

THE FIFTH IN A SERIES ON REVIVAL

Revival's odd couple: Wesley & Whitefield

BY KEN HORN



John Wesley



George Whitefield

John Wesley and George Whitefield (pronounced wit•field) couldn't have been more different in some very significant ways.

Yet they both had the same life goal — to see as many souls come into the kingdom of God as possible. And in this they worked together.

John Wesley

In 1728, young John Wesley read the book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* by William Law. Profoundly influenced by it, John and his brother Charles founded what came to be known as the “Holy Club” in 1729 at Oxford University in England. Wesley’s holiness doctrine has come down to a large group of “Holiness” churches out of which our own Fellowship, the Assemblies of God, has sprung.

The term holiness brings to mind the biblical concepts of purity and separation — *from* the world, *to* God. To some

it also conjures images of endless lists of “do’s and don’ts.” Sometimes those attempting to pursue holiness have drifted into legalism — a Christianity dependent on the letter of the law.

Legalism is clearly illustrated in the life of Wesley. He pursued his “methodical” religion while at Oxford and, later, while a missionary — all before his actual conversion to Christ. Wesley’s salvation experience came nine years after the establishment of the Holy Club. He had pursued his rules, his devotions, even his evangelism from a legalistic perspective. True holiness followed his encounter with Christ.

In a church I once served, an alcoholic attended occasionally. After one service I intercepted him in the foyer and asked him if he would give his life to Christ.

He replied, “Pastor, I’m not good enough. As soon as I can give up my drinking, then I’ll get saved.”

No amount of coaxing or theological elucidation could move him.

What this man had right was that God does demand holiness — a godly lifestyle; what he had wrong was that he could achieve it by himself. When God saves, He is the One who does the changing (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). Till then, God sees all our attempts at good works as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Works don’t get you saved; they are evidence of your salvation (Ephesians 2:10). This man’s problem was not the sin of alcoholism; his problem was he was a sinner.

John Wesley led an exemplary life, but it was not a truly holy life until his heart was changed by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The line between holiness and legalism is often blurred. Legalism is a set of rules; holiness is a way of life. Legalism says, “What can I get away with that does not violate the code?” Holiness says, “How close to Jesus can I get?” Legalism begrudges sacrifice; holiness gladly gives more than is required. Obedience is more likely when you love the One you must obey and live your life to please Him. Those who obey out of

fear are constantly searching for loopholes.

Where lives are touched, behavior is changed. The touch of God comes first. When revival hits, people are not bound by legalism. They have a passion for holiness. A person touched by the hand of God does not need a list of television programs he shouldn’t watch; instead his spirit is stricken with grief at the sound of a profane word or sexual innuendo. He does not grudgingly turn the channel as his eyes linger; his spirit compels him to rid his home of filth. Holiness grows out of nearness to God — not out of any attempt to keep a set of rules.

Revival and holiness are inseparable.

“Holiness” without revival breeds legalism. A revival that does not produce holy lives is no revival at all.

The worldly lifestyles of many Christians are a sign of certain need. But the need is not a rigid Christianity driven by rules; it is a revived Christianity ennobled by Jesus.

George Whitefield

One member of John Wesley’s Holy Club was George Whitefield, an outgoing young man who would precede Wesley by three years in his confidence in salvation, and would eventually stand alongside him as the driving force of the First Great Awakening (as it was called in America) and the Evangelical Awakening (in Great Britain) of the 18th century.

Whitefield would become the first “superstar” revivalist. He was called “the marvel of the age” and the “Grand Itinerant.” He preached with a theatric flair, appealing to emotions and tugging at heartstrings ... techniques shunned by most preachers of the day. But his message that one could have a personal salvation, an intimate experience with Jesus Christ, seemed to fit his delivery.

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And wherever he preached, crowds gathered.

Whitefield found a popular acceptance that escaped John Wesley because of Wesley's early austere legalism. Whitefield noted, "As my popularity increased, opposition increased also." One common complaint was that the churches were too crowded. It was no longer easy and comfortable to attend. Indeed, this complaint seems to attend every revival, and in itself shows the need of revival.

And the more Whitefield was attacked by clergy, the more people wanted to hear him. When churches were closed to him, he did the unthinkable, preaching in the outdoors. Even Wesley decried this until he came around to Whitefield's way of thinking. Whitefield first did this because he was blacklisted by ministers, but he continued to do it because there was usually no building large enough to hold the crowds. Sometimes he would speak to crowds larger than the entire population of the town he was preaching in.

Whitefield preached extemporaneously and loudly enough that he could be heard by as many as 30,000 people.

He took his salvation message to places preachers had never before considered ... like the horse races and other public events.

John and Charles Wesley followed suit.

Differences

Wesley and Whitefield were partners in revival. After he heard Whitefield preach, a man named

John Thorpe went to a tavern to drink with friends. The men ridiculed the preacher, and Thorpe leaped atop a table to mimic him ... when he suddenly fell under conviction. Thorpe gave his life to Christ. He then became one of John Wesley's traveling preachers.

But significant differences arose between the two partners.

Their theology was, in some of the most crucial points, in adamant opposition. Whitefield became a Calvinist, believing in predestination and eternal security. Wesley became the foremost proponent of Arminian doctrine, focusing on free will and denying eternal security. Yet both ministered fervently to bring lost souls to Christ.

Their disagreements became public, and sometimes bitter, until the two reconciled and agreed to disagree.

Whitefield was the supreme evangelist but had no effective system of discipleship for his converts. Wesley supplied that, effectively preserving much of Whitefield's harvest. Though far different in theology, method of delivery, and many other areas of ministry, revival's odd couple eventually worked together with eternal impact.

Though Whitefield was younger than Wesley, he died earlier. And John Wesley preached his funeral sermon ... at Whitefield's request. **tpe**

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This series began in the Jan. 11 issue.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

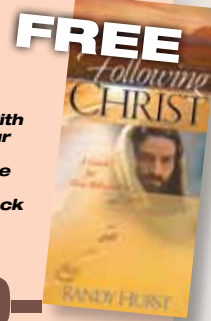
C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

1-800-4PRAYER
Assemblies of God
National Prayer Center



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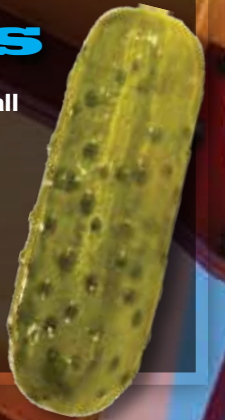
JUST FOR laughs

What do you call a small kitchen appliance that runs on a track?

A roller toaster.

What do you call a pickle with wheels?

A roller kosher.



Roller coaster riding

Have you ever been on a roller coaster? Some people think roller coasters are scary. Others say they're great fun. Whether you're on board or just watching from below, there's something about the high speeds, dizzying heights and twisty turns that make your heart beat a little faster.

People have been attracted to thrill rides for hundreds of years. In the 1700s, ice slides were popular in Russia. Steep, curvy tracks were carved in the ice, and riders went down on sleds made of wood or ice.

Many riders were hurt, but that didn't stop people from lining up for their chance to slide.

An early version of the roller coaster showed up in the United States in the 1800s. It was first made to move coal and supplies in and out of a coal mine in Pennsylvania. Then someone got the idea of loading the cars with people and pushing them down the hill. People paid \$1 each for a chance to try the wild,

bumpy ride that reached speeds of 100 miles per hour.

By the early 1900s, wooden roller coasters were popping up all over the country. Inventors tried — and scrapped — all kinds of new ideas. Someone created a loop-the-loop, but it was discontinued because it hurt riders' necks. Another designer made a roller coaster that jumped a gap in the track, but it also failed. Not a single person was willing to ride it until the missing piece of track was filled in.

In 1955, Disneyland opened in California. One of its most popular rides was a roller coaster called Matterhorn Mountain. That was the beginning of theme parks featuring roller coasters.

Today, there are stand-up roller coasters, roller coasters that hang from their tracks, and ones with upside-down loops. Like the early coasters, most still rely on gravity to carry the trains through their courses.

Sometimes life is like a roller coaster — filled with ups and downs and unexpected twists. There are fun times. Other times, we face things that seem a little scary. But through it all, it's good to know we're never alone. Jesus is riding beside us the whole time.

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20, NIV).



Did you know?

In 2007, Richard Rodriguez rode a roller coaster for 17 days straight at an amusement park in England. He was only given a five-minute break every hour to use the restroom and eat.



The fastest roller coaster is Kingda Ka at Six Flags Great Escape in New Jersey. It reaches speeds of 128 miles per hour.

Try this!

Design a roller coaster!

Try designing your own roller coaster. Draw the track on a piece of paper. Include all the features you'd like to see in an amusement ride, such as water, lasers, animation and loop-the-loops. Think about how it would work. Don't forget to give your ride a cool-sounding name.

