

DENOMINATIONS: Methodism

Religion: the belief in a god

Denomination: a religious grouping where congregations are united in their adherence to its beliefs and practices

Synod: Greek for “walking together.” Congregations voluntarily choose to belong to a synod, which is a group of congregations that are in agreement with each other.

Basic History of Christian Denominations:

1054: “Great Schism” (Split of Orthodox and Rome)

1530: Protestant Reformation

- Lutheranism
- Calvinism
- Anglicanism
- Anabaptism



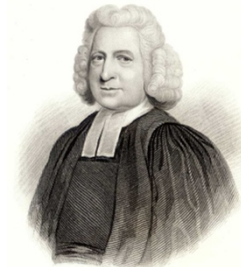
John Calvin



Jacobus Arminius



John Wesley



Charles Wesley

History of Methodism

A native of Holland, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) studied theology in Calvinist Geneva. However, after Arminius returned home to Holland in 1587, his study of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans led him to doubt whether Calvin’s teaching on predestination was correct. This doubt on Calvin’s double-predestination soon grew into opposition to most of Calvin’s theology.

Arminius taught as a professor at the University of Leyden in the Netherlands. The ministers trained under him caused widespread controversy as they taught his doctrines. They expressed these doctrines in a statement called the “Remonstrance” (Protest) against traditional Calvinism. These were repudiated by the Synod of Dort, convened in the Netherlands (1618-1619).

The Lutheran Vantage Point

In this study we examine denominations from a Lutheran point of view. But we always attempt to describe their systems of teaching fairly.

When the beliefs of these non-Lutheran systems disagree with Scripture, we shall point out why such teachings cannot be considered acceptable.

On the other hand, we shall note with pleasure those teachings that emphasize beliefs also found in the Lutheran Confessions, those teachings often make applications to Christian life, etc., from which Lutherans can gladly learn.

Calvin on Predestination

Double-Predestination: Jesus died for some, but not for all. If you are chosen for salvation, there is no way you can avoid it. Once saved, always saved.

The Arminian “Remonstrance” stated these ideas:

- While fallen humanity is seriously corrupted in its spiritual capacities, human will still has some freedom and ability to play a role in regeneration.
- There is no predestination except one conditioned on God’s foreknowledge of man’s use of free will to believe.
- The Savior died for all, and all can benefit by His atonement.
- The free will of man can both resist and reject God’s grace.
- Grace can be lost.

These views have influenced many within the Calvinistic, Episcopalian, and Baptist bodies. They also became the position of numerous bodies formed in later times, notably the Methodists.

Where Calvin taught...	Arminianism taught...
Total depravity of man	Man is not totally depraved, but has a free will.
Unconditional election	Election is God’s response to your personal decision to follow Him.
Limited atonement	Christ died potentially for everyone, so long as you decide to accept Him.
Irresistible grace	Grace is completely resistible and is based on personal choice.
Perseverance of the saints	You can walk away from salvation any time you like.

What we know of Methodism today traces its history to the leadership of John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles (1707-1788), who were born and raised in the Church of England (Anglican Church).

John Wesley experienced a strange warming of his heart on May 24, 1738, when he listened to a public reading of Martin Luther’s *Preface to Romans*. Later calling this experience a conversion that had been caused by the Holy Spirit, John Wesley and his brother fostered a movement that emphasized a warmer, more heartfelt religion than he had learned from the strict liturgical worship forms of the Church of England.

This emphasis on heartfelt religion led to the development of a church body that today continues to focus more on human care and neighborly compassion (aka: “social gospel”) than on faithfulness to a particular set of theological doctrine. Because “free will” remains a major theological emphasis in Methodism, a wide variety of theological opinions and practices can be found coexisting in the Methodist Church today. Stated another way, the specific teachings of the



Jesus on trusting your heart:
 “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”
 (Matthew 15:18-19)

Christian faith are not nearly as important to Methodism as is the practice of love in actions toward one’s neighbor. For Methodists, the best Christian life is lived according to a certain method (hence the name *Methodism*) by which the Christian focus on moral self-improvement and eventual perfection through service to others.

Discussion Questions

Free Will

Why are some people saved and not others? Calvinism’s limited atonement attempts to give an answer based on the idea of God’s sovereignty. Methodism (Arminianism) answers in the opposite way, point to the idea of the freedom of human will. According to Methodist teaching, you personally choose whether or not you wish to be saved.

- 1. **In what areas of life do people have the free exercise of their free will? Are there any areas in life in which free will is limited or restricted in some way?**

- 2. **What do the following Bible verses have to say about the freedom of the will when it comes to spiritual matters?**

- a. Romans 8:7 - _____
- b. Galatians 5:17 - _____
- c. Ephesians 2:1 - _____

- 3. **The preceding verses make it clear that the human will is bound and cannot act freely in spiritual matters. Since this is so, how is it possible to even believe in God, according to the following Bible verses?**

- a. Romans 10:17 - _____
- b. 2 Corinthians 4:6 - _____
- c. Ephesians 2:8-9 - _____
- d. John 11:38-44 - _____

- 4. **What do the following Bible verses say about those to whom God has given His miraculous gift of faith?**

- a. Psalm 51:10 - _____
- b. Romans 7:15-19 - _____

- 5. **The Bible makes it clear that salvation is entirely God’s work, to which no human adds anything, “so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:9). The Bible also teaches that when a**

Martin Luther on ‘Free Will’:
I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

(Explanation of the Third Article of the Creed)

person goes to hell, it is that person’s own hardness of heart and unbelief that caused it. In what way do these two teachings from the Bible seem contradictory and illogical? Can you think of any other teachings from the Bible that also seem contradictory and illogical?

6. In what way can an emphasis on the freedom of the human will, which is contrary to the teachings of the Bible, cause you to doubt your forgiveness and salvation?

Heartfelt

The focus on heartfelt religion promoted by the Wesleys led Methodists to emphasize Christian love as being more important than Christian truth.

- 1. **According to the following Bible verses, what is the relationship between truth and love?**
 - a. Zechariah 8:19 - _____
 - b. Ephesians 4:15 - _____
 - c. John 17:17 - _____
 - d. 1 Peter 1:22 - _____

2. **What might be some dangers of creating too much separation between truth and love? Where might an emphasis on truth at the expense of love lead you? Where might an emphasis on love at the expense of truth lead you?**

3. **What does Jesus say about the source of our works of love toward our neighbor in Matthew 13:23?**

4. **According to the following Bible verses, is it right for Christians to attend themselves only to God’s Word and to ignore their neighbor’s needs?**

- a. James 2:14-17 - _____
- b. 1 John 3:18 - _____

Caring for our neighbor’s physical need is good, but it only serves the neighbor for this life. Speaking God’s Word to the neighbor serves him or her both in this life and in the life to come.

“A lawyer asked Jesus a question to test Him. ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And [Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’”
(Matthew 22:35-40)

What is going on with the American Methodists?

Methodism has had a history of following general rules, or methods, as an ideal delineation of Biblical rules of conduct. As of 2023, most of the methods of Christian living associated with the Methodist Church have been eliminated.

Methodists have always shown a great deal of tolerance of differences when it comes to doctrine, but typically not on ways of holy living. So, Methodists don't typically refer to the Bible when it comes to holy living, but instead to "the heart."

Early American Methodism was counter-cultural, which appealed especially to African Americans and women. The Methodist church grew especially during the Second Great Awakening, which featured revivalism and camp meetings. But as Methodism took hold in the Southern United States, church leaders became less willing to condemn the practice of slavery or to grant African American preachers and congregations the same privileges as their European American counterparts. So, a number of black churches were formed as African Americans withdrew from the Methodist Church.

Holy Living in America: Prohibition

One of the methods of Methodism was refraining from alcohol use. Prior to Thomas Bramwell Welch's (1825-1903) invention of unfermented grape juice in 1869, there was no such drink as grape juice. As there was only wine available.



Welch was a British-American Wesleyan-Methodist minister, as well as a dentist. He created the use of pasteurization as a means of preventing the fermentation of grape juice. He persuaded many churches to adopt this non-alcoholic "wine" for use in Holy Communion, calling it "Dr. Welch's Unfermented Wine."



Holy Living in America: The Ku Klux Klan

Rev. William Joseph Simmons (1880-1945), a Methodist minister founded the second Ku Klux Klan in 1915 at Stone Mountain in Georgia following the success of the movie "The Birth of a Nation," which glorified the original Klan. The new Klan differed from the first Klan in that it was not only southern, but popular throughout the entire United States and even into Canada. The Klan became popular because of their progressive political agenda, which included prohibition, better public schools and expanded road construction. This progressive social justice agenda attracted many Christians who sought to improve humanity. The Klan actively met in Methodist and Baptist church buildings. The Klan also was racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Roman Catholic, and anti-Semitic. Simmons also introduced cross burnings.

Holy Living in America: The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army began as a movement organized by the Methodist evangelist William Booth (1829-1912) to carry on his work in the slums of East London and later in other places in England and overseas. The name indicates the military pattern adopted for carrying on “campaigns” against unbelief and sin. Ministers are “officers” with uniforms (Booth was the general of the Salvation Army). Members are “soldiers” who sign a doctrinal summary called “The Articles of War.”



From the time of Booth, the Salvation Army has followed the principle that spiritual work and social work must go hand in hand. He said that a hungry man must be fed before he will hunger for God. The Army, or the Salvationists (as they are often called), is well known and respected for its social-welfare program.

The Salvation Army considers Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as unnecessary. They claim that they were merely symbolic ceremonies in the early church, not instituted as permanent rites. Only the truths they symbolize are necessary.

COMPARING THE CHURCH BODIES:

United Methodist Church (UMC)



Origin and History: The United Methodist Church is one of the largest religious bodies in the United States and it has had a major impact on American culture. In many ways, the UMC is the quintessential American denomination as it has a tendency to “follow the heart” and the American culture, rather than adherence to Scripture.

The UMC is a church body produced by mergers. The first merger reunited three separated Methodist groups in 1939 when the church divided on the issue of slavery during the American Civil War. In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church (opposed slavery); the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (approved slavery); and the Methodist Protestant Church were reunited under the name, the Methodist Church. This merger helped to heal some of the wounds of the Civil War.

Then in 1968, the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB), a product of the German Pietist movement with Methodist leanings, to form the United Methodist Church. At the merger on April 23, 1968, the newly formed United Methodist Church revealed its new logo of the cross and flame. According to the UMC, the logo’s cross represents Christ and the flame represents the Holy Spirit. The two tongues of the single flame represent the union of the two church bodies. The membership at the time of the merger was nearly 11 million members.

With its focus on the heart, the UMC has adopted a Social Creed that stresses human rights and ecological concerns.

The UMC has faced considerable controversy in the recent years over gay marriage. This has led to multiple schisms within the church body. Officially, the UMC does not allow practicing homosexuals to be ordained as clergy or be given pastoral appointments. However, many congregations have defied this rule and have not been punished, since many bishops are in favor of gay marriage. As a denomination, the UMC has been a leader among American church bodies in promoting racial and sexual equality in church and society. The UMC ordains women and has women bishops.

Since 2019, more than 7,000 congregations have left the UMC. The majority of those leaving have joined the newly formed **Global Methodist Church**.

The UMC is active in ecumenical relations with other Christian denominations. It is in full altar and pulpit fellowship with the following church bodies:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) – mainline liberal church
- African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) – historically black church
- African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZC) – historically black church
- African Union Methodist Protestant Church (AUMPC) – historically black church
- Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CMEC) – historically black church
- Union American Methodist Episcopal Church (UAMEC) – historically black church

The Social Creed

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

(It is recommended that this statement of Social Principles be continually available to United Methodist Christians and that it be emphasized regularly in every congregation. It is further recommended that "Our Social Creed" be frequently used in Sunday worship.)

Source of Doctrine: The UMC root their teachings in their Articles of Religion, the Rules of the Methodist Church, and a collection of Wesley’s sermons. Scripture is understood through the filter of Church tradition and the test of human reason. The UMC demonstrate a great tolerance for differences, especially concerning the interpretation of Scripture.

Role of Christ/Way of Salvation: The UMC teaches that believers are able to cooperate in their conversion. While they acknowledge God’s role in forgiving sin and Jesus’ work of obedience, they teach that Christians are enabled by sanctification to do their own holy works, which qualify them for eternal life.

Sacraments/Ordinances: The UMC participate in the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and are seen as divinely appointed activities in which people receive help from God. They are not seen as a Means of Grace by which the believer receives forgiveness.

Eschatology: Amillennial view of the end times.

Life Issues: In The Social Principles, the UMC affirms: “Our belief in the sanctity of unborn life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child.” (Book of Discipline, 161.J.) The UMC also states: “while we understand the need for women to have access to safe, legal abortions, we also ‘mourn and are committed to promoting the diminishment of high abortion rates.’” There is considerable division among the UMC today when it comes to the issue of abortion.

Sexual Identity: According to the UMC Book of Discipline, the Church considers “the practice of homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teaching.” However, this official position remains controversial and hotly debated within the denomination. Despite it being against church practice, the UMC’s Western Jurisdiction elected the first openly lesbian bishop in 2016, the Rev. Karen Oliveto of San Francisco, California. Many other openly gay pastors have served the UMC despite being against church practice.

Role of Women: The UMC ordains women.

Our Lutheran response to the UMC:

Since the Methodist believer may not share the same understanding of Scripture, approach them with a spirit of love and concern. Be prepared to thoroughly explain what Lutherans teach as part of this conversation.

Global Methodist Church (GMC)



**GLOBAL
METHODIST CHURCH**

Origin and History: The GMC was created as a result of a schism with the UMC on May 1, 2022, after members departed to uphold “theological and ethical Christian orthodoxy” as they opposed the recognition of same-sex marriage and the ordination of non-celibate gay clergy. The GMC represent traditional Methodism, while the UMC has become the progressive Methodist church. With the exception of homosexuality, the GMC is in agreement with the UMC on all other matters.

The Global Methodist Church states: “It is a church committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly. The Global Methodist Church is filled with warm-hearted, Jesus loving, and Holy Spirit inspired people. They are grounded in Scripture and the life-giving confessions of the Christian faith found in the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creeds.”

Synod	United Methodist Church (UMC)	Global Methodist Church (GMC)	African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)	African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ)	Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)	The Wesleyan Church	Church of the Nazarene
Membership	7,679,850 (2012)		2,500,000 (2014)	301,005 (2010)	290,601 (2010)	385,321 (2012)	905,936 (2015)
Scripture	Contains the Word of God	Contains the Word of God	Contains the Word of God	Contains the Word of God	Contains the Word of God	Inerrant Word of God	Inerrant Word of God
Creeds & Confessions	Flexible	Flexible	Flexible	Flexible	Flexible	Flexible	Flexible
Lord's Supper	Divine Symbols	Divine Symbols	Divine Symbols	Divine Symbols	Divine Symbols	Divine Symbols	Divine Symbols
Life Issues	Pro-Life*	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life	Pro-Life
LGBTQIA+	Sin*	Sin	Sin	Sin	Sin	Sin	Sin
Notable Information	The UMC is in altar-pulpit fellowship with the ELCA.	Split from the UMC in 2022 over same-sex marriage.	Organized by a group of people protesting racial discrimination in the Methodist Church.	Organized by a group of people protesting racial discrimination in the Methodist Church. The word Zion was used to distinguish this church from the AME Church.	The CME was established in 1870 in an amicable agreement between white and black members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. This was done to not lose members to the AME and AMEZ churches.	First denomination founded in the U.S. as a protest against slavery. This church was active in the Underground Railroad before and during the Civil War.	Believe in divine healing but never to the exclusion of medical agencies. Discourage alcohol and tobacco use.

Sources:

Roger E. Olson, et all. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States: 14th Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2018). *Churches in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994).

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The Lutheran Difference: An Explanation & Comparison of Christian Beliefs (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010).

The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations (Eugene: Harvest House, 2015)

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

The Global Methodist Church, www.globalmethodist.org

C.F.W. Walther (first president of the LCMS) believed that Methodism was the greatest threat to Lutheranism. Why would Methodism be a threat? Was he right or wrong?