Supporters built him a great wooden meeting house, and it was soon filled with eager listeners, often beyond capacity. In spite of the Wesleys' opposition, Whitefield continued to think of them as friends and did not speak against them.
- B. Whitefield began making trips to Scotland and Wales, where he also spoke to huge crowds. At one event in Scotland, he spoke to huge crowds until 2:00 am.
- C. He married a Welsh widow but apparently never really enjoyed married life.<sup>56</sup> As he traveled throughout the British Isles, he spoke to huge audiences and his followers formed Methodist churches. Although the Wesleys were the founders of Methodism, and although Whitefield disagreed with them theologically,

<sup>55</sup> C. Mitchell, "Whitefield, George," ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 716.

<sup>56</sup> His wife rarely accompanied him on his travels, and it seems that they were not a happy couple. They had only one child, a son, who died at four months. His wife died in 1768, and it seemed to be a relief to Whitefield.

Whitefield brought many thousands into the Methodist fold. Those following Whitefield's theological views were called Calvinistic Methodists.

#### VI. Back to America

In 1743, Whitefield again journeyed to America, again speaking throughout New England and trying to settle down some of the more chaotic and extreme aspects of the Great Awakening. He remained in America for the next three years. Historians suggest that nearly every man, woman, and child in the colonies heard Whitefield speak at least once or read something written by him. Probably no one in America was more widely known than Whitefield, other than the king.

His free use of natural gestures, illustrations, and a more extemporaneous style permanently altered American evangelical preaching. He was also a preacher of extraordinary power and possessed a supreme ability to hold audiences, attracting people from every rank and station in life. Benjamin Franklin estimated that he could be heard clearly by up to thirty thousand people at one time.<sup>57</sup>

#### VII. Later Years and Legacy

- A. For the rest of his life, Whitefield supported many evangelical causes, whether from a Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, or Congregationalist perspective. He continued to be officially connected to the Church of England, but his interests were far broader than that church alone. He erected new church buildings, traveled widely throughout Britain and America, and channeled converts into Methodism.
- B. Whitefield was a man of his times, and it is not hard to find a few faults in his life.
  - 1. Slavery was very common in his era, and he owned and kept slaves to care for his orphanage. He argued in favor of the practice of slavery. Yet he included slaves in his revival campaigns, argued for their rights, housed them in his orphanage, and protested their abuse. The positive response to Whitefield among the slaves was so great that some historians credit him for being the father of the black church in America.
  - 2. Another fault that some point out is that Whitefield worked largely outside the structures of the local church. Today, his style of ministry would be labeled as "parachurch." Whitefield functioned largely outside the authority and sponsorship of any particular local church, which seems to violate NT expectations.
  - 3. Further, Whitefield was more ecumenical than separatist. He cooperated with many other Protestant groups, even those he sincerely disagreed with them theologically.
  - 4. Whitefield's preaching was solidly orthodox, yet his methods were rather novel. His dramatic style of preaching may have accounted for much of his popularity. No doubt, some of those converted through his ministry

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<sup>57</sup> C. Mitchell, "Whitefield, George," ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 717.

were moved more by emotion than by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

5. Otherwise, Whitefield was virtually blameless. He was a holy man who lived for God and who proclaimed the Gospel message whenever he had the opportunity. Multiple millions heard the Gospel through him, and many thousands were genuinely saved through his ministry.
- C. Whitefield held tenaciously to the “faith once delivered to the saints” – the inerrancy of Scripture, the sinfulness of man, the substitutionary atonement made by Christ, and the free gift of salvation to those who repent and believe.
- D. He was directly involved in helping to found three American educational institutions: the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), and Dartmouth; and at the time of his death he was intending to begin one in Georgia.<sup>58</sup>
- E. Because of his hectic schedule, Whitefield was nearly worn out by the time he was forty-five. He pushed himself onward and kept going for another ten years. He traveled widely in Britain and in America at a time when travel was very difficult and arduous. Historians estimate that he preached about 20,000 sermons and crossed the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times. He said, “I would rather wear out than rust out.” He ignored his illnesses and kept on preaching. His last message was given outside while he was standing on top of a large barrel.  
  
 “He was speaking of the inefficiency of works to merit salvation,” one listener recounted for the press, “and suddenly cried out in a tone of thunder, ‘Works! works! A man gets to heaven by works! I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand.’” The following morning he died.<sup>59</sup> He was buried in a crypt under the pulpit of the church in Newburyport, Massachusetts. John Wesley preached his funeral.
- F. Whitefield left a lasting legacy, both in Britain and in America. His support for Methodism had a huge impact on the American colonies. Presbyterians and Baptists also benefited from his preaching. Early America was deeply influenced by the ministry of George Whitefield.



Portrait by Joseph Badger, c. 1745. Yes, he was cross-eyed.

Through the preaching of the Gospel, God graciously brought revival both in the United Kingdom and in America, which set the stage for individual conversions and also societal transformation. Often people look back at this era and rightly acknowledge that if it was not for

<sup>58</sup> C. Mitchell, “Whitefield, George,” ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who’s Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 717.

<sup>59</sup> “George Whitefield, Sensational Evangelist of Britain and America.” *Christianity Today*.

the changes which occurred in the Evangelical Revival in the United Kingdom and the Great Awakening in America, the history of these countries would be quite different.<sup>60</sup>

George Whitefield was a mighty man of God, greatly used for the furtherance of the gospel on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>61</sup>

By the time of his death he had won the admiration and commanded the attention, if not the assent, of the entire English-speaking world, leaving a legacy that has helped shape American Christianity.<sup>62</sup>

In spite of their theological disagreements, Whitefield and the Wesleys had a great admiration and respect for one another, as is evident in the following famous story.<sup>63</sup>

Sometime after Whitefield's decease, a woman asked John Wesley if he expected to see Whitefield in heaven.

"A lengthy pause followed, after which John Wesley replied with great seriousness, 'No, madam.' "His inquirer at once exclaimed, 'Ah, I was afraid you would say so.'

"To which John Wesley added, with intense earnestness, 'Do not misunderstand me, madam; George Whitefield was so bright a star in the firmament of God's glory, and will stand so near the throne, that one like me, who am less than the least, will never catch a glimpse of him.'"

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<sup>60</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, "Editorial: The Life and Legacy of George Whitefield (1714–1770)," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2014): 4.

<sup>61</sup> Lee Gatiss, "George Whitefield—The Anglican Evangelist," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2014): 80.

<sup>62</sup> C. Mitchell, "Whitefield, George," ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 717.

<sup>63</sup> Copied from [https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic\\_id=29733&forum=45](https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=29733&forum=45)



## The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

William Carey (1761-1834)

William Carey is often credited as the father of modern missions. He almost singlehandedly launched the missions movement in the Protestant church. Through the work of Carey and others, Christianity expanded to become the world's largest and most influential religion. The fact that Carey was a largely untaught and unrecognized volunteer further heightens the appeal of his story.

Carey's lack of basic qualifications was outweighed by his enthusiasm for missions, his dependence on God, and his determination to succeed in a high-risk venture. Carey's accomplishments as an evangelist, church planter, teacher, translator, and field director were enormous; and as a forty-year veteran missionary who never took a furlough, Carey set a powerful example of sacrifice and fortitude for generations of foreign missionaries who were to follow him.<sup>64</sup>

### I. Birth and early life<sup>65</sup>

- A. Carey was born in rural England in 1761, the son of a weaver. His family lived a humble and simple life. He had limited formal education and was apprenticed to a shoemaker/cobbler. However, Carey had a sharp mind, and his interests were far broader than merely making and repairing shoes. By the age of twelve, he had taught himself Latin.

An interesting detail: When age 7, Carey developed several allergies and a severe skin disease causing pain when his body was exposed to the sun.

- B. He was led to the Lord in 1779 (at age 18) by a fellow shoemaker/cobbler. He was raised in an Anglican home but was baptized in 1783, becoming a Baptist. He began studying the NT and the original Greek language, and by his early 20s, he was filing the pulpit at a non-conformist (dissenter) church two hours walk from his home. However, when seeking ordination in 1785, the church committee thought him a poor preacher and refused to appoint him. He was finally ordained two years later. Three ministers officiated at the service: John Sutcliffe, John Ryland, and Andrew Fuller—three cornerstones of the future Baptist Missionary Society.
- C. It was during this time that Carey began thinking about foreign missions. He was naturally interested in travel and in geography, being intrigued with the accounts of exploration and daring exploits of sailors like Captain Cook. "Reading Cook's voyages," he later wrote, "was the first thing that engaged my mind to think of missions." He began collecting statistics regarding the multitudes of people living in places unreached by the Gospel.

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<sup>64</sup> *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, 307.

<sup>65</sup> Some of this material is from Scott Estell, *Famous Modern Missionaries*.



- D. At a 1787 Baptist ministerial meeting in Northampton, Carey requested that the pastors needed to discuss taking the gospel to the heathen. A fellow pastor sternly rebuked Carey: “Young man, sit down! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine.” At that time, the very idea that Christians were responsible to reach the whole world with the Gospel seemed ridiculous. Many at that time held that only the original apostles were obligated to carry out the Great Commission. Carey’s thoughts on the issue were not well received among his Baptist brethren; indeed, he was publicly rebuked for his concerns.
- E. Carey had little to commend himself as an aspiring missionary leader. He was often in debt, not well educated, not considered to be a good teacher, frequently ill, and entangled with various difficult family responsibilities. He never earned more than twelve pounds per year from preaching (or approximately \$1,200 per year by modern standards), although he was supplemented by a Particular Baptist minister’s fund with five pounds per annum (\$500), a grand total equivalency of \$1,700 per year!<sup>66</sup> Still, Carey maintained his vision that God would use him in a great way in foreign missions.

Note: Carey was a part of the Particular Baptist movement. That group was Calvinistic in its understanding of salvation. Clearly, in Carey we see someone who both upheld Calvinistic ideals and believed strongly in evangelism.

## II. Beginnings of the mission movement

- A. Not one to let such faulty reasoning go unchallenged, in 1792 Carey published his famous *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. This eighty-seven-page booklet argued for the need for worldwide Christian missions. The short book turned out to be “one of the most important books in all of church history.”<sup>67</sup> Carey provided scriptural defense of missions and gave examples from church history showing that Christians of previous times saw the need to spread the Gospel. He cited current statistics about various nations around the world, showing that it was not impossible to reach these lands. He provided a strategy for missions and dealt with practical issues such as financial support, cooperation among various agencies, and finding quality recruits.
- B. Unfortunately, Carey’s book was, at the beginning, not widely read or circulated. Few people found the work interesting or compelling. Carey made no money on sales from the book; many printed copies went unsold. It was only after Carey went to the missionary field and became famous that the book began causing a stir.

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<sup>66</sup> Priest, “Early Baptist Missions”

<sup>67</sup> [www.chinstitute.org](http://www.chinstitute.org)

- C. In 1792, Carey preached his famous sermon, “Expect Great Things [From God]; Attempt Great Things [For God]” (based on Isaiah 54:2-3). The sermon was an attempt to get his Baptist brethren to consider broader horizons for ministry. Alas, most of the hearers of the sermon lacked vision and/or were impoverished and unable to do much in the way of world outreach. However, one of the men passed around his snuff box to collect an offering for the endeavor—13 pounds, 2 shillings, and 6 pence. Within five years the Society was expending over 5,000 pounds yearly.
- D. Providentially, Andrew Fuller, an influential Baptist leader, adopted Carey’s fervency for missions. Fuller had the resources to implement some of Carey’s ideas, and so the Baptist Missionary Society was formed in 1792 with a total of thirteen Baptist pastors participating.

### III. Missions work begins

- A. The first official recruit for missions work was a doctor who had been living in India—John Thomas.<sup>68</sup> The next volunteer was Carey himself, whom the Society accepted immediately. He agreed to be ready to leave for India in three months. His family, and particularly his wife, Dorothy, was greatly shocked by the idea of leaving England to pursue missions abroad. His wife was pregnant at the time with her fourth child and did not share her husband’s fervency for foreign missions; she refused to go. His father thought he was crazy. The mission board had no money to send him, and the East India Company, who controlled access into India, refused him a permit to enter the country. Nevertheless, after some preliminary preparations and a few missteps, the Careys boarded ship for India, arriving five months later, in November of 1793. Carey would never leave.

Note: Lack of preparation, adequate training, and financial support would hinder the work in India for many years. Carey’s family suffered desperately because of poor planning and lack of support. Looking back, it would have been better had Carey taken more time to prepare himself and his family for this difficult task.

Another note: Carey and his group were not the first missionaries in India or Asia. Missionaries from Germany, Denmark, and other European countries had been actively spreading the Gospel for nearly a century when Carey began his work. There were already many thousands of Christians in India when he arrived.

A further note: Due to an illness, Carey lost most of his hair in his early twenties. He wore a wig for about ten years in England, but on his way to India, he reportedly threw his wig in the ocean and never wore one again.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas later deserted the work because of rising debts. He eventually engaged in the production and sale of rum (alcohol).

<sup>69</sup> <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/william-carey-did-you-know>

- B. The Careys first lived in a malaria-ridden, robber-infested swamp near Calcutta. The housing and food situation were nearly unbearable. John Thomas abandoned the mission and went back to work as a doctor. Everyone in the family succumbed to various tropical diseases like dysentery and malaria. In 1794, five-year-old Peter died of disease. Dorothy did not tolerate these conditions well, and her mental state declined severely. One missionary described her as “wholly deranged.” She had gone completely insane. But William had a strong sense of God’s calling and that God would accomplish his purposes through him. Carey struggled on for seven years, studying the language, preaching, and working without making a single convert. During this time, he developed a remarkable grasp of the native languages and translated a large portion of the NT into Bengali. He proclaimed the Gospel to a large part of the region but with few tangible results.
- C. A day in the life of William Carey
- “In the morning and afternoon addressed my family,” he wrote in his diary in May 1794, “and in the evening began my work of publishing the Word of God to the heathen. Though imperfect in the knowledge of the language [Bengali], yet, with the help of moonshi [a translator], I conversed with two Brahmans in the presence of about two hundred people, about the things of God. I had been to see a temple, in which were the images of Dukkinroy, the god of the woods, riding on a tiger; Sheetulla, goddess of the small pox, without a head, riding on a horse without a head; Puchanon, with large ears .... I therefore discoursed with them upon ... the folly and wickedness of idolatry, the nature and attributes of God, and the way of salvation by Christ.... I cannot tell what effect it may have, as I may never see them again.”<sup>70</sup>
- D. Carey experienced a time of deep discouragement and defeat. His family had all been very sick, his son had died, his wife had gone mad, and his efforts seemed to be all for nothing. He had not received a single letter from home for seventeen months. The first letter he opened after that was critical of his work. In desperation, he clung to his faith. He continued plodding on, translating the Bible and learning the local languages. He established a school for boys and he kept preaching.
- E. In 1800, the Careys moved to a Danish colony called Serampore. This was a more densely populated area, and two Indians were converted and baptized within less than a year. Several other missionaries arrived to help with the work. The clouds of discouragement began to lift. By 1803, seventy-five Indians had converted to Christ. Still, the work was slow, and even after twenty-five years of efforts in India, the number of converts was only about seven hundred.

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<sup>70</sup> <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/man-who-would-not-give-up>

## IV. Expansion and influence

- A. In 1801, Carey was appointed as a teacher at Fort William College, a school for British civil servants. This provided the mission with a steady income and with other benefits. The mission established an outpost about 200 miles north of Calcutta—the first of many such mission outposts.
- B. Carey’s emphasis on Bible translation set the tone of missionary work for the next century. His mission became a center for linguistic training and publication. With the help of Indian teachers, Carey made six translations of the entire Bible into various Indian languages and also translated parts of the NT into nearly thirty languages and dialects.

Interesting note: Although Carey never finished high school or college, Brown University conferred upon him the Doctor of Divinity degree on him in 1807.

Another note: Carey’s written English was poor, both in spelling and punctuation. His chief supporter once wrote to him, “I never knew a person of so much knowledge as you profess in other languages write English so bad.”<sup>71</sup>

- C. Although he would never see a strong indigenous church, Carey placed great emphasis on training native leaders. His first convert ended up being an effective evangelist in Calcutta and Assam. By 1817 the Serampore missionaries had opened 103 schools with an average combined attendance of 6,703.
- D. Carey, unlike other missionaries at the time, had a great respect for Indian culture. He did not try to force western ways on the Indian converts. Carey was also instrumental in bringing about reforms to Indian culture. He protested practices such as infanticide, child prostitution, and sati (burning widows). Careys view of missions included social, intellectual, spiritual, and even economic reform.
- E. Mission work was a family affair for the Careys. Jabez, at the age of thirteen, began learning Chinese in order to help translate the Bible into that language. Felix was preaching by the age of sixteen. William was distributing literature. Women were also an important part of the missions work at a time when women were not normally included.
- F. Two co-workers, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, along with Carey became known as the “Serampore Trio.” These men and their families formed the backbone of the mission in India. Unfortunately, dissension among the younger missionaries and with the Baptist Missionary Society home office resulted in the Serampore mission breaking with the Society in 1827.
- G. Carey persevered in the work in spite of obstacles and trials. “I can plod,” he wrote. “I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.” This quality was on vivid display when a warehouse fire destroyed manuscripts, equipment, and paper. Cary saw the tragedy as the will of God and immediately began the arduous task of re-doing the work that had been destroyed.

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<sup>71</sup> “William Carey: Did You Know?” Christian History Institute.

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/william-carey-did-you-know>

- H. Carey died in 1834, having spent the final 40+ years of his life on the field, having never taken a furlough. His wife, Dorothy, died in India, as did another wife,<sup>72</sup> along with his sons Peter and Felix. Carey's fortitude earned him the title "the father of modern missions." His work initiated the age of Protestant missions and reform. During his four decades of ministry in India, many new mission boards were organized and great missionary pioneers were penetrating the barriers of civilizations around the world.<sup>73</sup>

Inscribed on Carey's Tomb is his simple epitaph—"A wretched, poor, and helpless worm, On Thy kind arms I fall."

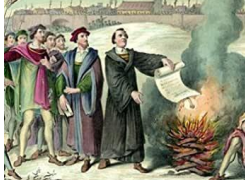
Few persons in the history of the Christian faith have had a more profound sense of the grace of God. "If ever I get to heaven," he said, "it must be owing to divine grace from first to last." Carey's courage in the face of incredible difficulties and personal shortcomings was grounded in his unswerving confidence in the sovereignty of God.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Carey was married three times, and he baptized all three of his wives.

<sup>73</sup> *Great Leaders*, 312.

<sup>74</sup> Timothy George, "The Lasting Contributions of a Wretched Worm." *Christian History* Issue #36, 1992. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/lasting-contributions-of-a-wretched-worm>

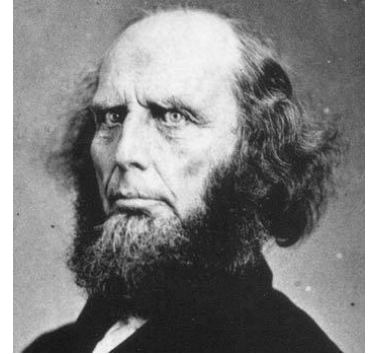


# The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875)

The First Great Awakening came unexpectedly by God's mercy on a sinful people and in the context of the doctrinal preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, among others. Their messages centered on condemnation of sin, justification by faith, and the new birth. In a profound way, theology produced genuine revival.<sup>75</sup>

However, not long after the First Great Awakening came the Second Great Awakening, and by this time, things had changed. Instead of focusing on human depravity and the work of the Spirit in bringing about conversions, people had begun adopting an optimistic view of humanity. Mankind was making progress; democracy was spreading; the idea of man's perfectibility was becoming popular. Riding a wave of human-centered theology and pragmatic religion was the revivalist Charles G. Finney.



If we evaluate modern evangelicalism, we find the stamp of Finney all over it. Finney's methods if not his theology are still evident in the wider evangelical world.

## I. Early life and conversion

The "father of modern revivalism" was born in 1792 in Connecticut, the seventh child of farming parents. The Finneys moved to New York in 1794. Charles enjoyed a basic education and learned to sing and to play the cello. In 1812, Finney returned to Connecticut to prepare for further studies as Yale, but ended up becoming a teacher in New Jersey. Upon his mother's illness, he returned to New York and took up the study of law, apprenticing with a judge.

Finney was converted to Christ in 1821, and that experience dramatically changed his life. Leaving a career in law, he sought entry into the Presbyterian ministry. He studied theology with his pastor and was licensed to preach in 1823, then was ordained the next year. He began his labors as a missionary to the settlers of upstate New York in the spring of 1824.

## II. Finney's revivals

Under Finney's preaching, a series of revivals broke out in several small villages, spreading to some of the major cities like Troy, Utica, and Rome. Finney began using what he called "new measures" in his revivals, such as the anxious seat, the public invitation, and the allowance of women to pray in public.

Finney became the leader of revival in the Northeast, with revivals sweeping through urban centers such as New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and Rochester.

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<sup>75</sup> Priest, "The Finney Era (1826-1842): New Measures vs. Divine Means."

Finney's fundamental concern throughout his life remained that of getting sinners converted and then setting them to work preparing for the coming of the millennial kingdom. In the diligent pursuit of that task, he had no peer.<sup>76</sup>

In 1832, Finney withdrew from revival work because of illness. He became the pastor of a Presbyterian church in New York City, and later pastored a church in Ohio. He then became professor of theology at Oberlin, Ohio, serving as the president there from 1851 to 1866.

Finney was married three times, losing his first two wives to death. He fathered eight children, all by his first wife, and was a devoted husband and father. He died in 1875 in Oberlin, Ohio.

Throughout his professional life, Finney produced books, sermon collections, and articles. His *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835) was a kind of manual on how to conduct religious revivals. His *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (1846) reveal some very troubling views that do not fit well with orthodox Christianity. His *Memoirs* (1876) recount his involvement in the revivals of the Second Great Awakening.

### III. Finney's theology

Although taught and ordained within mainline Presbyterianism, Finney's theology was anything but mainline. He openly rejected significant teachings of orthodox Christian theology. Perhaps due to his education in the law, Finney focused on the ability of unaided human reason as the center of his theological understanding. A few examples from his theological writing:

"Original sin, physical regeneration, and all their kindred and resulting dogmas, are alike subversive of the gospel, and repulsive to the human intelligence; and should be laid aside as relics of a most unreasonable and confused philosophy." (Lecture 42)

"If the Psalmist [in Ps. 51:5] really intended to affirm, that the substance of his body was sinful from its conception, then he not only arrays himself against God's own definition of sin, but he also affirms sheer nonsense. The substance of an unborn child sinful! It is impossible!" (Lecture 23)

"This doctrine of an imputed obedience for righteousness, or of that Christ's obedience to the law was accounted as our obedience, is founded on a false assumption. Christ's obedience could do no more than justify himself. It can never be imputed to us. It is naturally impossible for him to obey in our behalf as a proxy." (Lecture 36)

Note several of Finney's doctrinal errors:

- ⊖ He denied original sin. He taught that sinfulness stems from the moral choices made by each individual, not from our relationship to Adam. Sin is a voluntary act of each sinner's will, not the result of a sin nature inherited from Adam. Thus, the human nature is not depraved, guilty, or corrupt. On the contrary, the human nature is perfectible through man's own initiative and willpower. All the unsaved need are certain measures/methods to persuade them to make the right choices.
- ⊖ He denied the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ. He held that Christ's death on the cross was not so much a payment for sin as it was a demonstration that God was serious about keeping the moral law.

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<sup>76</sup> *Great Leaders*, 317.

- ☹ He devalued the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification. He believed that personal reformation is the work of the individual, who is responsible for his own salvation. The sinner changes himself by his own will power and can easily deny the work of the Spirit.
- ☹ He denied human depravity. Finney believed that the human nature was perfectible. God would not ask us to “be perfect” (Mt 5:48) if we were not able to do so. Every human is capable of moral perfection; we can perfectly obey the law of God. Few actually attain moral perfection, but it is available for those who hunger and thirst after it.
- ☹ Finney can accurately be charged with holding the ancient heresy of Pelagianism—the faulty teaching that mankind is born morally neutral or even good (i.e., unimpaired by Adam’s fall), and that man gains salvation through following Jesus’ moral example. The power of regeneration lies in the sinner’s own hands.

Pelagius’ error was to emphasize the ability of man and de-emphasize the need for special grace so as to make salvation and the Christian life more of a moral exercise energized by human choices than a radical, transforming work of God’s grace.<sup>77</sup>

Quote from Finney: “The sinner has all the faculties and natural abilities requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought. The words conversion and regeneration do not imply any change of substance but only a change of moral state or of moral character.”<sup>78</sup>

Finney became very skilled at “inducing” sinners to use their own powers to modify their moral character. Revival for Finney was little more than persuading people to make personal moral changes.

- ☹ He denied God’s sovereignty. God wants to save as many people as possible, but he is thwarted by man’s stubborn refusal to obey God’s law. Finney puts salvation in human hands. God does as much as he can, but man holds the keys.

Quote from Finney: “God’s entire action is determined by His creatures: He finds Himself (in His foresight) with an apostate race on His hands; an apostate race of whom He can ... save only a part; and His choice of the part He will save is determined immediately by them and not Himself.”<sup>79</sup>

“Grace” ... has made the salvation of every human being secure, who can be persuaded, by all the influences that God can wisely bring to bear upon him, to accept the offers of salvation.” ... All that God does toward saving men is directed to inducing the objects of salvation to save themselves.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Bob DeWaay, “Charles Finney’s Influence on American Evangelicalism.” *Critical Issues Commentary* July/Aug 1999, Issue #53. <https://cicministry.org/commentary/issue53.pdf>. Read this article for a good overview of Finney.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (Oberlin, OH: James M. Fitch, 1847), 473.

<sup>79</sup> B.B. Warfield, “The Theology of Charles G. Finney.” Originally from *The Princeton Theological Review*, xix. 1921, pp. 568–619; cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Perfectionism, Part Two*, vol. 8, 166-216.

<sup>80</sup> Warfield



#### IV. Finney's pragmatic revivalism

Much of what we think of as standard evangelical practice is rooted in the thought and work of Charles Finney. Unfortunately, much of what Finney advocated has been tremendously damaging to the church. This is particularly true of modern evangelicalism's emphasis on pragmatism—"whatever works is good, the ends justify the means." If a method succeeds in getting more converts or more people into the pews, then it must be good, and all churches should employ that approach (e.g., the seeker sensitive and church marketing strategies). "Success," defined by the number of people professing conversion, validates the methods used. How can you argue with a method if God is using it to reach the lost? Such a pragmatic attitude has led evangelists and churches to use all sorts of questionable and inappropriate methods to persuade people to believe in Jesus.

Finney's views on evangelism and missions were the result of his optimistic understanding of human nature. Man is weak but perfectible. Conversion comes from a simple change of heart. Given the right "measures," people can be persuaded to believe in Jesus and change their behavior. Evangelism and revival happen as the result of employing the proper methods. With the proper techniques, planning, and programs, sinners will be converted to Christ.

Finney employed "new measures" in evangelism and revival, such as special choirs and song leaders, aggressive advertising, the creation of an exciting, emotionally charged atmosphere, manipulation of emotion, the invitation system (i.e., "altar calls") as a means of gaining and tracking professions of faith. Especially important to Finney was the number of people attending an event and the number who make professions of faith. "Success" in evangelism amounted to a large number of converts, and whatever works to get people to make a "decision" for Christ is legitimate. Everything in the revival service is structured to get people to make that decision, especially including a lengthy, emotional appeal or invitation at the end of the service. Finney would sometimes use harsh, caustic language and mention individuals by name in an effort to produce results. Services could be extended for lengthy periods; he would take whatever time was necessary to break down the sinner's resistance to the Gospel. All of this was done in an effort to persuade or convince the sinner to make a decision of the will.

It was Finney who originated many of the methods used by such famous revivalists as Moody, Chapman, and Mills, who in turn passed them on to be adapted later by men such as Billy Sunday and Billy Graham.<sup>81</sup>

Quoting Finney: "A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means — as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means. ... There must be excitement sufficient to wake up the dormant moral powers, and roll back the tide of degradation and sin."

American Evangelicalism has taken on a "do-it-yourself" approach to doctrine and spirituality. We have become pragmatists. If it works, then it must be good. If it gets people "down the aisle" and gets them to "pray the prayer" then it is good. This is Finney's legacy to us and we are still buying in.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>"Charles G. Finney—Prototype of the Modern Evangelist," *Ministry Magazine*, Nov. 1976. Quoted in David Cloud, "The Influence of Charles Finney." Sept 10, 2020. Wayoflife.org

<sup>82</sup> Michael Scott Horton, "The Continuing Influence of Charles Finney."  
<https://www.alliancenet.org/mos-beta/1517/the-continuing-influence-of-charles-finney>

## V. Finney's emphasis on social justice and civic reform

Finney believed that conversion ought to have a deep impact on personal behavior. When many people are converted, it has an influence on the whole culture. He preached against slavery and fought for abolition and cared deeply about African-American civil rights. He supported the Underground Railroad's efforts to rescue slaves and taught at Oberlin College, the first American college to allow African-Americans and women to become students.<sup>83</sup>

"Let Christians do business one year on gospel principles," and the Christian spirit will "go over the world like the waves of the sea." Every goal Finney wished for society — among others, the abolition of slavery, the promotion of temperance, and an end to Sabbath violation — would, he believed, speedily be achieved if Christians united to promote these reforms.<sup>84</sup>

## VI. Finney's main weaknesses

- ☹ He denied major doctrinal assertions of orthodox Christianity, doctrines like original sin, human depravity, substitutionary atonement, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, the work of the Spirit in regeneration, and the sovereignty of God.

The real legacy of Finney was the willingness to sacrifice Biblical truth for the sake of teachings that were deemed to work better to achieve the desired ends.<sup>85</sup>

Was he a genuine Christian? Given his theological claims, his spiritual condition seems questionable at best.

- ☹ Perhaps the greatest damage done to the evangelical church was his pragmatic approach to evangelism and revival, holding that whatever works to secure the most professions of faith is good. All methods that lead to conversions are legitimate. The goal is to convince the sinner to believe in Jesus, and conversion is merely the change of the human will, which the preacher can manipulate through "means." Since many professions of faith were based on an emotional response (rather than genuine repentance), many conversions turned out to be false. As a result, the areas where Finney-style revival occurred later came to be known as "the burned over district," as people there were largely inoculated against the Gospel.
- ☹ Finney did not see the value of a thorough education for pastors. He despised formal training because he believed it produced dull and ineffective communication. He told ministers to throw out their notes, look their audience square in the face, and preach in a style that was colloquial, repetitious, conversational, and lively— "the language of common life."<sup>86</sup>
- ☹ He believed in the perfectibility of the human nature. Believers in Jesus could, through their own efforts, perfectly obey the law of God. Conversion depends solely upon the human will and requires no change in the sinner's basic nature. For Finney, the human will reigns supreme.

<sup>83</sup> "Who was Charles Finney?" <https://www.gotquestions.org/Charles-Finney.html>

<sup>84</sup> James H. Moorhead, "Charles Finney and the Modernization of America," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 62, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 105. Quoted by DeWaay.

<sup>85</sup> DeWaay.

<sup>86</sup> Gerald Priest, "Conflicting Evangelical Models: Finney Verses Nettleton." DBTS, July 2002.

- ☹ He promoted human logic as the final authority. He refused anything that contradicted his own understanding, including the clear statements of Scripture.  
Note Finney's "well-settled law" of biblical interpretation: "[Biblical] Language is to be so interpreted, if it can be, as not to conflict with sound philosophy, matters of fact, the nature of things, or immutable justice."
- ☹ He defined saving faith as merely an internal, personal feeling rather than the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual. The evangelist's task is to stir the emotions (i.e., psychological manipulation), which will result in a profession of faith.
- ☹ He promoted the idea that success in revival resulted in large numbers of converts. Those following in his footsteps tend to be impressed with "success" and large numbers as a sign of God's blessing. You can't argue with success; if it works, it must be good (pragmatism).
- ☹ He often made ridiculous, shocking statements, such as "If the Church will do all her duty, the millennium may come in this country in three years."

As a contemporary of Finney, evangelist Asahel Nettleton, put it: "The whole system of [Finney's] measures appeared to be adapted to promote false conversions, to strengthen and cherish false hopes, and propagate a false religion, and thus, besides destroying the souls of those who should be the subject of it, these measures should tend ultimately to bring all true religion, and all pure revivals into contempt, and increase the number of errorists and scoffers on every side."<sup>87</sup>

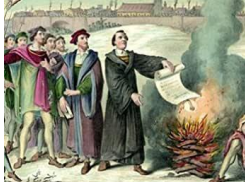
Toward the end of his ministry, as he considered the condition of many who had experienced his revivals, Finney wondered if this endless craving for ever-greater experiences might lead to spiritual exhaustion. In fact, his worries were justified. The area where Finney's revivals were especially dominant is now referred to by historians as the 'burned-over district,' a seedbed of both disillusionment and the proliferation of various cults.<sup>88</sup>

Unfortunately, a large portion of evangelicalism is shot through with Finneyism. Even some branches of fundamentalism embrace remnants of Finney's revivalism, often using the same kind of emotional manipulation and promoting a stripped down Gospel (i.e., easy believism, "1, 2, 3, pray after me") to make converts.

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Priest.

<sup>88</sup> Horton. Note that Mormonism and Seventh Day Adventism both started in the 1820s during the Second Great Awakening.



## The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)<sup>89</sup>

Charles H. Spurgeon was widely acclaimed as the “Prince of Preachers.” Perhaps no one since the days of the Apostle Paul has had a more powerful impact for the cause of Christ in the preaching of his Word. His contemporaries lauded him as “the world’s greatest divine” and “the most remarkable minister of Christ now living.” B. H. Carroll, Baptist pastor and founder of Southwestern Seminary, declared that Spurgeon “combined the preaching power of Jonathan Edwards and Whitfield with the organizing power of Wesley, and the energy, fire, and courage of Luther. In many respects he was most like Luther; in many most like Paul.”

### Birth and Early Life

1. Spurgeon was born in Kelvedon, Essex, England June 19, 1834. Both his father John and grandfather were Nonconformist Congregationalist ministers. Spurgeon’s mother had 17 children, nine of whom died in infancy. Charles was reared by his paternal grandparents. His earliest childhood memories were of listening to sermons, learning hymns, and looking at the pictures in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*.
2. Spurgeon was converted to Christ at age 15 at a Methodist Chapel on January 6, 1850. On the night of his conversion, he had intended to go to another church, but bad weather forced him elsewhere. He relates his conversion experience.



The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was,—“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth” [Isa 45:22].... I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, “Look!” what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him (Spurgeon’s *Autobiography* [Banner of Truth Trust], I:87–88).

He was baptized May 3 in the Lark River by Rev. W. W. Cantlow, a former missionary to Jamaica.

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<sup>89</sup> Much of this from Gerald Priest, “19<sup>th</sup> Century English Baptists.”

Note his comment on the decision to become a Baptist in his *Autobiography*:

I had attended the house of God with my father, and my grandfather; but I thought, when I read the Scriptures, that it was my business to judge for myself. I knew that my father and my grandfather took little children in their arms, put a few drops of water on their faces, and said they were baptized; but I could not see anything in my Bible about babes being baptized. I learned a little Greek; but I could not discover that the word “baptize” meant to sprinkle; so I said to myself, “They are good men, yet they may be wrong; and though I love and revere them, that is no reason why I should imitate them.” And they acknowledged, when they knew of my honest conviction, that it was quite right for me to act according to my conscience. I consider the “baptism” of an unconscious infant is just as foolish as the “baptism” of a ship or a bell; for there is as much Scripture for the one as the other. Therefore I left my relations, and became what I am to-day, a Baptist so-called, but I hope a great deal more a Christian than a Baptist....

If I thought it wrong to be a Baptist, I should give it up, and become what I believed to be right. The particular doctrine adhered to by Baptists is that they acknowledge no authority unless it comes from the Word of God.... If we could find infant baptism in the Word of God, we should adopt it. It would help us out of a great difficulty, for it would take away from us that reproach which is attached to us,—that we are odd, and do not as other people do. But we have looked well through the Bible, and cannot find it, and do not believe that it is there; nor do we believe that others can find infant baptism in the Scriptures, unless they themselves first put it there.

His mother’s reaction, “I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you might become a Baptist,” suggests the dismay that his family must have felt at his decision.

3. Spurgeon was born into a radically changing world. The industrial revolution had just begun, moving millions of Europeans from farms into cities to work in factories and warehouses. A scientific revolution was in progress (e.g., electrification, light bulbs, telephone, radio, telegraph, aspirin, etc.). Charles Darwin published his infamous *Origin of Species* in 1859, challenging traditional/biblical assumptions. The philosophy of Emmanuel Kant had removed certainty about former traditions and from religion for many. The works of Karl Marx were gaining popularity. Sigmund Freud was promoting his ideas about the human mind and behavior. Liberalism in theology was beginning to influence the universities. This was an era of great upset and revolution in Europe, and it was also a time of great optimism regarding human potential. The focus shifted from God to man. For many, God is no longer necessary.
4. Spurgeon’s formal education was modest at best. He attended school for only a few years, and for a brief time he was a teaching assistant at an Anglican school. He only briefly studied Greek. He intentionally decided not to pursue formal ministerial training, an unusual decision even among the Baptists of the time. Spurgeon’s main education came through his voracious personal reading. He collected Puritan editions, and his library of twelve thousand volumes contained one thousand works published before

1700. He was a literate man with a remarkable command of language that the exacting critic John Ruskin was not alone in finding him “very wonderful!”<sup>90</sup>

### Pastoral Ministry and Preaching Fame

1. In 1851 he became pastor of the Waterbeach (Baptist) Chapel near Cambridge. Nearly the whole town was converted through his ministry there.

He was small in stature, and in his youth pale and slim, appearing even younger than he was. His boyish appearance was in startling contrast to the maturity of his sermons, which naturally were strongly influenced by the Puritan works he had studied since childhood. He had a retentive memory and always spoke extemporaneously from an outline. His youth, energy, and oratorical skills, combined with his command of old-fashioned texts, made a vivid impact upon his congregations.<sup>91</sup>

2. In 1853 he began preaching at New Park Street Baptist Church, London. After several trial messages, the church extended a call to him, and he accepted in April, 1854. He was not quite 20 years of age. His predecessors had been highly influential Baptist leaders: Benjamin Keach, John Gill, and John Rippon. The auditorium seated 1,200, but typically only 200 would attend. In six months the place was filled. The congregation began meeting at Exeter Hall, and eventually made plans for a new building that could seat several thousand—the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

3. In that era, preachers often used elaborate language containing literary references that only the highly educated could understand or appreciate. Unlike his contemporaries, Spurgeon spoke directly to his audience with a pithy, homey, humorous style that many found very appealing. Many criticized him for being irreverent and uneducated. He was called “a clerical poltroon,” “the Exeter Hall demagogue,” and “the pulpit buffoon.” The Ipswich *Express* said his sermons were “Redolent of bad taste, vulgar, and theatrical.” In spite of such criticism, thousands flocked to hear him.

Spurgeon had a powerful voice and had a special gift for using dramatic gestures—“dramatic to his fingertips,” as one friend described him. Spurgeon paced the platform and even ran from side to side. Spurgeon was endowed with a beautiful speaking voice—it had melody, depth, and a resonance that could be heard by many thousands of people. His sermons were filled with sentimental stories that ordinary people could relate to: tales of dying children, grieving parents, repentant harlots, and servants wiser than their masters. Spurgeon’s language was graphic, emotionally charged, occasionally maudlin and sentimental. Wherever he preached, huge crowds gathered to hear him.

When it came to declaring the gospel in a relevant fashion to the common masses, Spurgeon was a master. He was a nineteenth-century reflection of George Whitefield.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Patricia Stallings Kruppa, “The Life & Times of Charles H. Spurgeon.” *Christian History* Issue #29, 1991. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/life-and-times-of-charles-haddon-spurgeon>

<sup>91</sup> Kruppa, “Life & Times”

<sup>92</sup> Lewis A Drummond, “The Secrets of Spurgeon’s Preaching. *Christian History* Issue #29, 1991. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/secrets-of-spurgeon>.

Devoted to the Scriptures, to disciplined prayer, and to godly living, Spurgeon exemplified Christian commitment when he stood in the pulpit. This itself gave power to his preaching.<sup>93</sup>

4. In 1856, Spurgeon preached in Surrey Gardens Music Hall to about 12,000 people, with another 10,000 outside. Tragedy struck when someone cried, “Fire!” and the resulting stampede killed seven people and injured several more. Spurgeon nearly quit the ministry because of this event.
5. The Metropolitan Tabernacle building was completed and dedicated in March 1861. It seated 3,600 people comfortably, but often hosted 6,000. Spurgeon once preached at the Crystal Palace before Queen Victoria to an assembly of 23,654 people. By 1865, Spurgeon was selling 25,000 copies of his sermons every week. Spurgeon presided over the largest Protestant congregation in the world at that time.
6. In his last years, Spurgeon was rather frustrated by his isolation from former friends and by his ongoing health issues. His bouts of rheumatic gout and Bright’s disease led him to take time off for rest and recovery, often traveling to the south of France to enjoy better weather. He was often plagued by depression. He died in France in 1892.
7. During his 38 year London ministry he built a congregation of 6,000. More than anything else, his published sermons secured his standing as “the Prince of Preachers.” At his death, 60,000 people came to pay homage to him during the three days his body lay in state at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The funeral parade was two miles long, while 100,000 people stood along the parade route. Flags around the city stood at half-mast, and even shops and pubs were closed to mark his death.

## Theology

1. Spurgeon focused much more on preaching the Word than he did on promoting a particular theological system. He was not really a theologian; he was a preacher.
2. Spurgeon aimed to be thoroughly biblical in his beliefs. As he put it, “I like to read my Bible so as never to have to blink when I approach a text. I like to have a theology which enables me to read [the Bible] right through from beginning to end, and to say, ‘I am as pleased with that text as I am with the other.’”<sup>94</sup>
3. Spurgeon was immersed in the works of the Puritans from an early age, and that influence led him to embrace a Calvinistic understanding of human sin and God’s sovereign grace in salvation. He was staunchly committed to the biblical doctrines of the substitutionary atonement of Christ, justification by faith, and the inspiration of the Bible (i.e., the fundamentals of the faith).

“It is no novelty, then, that I am preaching is; no new doctrine. I love to proclaim these strong old doctrines, that are called by nickname Calvinism, but which are surely and verily the revealed truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus.”

Spurgeon was once asked how he could reconcile his stance between Calvinistic theology and his fervent preaching of the gospel. He replied, “I do not try to reconcile friends.”

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<sup>93</sup> Drummond.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Mark Hopkins, “What Did Spurgeon Believe?”

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/what-did-spurgeon-believe>

4. Spurgeon did not take a strong position on eschatology (last things), finding such theories mostly irrelevant and impractical.

Nourished by his profound submission to Scripture, Spurgeon deeply appreciated God's transcendent holiness, the vast gulf separating it from man's sinfulness, and the atonement that spanned that gulf. He had a truly three-dimensional theology.<sup>95</sup>

### Contributions and Works

1. Spurgeon started the Pastor's College (now Spurgeon's College) in 1857. Helped found the London Baptist Association in 1865, the Stockwell Orphanage in 1867, and a girls' orphanage in 1879. He founded a monthly church magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*. By the time of his death over 30 separate ministries were underway.
2. Spurgeon wrote 140 works, most famous of which are *Lectures to My Students*, *John Ploughman's Talk*, and a six-volume devotional commentary on the Psalms, *The Treasury of David*. Of course, his most famous and lasting contribution is his sermons, especially the New Park Street Pulpit edition (63 volumes from years 1855 to end of life; 3,561 sermons—about 25 million words). He preached as many as 12 times a week, and many of his sermons were printed in the leading newspapers of the time. Unfortunately, Spurgeon lived just before recording machines became widely available, so we have no recordings of his voice.

### Controversies

As a famous public figure, and as a man with strong convictions and ample opportunity to express his views, Spurgeon was no stranger to controversy. Even his friends admitted that, while he was a terrific public speaker, he was not a talented debater. He paid a heavy price for his involvement in theological and political controversies of his day.

1. Spurgeon was involved in the "Baptismal Regeneration Controversy." He rightly taught that infant baptism was regarded by many Anglicans as regeneration and therefore a works salvation. A sermon he preached June 5, 1864 aroused a tremendous amount of opposition. Spurgeon lost much personal and financial support over that message.
2. The controversy with which Spurgeon is most closely linked was the so-called Downgrade Controversy of 1887. Spurgeon was associated with Baptist Union of England, and many in that organization had been adopting theological liberalism. He pleaded with the leaders of the Union to put a stop to the error, but they either could not or would not. Because of the Union's refusal to deal with theological error and "downgrade," Spurgeon split with the Union in October 1887. He was deeply grieved about that decision. He outlined his reasons he felt the decision was necessary in the November 1887 issue of the *Sword and Trowel*. After lamenting that many Baptist "brethren" are more concerned about preserving their liberty (to teach modernistic views) than resolving loyalty to Christ and His gospel, Spurgeon decried the Union's religious compromise.

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<sup>95</sup> Hopkins, "What Did Spurgeon Believe?"



As a matter of fact, believers in Christ's atonement are now in declared religious union with those who make light of it; believers in Holy Scripture are in confederacy with those who deny plenary inspiration; those who hold evangelical doctrine are in open alliance with those who call the fall a fable, who deny the personality of the Holy Ghost, who call justification by faith immoral, and hold that there is another probation after death, and a future restitution for the lost. Yes, we have before us the wretched spectacle of professedly orthodox Christians publicly avowing their contempt for those who cannot be guilty of such gross disloyalty to Christ. To be very plain, we are unable to call these things Christian Unions; they begin to look like Confederacies in Evil.

Perhaps Spurgeon's strongest indictment against the Baptist Union was pretense of unity in the face of pronounced theological error.

But the case before us is that of a distinctly religious communion, a professed fellowship in Christ. Is this to be made so wide that those who contradict each other on vital points may yet pretend to be at one?... It is our solemn conviction that where there can be no real spiritual communion there should be no pretense of fellowship. *Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin* [Spurgeon's emphasis]. Those who know and love the truth of God cannot have fellowship with that which is diametrically opposed thereto, and there can be no reason why they should pretend that they have such fellowship.

Note: Separation from error remains an important biblical concept that Christians and the church must still apply today. Unfortunately, theological error is very common, and we must not cooperate with it. We must not "fellowship with known and vital error," lest we "participate in sin," just as Spurgeon said. We are very happy to cooperate with those of like faith and practice, but we do not join forces with those we hold to be in error.

#### Other Interesting Details from Spurgeon's Life<sup>96</sup>

1. Spurgeon was never officially ordained, and he opposed the idea that preachers needed to be ordained. He refused to be addressed as "reverend."
2. One woman claimed to have been converted to Christ after reading part of a Spurgeon sermon printed in a newspaper that was wrapped around some butter she had bought.
3. Spurgeon read *The Pilgrim's Progress* at age six, and he estimated that he had read the book through some 100 times.
4. Spurgeon's 63 volumes of sermons stand as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity. Spurgeon is history's most widely read preacher (apart from biblical ones). Today, there is more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, alive or dead.
5. Spurgeon missed being admitted to college because a servant girl inadvertently showed him into a different room than that of the principal who was waiting to interview him. Later, he determined not to reapply for admission when he believed God spoke to him, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!"

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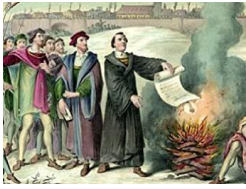
<sup>96</sup> Largely taken from [christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/spurgeon-did-you-know](http://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/spurgeon-did-you-know)

6. Spurgeon's personal library contained 12,000 volumes—1,000 printed before 1700. This library, 5,103 volumes at the time of its auction, is now housed at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri.
7. Before he was 20, Spurgeon had preached over 600 times.
8. Spurgeon's friends and even casual acquaintances remarked on his hearty laughter. His humor also found expression in his sermons and writings, for which he was sometimes criticized. Spurgeon responded that if his critics only knew how much humor he suppressed, they would keep silent.
9. Spurgeon typically read six books per week and could remember what he had read—and where—even years later. His memory was nearly photographic.
10. During his lifetime, Spurgeon is estimated to have preached to 10,000,000 people.
11. Spurgeon once said he counted eight sets of thoughts that passed through his mind at the same time while he was preaching.
12. Testing the acoustics in the vast Agricultural Hall, Spurgeon shouted, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." A worker high in the rafters of the building heard this and became converted to Christ as a result.
13. Susannah Thompson, Spurgeon's wife, became an invalid at age 33 and could seldom attend her husband's services after that.
14. For an average sermon, Spurgeon took no more than one page of notes into the pulpit, yet he spoke at a rate of 140 words per minute for 40 minutes.
15. Spurgeon met often with Hudson Taylor, the well-known missionary to China, and with George Müller, the orphanage founder.
16. Spurgeon had two children—twin sons—and both became preachers. Thomas succeeded his father as pastor of the Tabernacle, and Charles, Jr., took charge of the orphanage his father had founded.
17. Spurgeon spoke out so strongly against slavery that American publishers of his sermons began deleting his remarks on the subject.
18. Occasionally Spurgeon asked members of his congregation not to attend the next Sunday's service, so that newcomers might find a seat. During one 1879 service, the regular congregation left so that newcomers waiting outside might get in; the building immediately filled again.
19. Spurgeon prepared his Sunday morning sermon on Saturday night, and his Sunday night sermon on Sunday afternoon. He would walk into the pulpit with a simple, small outline, sometimes written on the back of an envelope, and from that extemporaneously pour forth eloquence almost equal to Shakespeare's for a solid forty minutes or more.
20. Spurgeon would often take visitors at the Metropolitan Tabernacle to a basement prayer room where people were always on their knees interceding for the church. Then the pastor would declare, "Here is the powerhouse of this church."

He was not an original thinker, and he never claimed to be a theologian. He was a preacher, and in that role he was unsurpassed in his day and not often matched since. His originality as a preacher lay in his combination of old-fashioned doctrine and up-to-date delivery. He may have been an ordinary and conventional Victorian in many of his personal tastes and prejudices, but he had an uncanny ability to sense the pulse of his times, and to know, almost instinctively, how to reach out to ordinary and troubled people in a language which they could not resist. It was the language of the marketplace—pithy, pungent, often humorous, and at once commonsensical and compelling. The power of that language reached a worldwide audience and has kept the name and message of Spurgeon alive long after the embers of old controversies have died out. “I must and I will make the people listen,” the boy preacher said. None did it better.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Kruppa, “Life & Times”



# The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899)<sup>98</sup>

In the mid-1800s, religious revival was in the air. The first and second Great Awakenings had occurred not many years previous to this era, and influential preachers like Charles Finney had spread revival to many of the large cities of America. Further, because of the industrial revolution, cities were growing, transportation was becoming easier, and communications increased. The era of mass evangelism had dawned. Into this setting, Dwight L. Moody was born and experienced a very productive ministry.

Moody's story, and above all, his personality, commanded attention. He was a rugged individual, yet a delightful and compassionate figure; a man of total integrity with a supreme gift for bringing New Testament Christianity before the whole range of contemporary hearers and putting them to work for God.<sup>99</sup>

Moody was a layman, not a trained theologian, teacher, pastor, or member of the clergy. He was much more of an organizer and a plain-spoken exhorter than anything else. He was utterly convinced that men are desperately lost, need to repent and to be redeemed by a loving Savior. He was determined to proclaim that message to as many as possible, and his efforts for the glory of God had tremendous results. Moody's influence remains with us today.

## I. Moody's Life

### A. Early life

#### 1. In Massachusetts

Dwight Lyman (normally "DL") Moody was born on February 5, 1837, in Northfield, Massachusetts, the sixth child and fifth son in the family. His father's sudden death, likely because of alcoholism, left his mother Betsy to care for the brood. The family lived in poverty, and Moody's education never advanced beyond fifth grade level. He eventually left the farm and went to Boston to work in a shoe store owned by his uncles.

In Moody's favor was his determination to succeed in business, hard work, thrift, and common sense, combined with a personal faith in Christ, whom he accepted as a teenager through the influence of his Congregationalist Sunday School teacher, Edward Kimball. Moody was muscular and well-built, a hard worker, ambitious, and full of fun.

#### 2. In Chicago.

Moody had a natural ability to succeed in business and make money. Within five years of his arrival in Chicago, he was making \$5,000 per year (over \$150,000 in today's money) and had banked \$7,000. Had he continued in business, he no doubt could have become a very rich man. Instead, he became more and more interested in reaching people with the Gospel, especially the young people in the slums of Chicago.

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<sup>98</sup> Much of this from Gerald Priest, "The Moody Era."

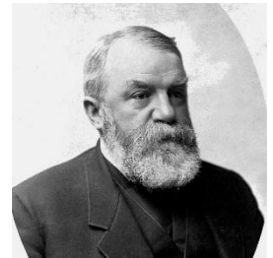
<sup>99</sup> *Great Leaders*, 339.

Moody joined the Plymouth Congregational Church and regularly rented four pews for street urchins and business associates to hear the sermons. In 1858, he started a Sunday school in a slum area. It became so large that he persuaded the mayor to let him use the hall over the city's North Market for his meetings—rent free! The class grew to over 1,000 pupils—at one time the largest in America. He also became active in the businessmen's prayer meetings and in the YMCA. Moody made lasting friendships with well-to-do business men who often funded his evangelistic projects. Moody ever remained the shrewd businessman and organizer. He could influence people and get things done.

## B. The Ministry

### 1. Beginnings of evangelism

In 1860, Moody left his lucrative shoe and boot business after “the hardest struggle I ever had in my life.” He gave himself wholly to evangelistic endeavors. He rose to president of the YMCA (at 28, without salary), helped organize a national Sunday school movement, became an agent for the City Relief Society, and performed volunteer work for the U.S. Christian Commission. People called him “Crazy Moody” for his fanatical zeal in Christian work. During the Civil War, he served in war zones and in Chicago as a lay chaplain.



He married Emma Revell in 1862. She was from Britain and her influence helped polish Moody's character and public persona. The couple had two daughters and enjoyed a happy family life. Moody was a physically large man with a huge neck and chest, a round face, and a full beard. His voice was not remarkable and his grammar not so good. But he could be heard by thousands of people without amplification. He had a profound ability to appeal to common people and give them the desire to know and love Christ.

### 2. Sunday School and Church

In 1864, Moody began the nondenominational Illinois Street Church—an outgrowth of his prosperous Sunday school. When the Chicago fire destroyed it in 1871, it was rebuilt and named the Chicago Avenue Church, becoming Moody Memorial after his death. The church's motto was “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, loyalty; in all things, love”—a formula that seems to capture the essence of Moody's ministerial philosophy. The church continues to operate today.

### 3. Evangelistic campaigns

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 destroyed virtually all that Moody had built in that city. He raised funds around the country and began rebuilding. In connection with Sunday school and YMCA work, Moody made three brief trips to the British Isles to preach—1867, 1870, and 1872. Later, with the help of song leader Ira Sankey (1840–1908), Moody created a sensation with evangelistic meetings throughout Great Britain in 1873–1875, preaching to thousands in major cities. This marked the beginning of the major city-wide evangelistic campaigns by professional evangelists; an entire host of revivalist preachers followed in Moody's footsteps (while never quite “filling his shoes”), e.g., R. A. Torrey, Charles A. Alexander, J. Wilbur Chapman, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham. It was during this time that Moody developed the “after meeting” or the inquiry room, where those concerned about their spiritual condition would meet with counselors.

When Moody and Sankey returned to America in 1875, they conducted successful city meetings in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago, and Boston. From 1881 to 1884 he returned to Great Britain for meetings, and again traveled throughout the United States and Canada.

Moody's plain, urgent message was backed by his integrity, his skill in bringing out the best in the hundreds of clergy and laity who worked with him, and by his refusal to answer critics or indulge in controversy.<sup>100</sup>

#### 4. World's Fair

Perhaps the highlight of his evangelistic career was the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. For this campaign, Moody enlisted the services of evangelists from around the country and overseas. These men included a virtual Who's Who among early Fundamentalist preachers: A. J. Gordon, George C. Needham, A. C. Dixon, A. T. Pierson, William G. Moorehead, James H. Brookes, Chapman, C. I. Scofield, James M. Stifler, and Leander W. Munhall, among others. These men preached in various places of the city to over two million people.

#### 5. Other ministries.

Moody's other ministries included the Northfield Bible Conference (started in 1880), Northfield Seminary for girls (1879), Mount Herman School for boys (1881), and the famous Moody Bible Institute in 1889. At a Northfield Conference in 1886, the Student Volunteer Movement was founded by a group of one hundred young people coming forward in a service to dedicate themselves to Christian service. In 1894, Moody started the Colportage Association for the distribution of Christian literature.

## II. Moody as Professional Evangelist

### A. Moody's preaching style

Moody's sermons were topical or textual and made up of mostly illustrations and exhortations, yet designed to bring out the simple meaning of a passage or scriptural truth. He had the ability to bring out and apply the simple truths of the Bible.

### B. Features of Moody's evangelism

1. Evangelism was run efficiently, like a business. Moody's friends would arrange a meeting at a particular city, gain support from evangelical pastors and from leading citizens, invite Moody to come to the city, work out the details for the meetings, and raise money from prominent businessmen.
2. Moody, in an effort to complement the work of the churches, not direct attention from them, scheduled his meetings other than at times of regular church services.
  - a. Three meetings were held daily: morning inspiration service at 8:00; a noon prayer meeting; and the main preaching service at either 7:00 or 7:30.
  - b. There were no meetings on Saturdays, Moody's day of rest.
  - c. On Sundays, Moody preached at 4 P.M. and again at 9 P.M.
  - d. In addition, Moody organized meetings for young men after the evening service and meetings for women following the noon prayer meeting.
  - e. The noon prayer meeting remained one of the most popular features of the Moody campaigns. Each Friday, the noonday prayer meeting was devoted to temperance.

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<sup>100</sup> *Great Leaders*, 341.

3. Clergy and laity from many different denominations would work together on these campaigns. They would prepare for the meetings, host them in large venues, and follow up with those who had made professions of faith. Special services would often continue after the campaign was finished. Moody's influence extended long after his services had ended.
4. Moody was probably the first itinerant evangelist to employ a professional soloist to accompany him at his meetings—Ira Sankey. Sankey was not professionally trained, but he had a very fine voice and a great heart for evangelism. He made popular the songs of Philip Phillips, P. P. Bliss, George C. Stebbins, and James McGrahahan.
5. Moody was a grand story-teller. Heart-rending anecdotes gripped his listeners. He could be serious one minute and comic the next.
6. Moody's sermons were not exegetical or theological expositions; they were devotional and practical exhortations designed for the common person. He would take one basic theme, such as repentance, heaven, or faith, and string together a group of passages, slipping in poems, anecdotes, and stories all along the way.
7. Moody totally disapproved of any emotional outbursts in his services. There were no fervid appeals to the lost, such as Finney would make, and no shouting of "hallelujahs."
8. Moody relied on well-trained counselors to lead the lost to Christ in inquiry rooms.

#### C. Popular acceptance

1. Moody had an uncanny ability to identify with and speak to the common man. Moody, like few before him, popularized the gospel, made it available to everyone, but coupled it with the warning that the world is getting worse and Christ's return is imminent.
2. Moody provided an answer to the increasing problems associated with the big city—crime, impoverishment, dereliction, drunkenness, illiteracy, incontinency. His "old-fashioned revival" through inner-city mission activity helped those in need. This was one reason for Moody Bible Institute: the raising up of "gap men" to win the city masses to Christ.
3. Moody did not promote any particular denomination or theological point of view. He was never ordained and always remained "Mr. Moody." He preferred to hold meetings in great city halls or auditoriums rather than in local churches.
4. Moody's approach was novel and fresh. His homespun presentation of simple Bible truths spoke to average people.

#### D. Moody's Emphases

1. His moral emphasis: Moody was strong on personal separation and standards of Christian behavior. He was against the theater, disregard for the Sabbath, Sunday newspapers, atheism, evolution, liquor, and worldly amusements. He opposed the social gospel (i.e., that Christianity focuses primarily on social reform).
2. His theological emphasis: Moody defended biblical infallibility and all the fundamental doctrines against liberalism. Moody learned much of his theology from the Plymouth Brethren—basic dispensationalism, premillennialism and moderate Calvinism. He preached the "three Rs" of:

- Ruin by sin: Man is ruined by the Fall. Moody preached, “Our natural hearts are as black and deceitful as hell.” “Children are not born good. Men may talk of natural goodness, but I don’t find it.”
  - Redemption by Christ: Man stands in total dependence on God’s grace in redemption and regeneration. Spurgeon himself defended Moody in print as proclaiming the historic Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. Redemption is something God did for man on the cross, the atonement being understood in terms of Christ paying the penalty for our sins.
  - Regeneration by the Holy Ghost: Regeneration is what God, and God alone, does in man in giving him a new nature. Although he was aggressive in reaching people with the Gospel, he was keenly aware that salvation was a work of God. He refused to use high-pressure tactics; he always left the results with God.
3. His evangelistic emphasis
- Moody assumed that, if the gospel would reach enough people, and if the message were presented simply, clearly, and powerfully, God would use that means to convert many to Christ. But God must do it. “I cannot convert man; I can only proclaim the Gospel.” “It’s a good thing to give [the self-righteous] the Word of God. I am not responsible for their conviction. I cannot convict them; but I can give them the Word of God.” And Moody was very insistent that every Christian do just that—evangelize with the Word of God.
- Services were very simple, but designed to provide an atmosphere for evangelistic preaching: hymn-singing by the congregation (often 30 minutes in length), prayers by guest preachers, special music usually by Sankey and a choir, Scripture reading, and the sermon, normally about 30 to 40 minutes in length, followed by a song of invitation. One observer wrote that his sermon “was like a cavalry charge. You had either to go with it or get out of the way.”
4. His practical emphasis.
- A. C. Dixon said of Moody, “He was a man of the most uncommon common sense that I have ever met.” Moody had a keen business sense, excellent organizational skills, and a thorough understanding of human nature. He had the ability to be flexible and adapt to new situations and sudden changes of events. He possessed a buoyant optimism and wonderful sense of humor. His pulpit manner was natural, sincere, and direct.

### **E. Moody’s personal character**

Moody is an example of what a man who is wholeheartedly committed to God can do. He devoted his every talent and resource to proclaim the Gospel message to as many people as possible. He was a devoted student of the Word of God, and he believed it with all his heart. He knew the Bible well and could proclaim it in a way that average people could understand. Yet he was humble and never self-centered. His whole life was characterized by childlike sincerity and absolute integrity. An understanding of his own failings gave him a sympathy for the plight of mankind. Yet he had no patience with hypocrisy or ostentation. He had the equivalent of only a fifth grade education, had poor grammar, used no punctuation in letters, but he set out to educate himself by thorough personal study of the English Bible and through informal sessions with ministers whom he met.



Moody firmly trusted in the power of the Spirit of God and in the power of prayer. He was not afflicted with the love of money. He had a fervent love for the souls of men. Moody made the resolution as a young man in Chicago to never let a day go by without sharing the gospel with someone. He was personable, approachable, cheerful, and good-natured.

#### IV. Moody's Influence on Evangelicalism

##### A. Negative influences/weaknesses

1. Moody lacked theological depth and avoided doctrinal precision. To Moody, the remedy of all unbelief is positive preaching of the gospel, not argumentation or exacting theology. Moody said, "The work of systematic theology is a luxurious part-time [job] not to be enjoyed while the whole world is going to hell. Perhaps in heaven we will be theologians, but on earth we are called to be evangelists."

A biblical ministry should be both theologically robust and practically oriented. Without a solid theological foundation, ministry often strays into unorthodoxy. This is especially true in following generations (e.g., Methodism's avoidance of theology has led to doctrinal compromise and apostasy).

2. Moody over-emphasized God's love and the unity of all believers to the neglect of God's holiness and the necessary separation from sin and compromise that flows from it. At times, he spoke against liberalism, but at the same time he invited liberals (i.e., Bible critics and skeptics) to participate in his evangelistic efforts. This practice helped set a precedent for modern ecumenical evangelism (i.e., including liberals and Roman Catholics) and the use of worldly means (i.e., "Hollywood" testimonies and rock music) to popularize the gospel.
3. As with other evangelists and revivalists, Moody's connection to the local church was uncertain at best. His ministry was not conducted under the authority of any particular church, and his revivals channeled converts into many different kinds of churches. Moody had a great appreciation for the local church and strove not to undercut the work of the church, but he was not accountable to a local church or churches.

Christian ministry ought to be done in association with local churches, and ideally, under the auspices of a particular local church. Parachurch ministries often operate almost without connection to or accountability from local churches.

##### B. Positive contributions/strengths

1. He avoided both the pragmatism of Charles Finney and the sensationalism of Billy Sunday. Moody specifically rejected "new measures" techniques popularized by Finney. He believed that only the Holy Spirit can bring revival.

Moody did not believe that the end justifies the means (i.e., pragmatism—whatever works is good). He used only legitimate means that he believed God might use, such as door-to-door visitation and modest advertisements.

2. Moody rejected the high pressure tactics, emotionalism, and crowd manipulation other evangelists of his day were using to promote revival.
3. Moody was a premillennialist, not a postmillennialist, like Finney. As such, Moody was not optimistic about "converting the world." He would "do the best [he] could, and leave the results with God."

4. Moody advocated that human effort be put at God's disposal. The business of the Christian is proclamation of the Gospel; only God can produce conversions. Moody repudiated "the idea that a man can start a revival and stop one." In fact, he said, "I don't like the word 'revival;' we cannot tell whether we are going to have a revival or not. That depends upon whether God comes." In other words, conversions are supernatural and revival, heaven-sent.
5. Many thousands were converted to Christ through Moody's evangelistic campaigns, and multitudes entered the Christian ministry because of his influence. For example, after Moody preached in Cambridge, England, seven young men of wealth and social position—"the Cambridge Seven"—gave up their advantages and became missionaries to China. Moody was a strong influence for world evangelization.
6. The Moody Bible Institute, founded in 1886 and still functioning today, has equipped thousands of Christian workers and leaders for Christian ministry of all kinds. Moody Press publishes many books that encourage Christians in their walk with the Lord. Moody's Illinois Street Church burned to the ground in 1871, was rebuilt, and is now known as the Moody Memorial Church. It remains a center of Gospel teaching and evangelism.<sup>101</sup>

No man has ever done more for the Christian cause in his generation than D.L. Moody did. He recruited for Christ many who were leaders in the next generation. And Moody's character, dedication, and faith set a standard in evangelism by which those who come after are judged.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> As with most things, we cannot put out a blanket endorsement of everything produced by Moody Press, Moody Bible Institute, or Moody Memorial Church. These institutions are largely mainstream evangelical and have in the past been quite theologically conservative. But times change, and Christians must be discerning regarding materials produced by these institutions. Past faithfulness does not necessarily guarantee present reliability.

<sup>102</sup> *Great Leaders*, 342.



# The Most Influential People in the Church, 1100 to the Present

Billy Graham (1918-2018)

For many evangelicals, Billy Graham is the pinnacle of preaching, evangelism, and ethical ministry. The likelihood that millions were converted to Christ through his evangelistic campaigns secures his place among the very best and most influential leaders of the Christian church. He proclaimed the Gospel to untold masses of people in person and through TV and films. He is nearly universally acclaimed as an exemplary preacher, “America’s Pastor” for many decades, and was often ranked as one of the most admired people in the world.

However, it’s impossible to ignore the serious weaknesses and compromises in in Graham’s ministry. Although clearly one of the most influential voices in Christianity in the last thousand years, Billy Graham also left a lasting legacy of shallow theology and ecclesiastical compromise which cast a long shadow within evangelicalism.

## Birth and Early Life<sup>103</sup>

Graham was born November 7, 1918, in Charlotte, North Carolina, the first son of William F. and Morrow Graham. His parents owned a dairy farm and were active members of the Associate Presbyterian Church. At the age of sixteen he was converted through the ministry of Mordecai Ham, a well-known southern evangelist.

After a brief period at Bob Jones College (Tennessee), Graham enrolled in Florida Bible Institute in Tampa, Florida (B.Th., 1940). There he not only gained a foundation in the Bible which would greatly influence him the rest of his life, but also received his call to the Christian ministry. During that time, he began preaching and was ordained as a Southern Baptist minister in 1940. Later that year he enrolled at Wheaton College (Illinois), where he met his future wife, Ruth McCue Bell, the daughter of L. Nelson and Virginia Bell, Presbyterian medical missionaries to China. They married in 1943 and had five children.

## Adult Ministry

Upon graduation in 1943 (B.A., Anthropology) he became pastor of a small Baptist church in Western Springs, Illinois. Two years later he resigned to become a full-time evangelist with the newly formed Youth for Christ organization. Almost immediately he began to travel extensively, not only through the United States but to war-scarred Great Britain. In 1947 he reluctantly accepted the presidency of the Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis (which included a Bible college, liberal arts college, and seminary), but continued to travel widely as an evangelist, finally resigning from the presidency in 1951.

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<sup>103</sup> Graham’s biography taken from J.N. Akers, “Graham, William (‘Billy’) Franklin, Jr.,” ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who’s Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 283–284. Edited slightly.

Graham skyrocketed to national prominence in 1949 through his meetings in Los Angeles. The meetings in a huge “canvas cathedral” (tent) resulted in the conversion of several well-known personalities and attracted the attention of media giant William Randolph Hearst, whose newspapers gave widespread coverage to the event. Almost overnight Billy Graham became a household name, and in the next few years his city-wide evangelistic meetings in stadiums and arenas in some of America’s largest cities established a pattern for mass evangelism that would always be associated with his ministry. Graham preached in more than eighty countries to over 110 million people, more than any other individual in history. Hundreds of millions more heard him through television, radio, and film.

Graham’s primary commitment was to proclaim the historic message of the Christian faith to nonbelievers. This desire to reach unbelievers led him to utilize the mass media for the proclamation of the gospel to an unprecedented extent. His worldwide radio program “The Hour of Decision,” started in 1950, soon was heard on hundreds of stations. He likewise utilized television extensively almost as soon as it became widespread. As technology advanced, Graham used satellites and video recordings to extend single crusade meetings across entire continents. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (founded 1950) produced and distributed dozens of documentary and dramatic films, becoming the largest producer of religious films in the world. Graham authored over fifteen books, most of which hit the best-seller lists and were widely translated. He was a frequent guest on major television programs.

While drawing upon the work of such evangelists as Wesley, Whitefield, Finney, Moody, and Sunday, Graham sought to refine and update the methods of mass evangelism. Each citywide crusade was carefully organized, with a trained staff working with local church leaders and volunteers for many months in advance. Early in his work Graham realized the need for more effective follow-up of those making spiritual commitments in his meetings. Working with Dawson Trotman (founder of The Navigators), he developed a system that included basic Bible studies, personal counseling, and immediate contact with a local church.

Almost from the beginning of his public ministry Graham opted for a cooperative approach to evangelism, i.e., working with all churches and denominations that would cooperate with him. This led to criticism from both fundamentalists and liberals—the former denouncing him for compromising with liberal churches and clergymen, the latter rejecting his message and methods as simplistic, out-of-date, and socially irrelevant. Some critics even assailed him for integrating his meetings, which he did more than a year before the Supreme Court’s landmark decision on civil rights (1954). In the late 1970s and early 1980s others criticized him for accepting invitations to preach in communist-dominated Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, although many of those same critics later acknowledged that his visits had a significant impact on the later course of religious freedom there.

In spite of these critics, however, Graham’s integrity, personal humility, and popular appeal made him one of the most influential religious leaders of the twentieth century. Unlike other preachers in the media, there was never a hint of impropriety in Graham’s personal life. He regularly ranked among the ten most admired men in America. He was called the unofficial White House chaplain, due to his friendship with every American president from Harry Truman through Donald Trump. He received numerous honorary degrees, and over fifty major awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1983), America’s highest nonmilitary honor.

Of special significance is Graham's influence on the resurgence of evangelical Christianity in the latter half of the twentieth century. As the most visible proponent of biblical Christianity, Graham became the symbolic leader of evangelicalism, in spite of his refusal to become associated with special interest groups or causes. His concern for the future of evangelicalism led to the founding of the influential magazine *Christianity Today*. Graham also used his influence to draw together evangelical leaders and evangelists in a series of international congresses, including the World Congress on Evangelism (Berlin, 1966), the International Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne, 1974), and the International Conferences for Itinerant Evangelists (Amsterdam, 1983, 1986).

### Criticism

As noted above, Graham faced criticism both from the theological left and the right. Those on the conservative side charged Graham with compromise, especially in his willingness to cooperate with those who denied the Gospel—especially Roman Catholics and modernists/liberals. In so doing, he denied the biblical doctrine of separation (cf. 2 Cor 6:17; Eph 5:11). Cooperating with and refusing to separate from error became one of the tragic marks of evangelicalism.

Graham began his ministry as a conservative, some would say, a fundamentalist. He attended Bob Jones College<sup>104</sup> and enjoyed the support of many fundamentalists of his era. In 1948, Bob Jones University bestowed an honorary doctorate on Graham. In 1950, Bob Jones endorsed a two-week Graham crusade in Greenville, SC. But that initial support was about to end as Graham pursued backing and cooperation from those outside conservative Christianity.

The enduring break with hard-line fundamentalism came in 1957, when, after accepting an invitation from the Protestant Council of New York to hold a crusade in Madison Square Garden, Graham announced, "I intend to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the gospel of Christ, if there are no strings attached to my message. ... The one badge of Christian discipleship is not orthodoxy but love. Christians are not limited to any church. The only question is: are you committed to Christ?"<sup>105</sup>

By the early 1960s, formerly supportive fundamentalists became critics as they grew increasingly upset with Graham's continuing compromises. Bob Jones Jr. said in 1966 that Graham was "doing more harm to the cause of Jesus Christ than any living man." BJU boycotted Graham's Greenville crusade that year, and BJU students who attended the crusade were threatened with expulsion.

Graham's attitude of "not orthodoxy but love" has become that basic commitment of the evangelical world. Graham and those like him have denied and rejected the biblical command to separate from and not cooperate with those who deny the Gospel. The Christian faith demands both orthodoxy (i.e., sound theology) and love. We dare not tolerate in love those who deny the faith. Instead, we must "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). If someone preaches "another gospel" (cf. Gal 1:6-9), we must not cooperate with him or even recognize him as a Christian brother. Graham's greatest error was extending Christian recognition to those who were outside the boundaries of the Christian faith. Graham's legacy of failing to separate from error continues to plague evangelicalism. We dare not tolerate or accept in the name of Christian love what God clearly condemns.

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<sup>104</sup> But only for one semester; he found the school shockingly regimented and restrictive.

<sup>105</sup> "Billy Graham: Evangelist to millions." <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/evangelistsandapologists/billy-graham.html>

Some examples of Graham's compromises:<sup>106</sup>

*Inclusion of Catholics and liberals (ecumenism)*

In Sept., 1957, Graham said in an interview with the San Francisco News, "Anyone who makes a decision at our meetings is seen later and referred to a local clergyman, Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish."

This was Graham's normal practice. He never intended to challenge Catholics to leave their apostate church and join a biblically sound evangelical church. If Catholics attended his crusades, there were no efforts made to convert them. Those from a Catholic or Jewish background would be directed back to those traditions. Because of this, many Catholic churches cooperated in Graham's crusades.

Note: Catholics likely had their own way of interpreting Graham's message. When Catholics hear of "receiving Christ," they do not think in terms of receiving Christ once-for-all through faith in His blood. They think, rather, in terms of Catholic doctrine, which teaches that they receive Christ continually in the sacraments, such as the mass and confession. Graham's exhortation to "commit your life to Christ" would have a different meaning for Catholics than it would for evangelicals. The Catholics who went forward in the Graham crusade were subsequently invited to join a Catholic study group in their area. Catholics were not opposed to Graham because he represented no threat to them; he channeled his campaign converts right back into the Catholic church. Graham did not make a clear distinction between the true Gospel message of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone and the Catholic message of faith plus works.

Graham's close affiliation with false teachers has been documented for many years. There were 120 modernists on his New York Crusade committee in 1957. One of those was Henry Van Dusen, president of the extremely liberal Union Theological Seminary. Van Dusen denied Christ's virgin birth. In his book *Liberal Theology*, he stated that Jesus is not God. Van Dusen and his wife later committed suicide together.

Another modernist exalted by Graham during the 1957 New York Crusade was John Sutherland Bonnell, pastor of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Bonnell was on the executive committee and was honored by Graham on the platform during the meetings. Bonnell had stated that he and most other Presbyterian ministers did not believe in the virgin birth or bodily resurrection of Christ, the inspiration of Scripture, a real heaven and hell, and other basic Christian doctrines.

Graham Quote: "The heart of the problem for men like Bob Jones, Carl McIntire, and John R. Rice<sup>107</sup> was the sponsorship of the Crusade [1957] by the Protestant Council of New York. The council, they contended, included many churches and clergy who were theologically liberal and who denied some of the most important elements of the biblical message. It was not the first time some of them had raised their objections to my growing ecumenism, of course, but the New York Crusade marked their final break with our work" (*Just As I Am*).

The Roman Catholic bishop of Sao Paulo, Brazil, stood beside Graham during his 1963 crusade in

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<sup>106</sup> Some of these taken from David Cloud, "Billy Graham's Sad Disobedience to the Word of God." Fundamental Baptist Information Service, 16 Dec 2009.

<sup>107</sup> These three men were noted fundamentalists or conservatives of that era. Jones was Methodist, McIntire was Presbyterian, and Rice was Baptist. Graham clearly admits that he cooperated with those who denied "important elements of the biblical message," but that did not seem to bother him. It bothered many others who would otherwise have continued supporting him. Graham chose mass recognition and popularity over faithfulness to the biblical message.

that city, and blessed those who came forward at the invitation. Graham said this illustrated that “something tremendous, an awakening of reform and revival within Christianity” was happening (*Daily Journal*, International Falls, Minnesota, Oct. 29, 1963).

In 1979 Graham called Pope John Paul II “the moral leader of the world” (Religious News Service, Sept. 27, 1979). He also said that John Paul II “is almost an evangelist because he calls to people to turn to Christ, to turn to Christianity” (*The Star*, June 26, 1979, reprinted in the *Australian Beacon*, August 1979, p. 1).

In his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*, Graham said his goal was not to lead people out of Roman Catholicism: “My goal, I always made clear, was not to preach against Catholic beliefs or to proselytize people who were already committed to Christ within the Catholic Church. Rather, it was to proclaim the gospel to all those who had never truly committed their lives to Christ.”

In a May 30, 1997, interview, Graham told David Frost: “I feel I belong to all the churches. I’m equally at home in an Anglican or Baptist or a Brethren assembly or a Roman Catholic church. ... Today we have almost 100 percent Catholic support in this country. That was not true twenty years ago. And the bishops and archbishops and the Pope are our friends” (David Frost, Billy Graham in Conversation).

#### *Extending hope to pagans and unbelievers*

In an interview with McCall’s magazine, January 1978, titled “I Can’t Play God Any More,” Graham said: “I used to believe that pagans in far-off countries were lost—were going to hell—if they did not have the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that. ... I believe that there are other ways of recognizing the existence of God—through nature, for instance—and plenty of other opportunities, therefore, of saying ‘yes’ to God.”

Though Graham later tried to stem the controversy brought about by his comments, he continued to allow for the possibility that the unsaved in other religions might not go to hell if they respond to the “light” that they have.

In 1985, Graham affirmed his belief that those outside of Christ might be saved. When asked, “What about people of other faiths who live good lives but don’t profess a belief in Christ?” Graham replied, “I’m going to leave that to the Lord. He’ll decide that” (*Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, July 22, 1985).

In 1993, Graham repeated this philosophy in an interview with David Frost. “And I think there is that hunger for God and people are living as best they know how according to the light that they have. Well, I think they’re in a separate category than people like Hitler and people who have just defied God, and shaken their fists at God. ... I would say that God, being a God of mercy, we have to rest it right there, and say that God is a God of mercy and love, and how it happens, we don’t know” (*The Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 16, 1993).

In his interview with Robert Schuller in May 1997, Graham again said that he believes people in other religions can be saved without consciously believing in Jesus Christ. He said, “I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, whether they’re conscious of it or not, they’re members of the Body of Christ. ... that’s what God is doing today, He’s calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world or the non-believing world, they are members of the body of Christ because they’ve been called by God. They may not even know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don’t have, and they turn to the only light that they have,

and I think that they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven."

*Questioning/downplaying of the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell*

Billy Graham was questioning the literal fire of hell as far back as 1951. He saw the suffering of hell as metaphorical or figurative, not literal. He suggested that hell was really a "a burning thirst for God that can never be quenched."

In Time magazine, November 15, 1993, Graham said: "The only thing I could say for sure is that hell means separation from God. We are separated from his light, from his fellowship. That is going to be hell. When it comes to a literal fire, I don't preach it because I'm not sure about it. When the Scripture uses fire concerning hell, that is possibly an illustration of how terrible it's going to be—not fire but something worse, a thirst for God that cannot be quenched."

*Doctrinal compromise*

Graham held that it didn't really matter if you took the Genesis creation story as a historical account or as mythology/symbol. He extended Christian recognition to those who denied salvation by grace through faith, denied the virgin birth and the resurrection, and denied a literal heaven and hell. He once said, "I do not believe that the ground of our fellowship is to be the inerrancy of Scripture." He also said, "Christ can unite fundamentalists, of which I am one, and so-called modernists about the cross. We've got to forget our differences."

*Pragmatism*

Graham embraced a common idea among many Christians—whatever works to spread the Gospel message and see people converted is good. Under that assumption, Graham used questionable methods to make his appeal and to produce converts. He adopted modern "contemporary Christian" music and singers (e.g., Cliff Richards, Jonny Cash, DC Talk, Steve Green, Michael W. Smith). Graham also used Hollywood celebrity figures, athletes, and politicians (e.g., Bill Clinton!) to speak at his crusades. He normally refused to refute error and/or rebuke the flagrant sins of celebrities and politicians. He appeared on various TV talk shows (e.g., Larry King, David Frost, Phil Donahue, Johnny Carson) to great approval and applause. It's usually a bad sign when the political establishment and the entertainment industry promotes and accepts a Christian preacher. Such institutions accepted Graham because he was no threat to them; he rarely rebuked them or urged them to repent.

The following are excerpts from the program *Larry King Live*:

**King:** "What do you think of other churches... like Mormonism, Catholicism and other faiths within the Christian concept?"

**Graham:** "Oh, I think I have a wonderful fellowship with all of them... I am very comfortable with the Vatican. I have been to see the pope several times... I like him very much. He and I agree on almost everything."

**King:** "Are you comfortable with Judaism?"

**Graham:** "Very comfortable... In New York they have had me to the Rabbinical Council to meet with them and to talk with them and Rabbi Tannenbaum, who was a great friend of all of us, who died, he gave me more advice and more counsel, and I depended on him constantly, theologically and spiritually and in every way."

**King:** "You're a big admirer of Hillary Clinton, right?"



**Graham:** “Yes. I think a great deal of Hillary... I like the Clintons very much.”

We certainly cannot deny that God can use all kinds of people, even those in whom we see serious error, to accomplish his own purposes. No doubt, millions have heard the Gospel, and multitudes of people have been converted under the ministry of Billy Graham, and for that, we give him credit and we thank God.

However, Graham has also done great damage to the biblical truths of the Gospel by tolerating the errors of Catholicism and liberalism. He suggested that non-Christian faith may result in salvation. He supported unity where there should be separation and exposure. He failed to use his position of influence to contend for the faith and to rebuke error. He became popular largely because he was not seen as a threat to those in power. Like many influential leaders in Christianity, Graham’s legacy is a mixed bag of good and bad. It seems likely that Graham never would have gained such prominence and influence had he been more faithful to the Bible.

*Luke 6:26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

*James 4:4 Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*