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Christian History Made Easy (Rose Bible Basics)

25. Revolutions of Faith and Reason (Colonial America, Pietism, and the Great Awakening)

This chapter traces how, in the 1600s and 1700s, people whose inherited faith no longer inspired them 'forged fresh—and sometimes false—forms of faith.' It follows four revolutions: in the social order (colonial New England), in reason (the Enlightenment and Deism), in religion (Pietism and the Great Awakening), and in politics (the American Revolution). The thread running through all of them is the question of where truth and authority finally rest.

Key takeaways

- The Pilgrims and Puritans built a society where church and state were linked; only saved, professing believers could vote. The arrangement soon broke down.
- Roger Williams argued civil judges should not enforce religion. Banished in 1635, he founded Providence (Rhode Island) as a colony open to every faith—the seed of religious liberty.

- Anne Hutchinson was banished for teaching that Christians need not obey human laws and for claiming direct, authoritative revelation from God.
- As Puritan zeal faded, the 'Halfway Covenant' and then the 1692 Salem witch hunt marked spiritual decay.
- The Enlightenment shifted authority from church tradition to human reason. Newton's science inspired Deism: God as distant Maker, no miracles, no Trinity, no need for redemption.
- Pietism (Spener, Zinzendorf's Moravians, round-the-clock prayer at Herrnhut) revived personal relationship with Christ and fueled worldwide missions.
- The Great Awakening: Jonathan Edwards' Northampton revival, John and Charles Wesley's conversions (Aldersgate, 1738) and 'Methodist' movement, and George Whitefield's preaching heard by most colonists.
- Most churches backed the Revolution, but many founders were Deists, not Christians. The Bill of Rights finally realized Roger Williams' dream of a government tied to no religion.

Passages worth keeping

“When former forms of faith fail to inspire them, folk forge fresh—and, sometimes, false—forms of faith.”

The chapter's key concept and organizing thesis.

“I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation.”

John Wesley's conversion, the turning point that carried Pietist revival into the Awakening.

How it connects

The recurring test is authority: when Scripture reigned (Williams, the Moravians, Edwards, Whitefield), faith revived; when reason or personal experience replaced it, faith drifted into Deism or error.

Scripture referenced

- **Romans 3:24-28** -- Grace over law—what Anne Hutchinson leaned on.
- **Romans 13:1-7** -- Obedience to civil authority—the truth she neglected; also cited on rebellion.
- **2 Corinthians 13:5-6** -- Examine yourself—warning against spiritual 'sleep.'
- **Acts 18:26** -- Priscilla teaching—Hutchinson's defense of a woman instructing.
- **Matthew 22:17-21** -- 'Render to Caesar'—weighed against revolution.
- **John 14:6** -- Christ as 'the way, the truth, and the life'—the chapter's answer to 'What is truth?'