

If leaving the United Methodist Church is not an option, then what?

If it is true that congregations are not able to leave the United Methodist Church, what comes next? To answer that question, perhaps we need to look at who we are as Methodist Christians who hold to a more traditional understanding of the scriptures, while living, working, and worshipping alongside those who think differently on the issues that have divided United Methodism.

What is a Methodist?

For this we go back to the founding of the movement called Methodism. Many people know that it all began with two brothers, John and Charles Wesley, and their friends at Oxford University. John and Charles had a desire to grow in their faith and their practice of the Christian faith, so they started something that became known as the Holy Club.

John, Charles, and their friends spent their time in dedicated and intense practice of the Christian faith. Through prayer, Bible study, regularly receiving communion, fasting, serving the poor, visiting prisoners, teaching children to read, and providing food to needy families, they ordered their faith to make sure that their faith practice lived up to scriptural mandates. But one thing was missing, a true experience of the assurance of salvation, and with that a true change of heart-not just practice.

After a failed missionary journey to Georgia, John serving as the rector of Christ Church in Savannah and Charles serving as chaplain at Fort Frederica on St. Simon's Island, they felt defeated and questioning their faith and vocation. John much more than Charles felt lost. On the Day of Pentecost. Sun., May 21, 1738, Charles received the assurance of his salvation and the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Just three days later on May 24, 1738 John received the assurance of his salvation in a meeting on Aldersgate street in London. Of the experience John said,

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

From that day forward the Wesley brothers had a desire to reach lost people with the saving knowledge of Christ, and upon receiving Him receive the assurance of their salvation just like

they did. That evangelistic zeal led them to change the world of their day, and by extension ours.

In the Character of a Methodist, John wrote,

A Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;" one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!'"

Mr. Wesley added to this that a Methodist follows the commandments and seeks to live in holiness in the same measure to which we love. Modern United Methodists are fully engaged in the idea of love driving all our relationships but have a problem with the idea of living holy lives, following the will and way of God as brought forth in the Bible. In the "Large" Minutes, John Wesley said the purpose of Methodism is to "to spread scriptural holiness over the land."

The United Methodist Church has become exactly what Mr. Wesley feared:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.

It would seem we have lost our doctrine, spirit, and discipline with the 2020/2024 General Conference. Many of those who attended and had a vote at that conference said they were following the Holy Spirit by changing our doctrine of marriage and approving behaviors that are indeed incompatible with Scripture, reason, and tradition. In leaning on experience, they were divorced from the other three parts of the Wesleyan quadrilateral that is so much a part of United Methodism. I believe they were indeed following a spirit, but it is certainly not the Holy Spirit. They were following the spirit of the age, a spirit of rebellion against the will and way of God. The General Conference departed from the spirit and law of methodism, abandoned the Christian faith, and became a pagan gathering.

Considering this, many local United Methodist Churches have wanted to leave the denomination. The problem is the paragraph that allowed us to leave in a simple and defined way has expired, and the promised extension of 2553 was turned down by GC2024. But many of our leaders, Bishops, and District Superintendents promised us that if the General Conference chose to abandon biblical truth, we would have a way of escape from a now apostate denomination. Some of the conferences tried to honor their promises but have now, due to the decision of the Judicial Council, reneged on their commitments. The reason stated was they had to follow the Discipline, even though many of our leaders disobeyed the Discipline by teaching doctrine contrary to our articles of religion and confession of faith. Still others disobeyed the

Discipline by ordaining or failing to charge self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Then you have the Western Jurisdiction consecrating two self-avowed practicing homosexuals as Bishops before this was allowed by General Conference, and when the judicial council said those elections were invalid, they refused to remove the offending party. Only now does the Discipline matter, now that the leftists in our denomination have gotten their way.

So, if leaving the United Methodist Church with our properties is not an option then what?

- Well, the first thing to note is **separation may be possible for some churches on a case-by-case basis.** This has always been true; it is just very expensive and not assured. The Bishop of your Conference and your Conference Trustees can allow it. But there is little to no standard way it can happen.
- **The next option is simply to abandon our properties *en masse* and start new local churches in our communities.** If this is the option a church body thinks is best, you are encouraged to prayerfully consider every detail of what this will look like. Research the process, think about funding, find a meeting place, whether your pastor is going with you or if not, how you will get a new pastor, tax exempt status, and denominational affiliation. All local churches should be a part of a larger body. An independent church simply is not a biblical model. Just make sure that the local church retains ownership of any property you obtain so that you will never be back in the position United Methodist congregations are now.
- **The last option is to dig in and fight for your right of self-determination and / or the soul of the United Methodist Church.** But how can we fight?
 1. **Begin by withholding your apportionments** until the conferences begin to listen to biblical Methodists. It seems that money is the only thing our higher-ups listen to. Withhold the cash! There are a few ways to do this and be effective.
 - a) Withhold the apportionments and put the money in escrow. This is important if you still feel that someday, somehow your church wants to try and exit the denomination. If they ever allow you to exit the denomination, they are going to expect that you will pay any back apportionments.
 - b) If you believe that they will never let you go or that biblical Methodists will one day prevail in turning our denomination around. Withhold the apportionments and use that money to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - c) If your church is split on the issues that are separating the United Methodist Church, withhold the apportionments and allow

individual church members who feel apportionments should be paid to designate their giving for the payment of apportionments. It should be stipulated that if this designated giving exceeds the amount the conference is asking for, any leftover money would go into the general fund.

- d) A note to pastors about apportionments. In order to protect your appointment, you might consider what some denominations do, the Assembly of God for example. In the Assembly of God, the pastor is required to give half of their tithe to the local churches they are serving and half to the conference.

2. **If you feel like you should pay your apportionments since you are still a United Methodist Church, demand an exact accounting of the apportionments.** Demand of your conference an À la carte menu so that you are only financially supporting those things you can in good conscience support. If you do not trust the conference to be honest about where the money is going, take the amount they ask for and donate it to United Methodist ministries you trust, i.e. UMCOR, children's homes, and African schools such as those in Liberia.
3. **De-emphasise the denomination in the local church.** As conservative/biblical Methodist congregations it is going to be more and more difficult to reach new people. The other difficulty is many conservative Methodists no longer feel comfortable in being a part of the United Methodist Church because they feel to be part of it is to condone the actions of the General Conference. To borrow a term from the business world, **rebrand your local church**. Many churches in a variety of denominations have taken the denominational logo and name off the building while remaining connected to it.
4. **Bombard Annual and General Conference with petitions that return the United Methodist Church to biblical principles.** Make them deal with the truth over and over again in the hope that hardened hearts will be softened, and either they will ask us to leave or repent and turn their hearts to the right.
5. **Get involved.** For many years the most liberal person in any given church has been the one who is elected to go as Lay Member to Annual Conference. Conservative Methodists must get involved. You must volunteer to serve as Lay Member and be in the room to vote and support what is right and fight against what is wrong. If you are Lay Member to Annual Conference, run for General and Jurisdictional delegate and work to get only biblical Methodists elected.

There is more that could be said, but the primary thing is to pray for God's guidance for the way you and your church should go. It may be that you and your church are called to be a light within the darkness that has enveloped the United Methodist Church. Methodists are holiness people, called to reach our world and transform lives through the Gospel. We cannot transform our world if we are not different from the world. For some of us, we are in a holding pattern, waiting for a workable exit process. The key is to not stand still in the waiting. Pray and plan for the future God has for you and your church. When you get a clear answer, act boldly for the good of the kingdom of God and for the soul of the Methodist movement.