

Cooke, TonyMiracles and the Supernatural Throughout Church History

19. John Wesley and the Methodists

This chapter traces John Wesley (1703–1791), the Anglican priest whose ministry helped launch the Methodist movement. It follows his journey from rigorous but empty religion to a heart-transforming faith, and documents the powerful works of the Holy Spirit—conviction, healing, and deliverance—that marked his preaching, along with his careful, balanced handling of those manifestations.

Key takeaways

- Like the apostle Paul, Wesley first tried to earn righteousness through good works before discovering that only Christ's righteousness, received by faith, saves.
- Moravian missionaries—calm during a deadly storm at sea—exposed Wesley's lack of assurance; their preacher Peter Boehler urged him to 'preach faith until you have faith.'
- His conversion came May 24, 1738, at Aldersgate Street, where his 'heart was strangely warmed' and he gained assurance that Christ had saved him personally.
- Under his preaching people often fell 'as if thunderstruck,' cried out under conviction, then rose in joy—outward signs Wesley saw only as indicators of an inward work of God.

- Wesley recorded genuine healings (notably Mr. Meyrick, twice raised from near death) and deliverances, and defended them as real, supernatural acts of God against skeptics.
- He insisted things be done 'decently and in order,' warning against fleshly 'extravagance' while correcting excess gently so people wouldn't fear yielding to the Spirit.
- He blamed the loss of the Spirit's gifts after Constantine not on their being unneeded but on Christians' love growing cold and faith fading into dead form.
- Wesley's organizing genius—discipleship classes, lay preachers, women leaders—preserved the fruit of revival where the greater preacher Whitefield's converts became 'a rope of sand.'
- He warned prophetically that Methodists could survive as 'a dead sect' with the form of religion but not the power, unless they held fast to doctrine, spirit, and discipline.
- His remedy for revival decaying into complacent prosperity: 'gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can'—generosity keeps grace flowing.

Passages worth keeping

"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation."

Wesley's Aldersgate conversion—the turning point of his life and the movement.

"I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."

His prophetic warning to every movement born in the Spirit.

How it connects

Wesley's arc mirrors Paul's: religious zeal that could not save, then grace received by faith. His warning about a 'dead sect' echoes Christ's threat to remove Ephesus's lampstand—revival must be guarded, not assumed.

Scripture referenced

- **Mark 8:25** -- Jesus healing the blind man in two stages—cited to explain why Wesley prayed twice for Meyrick.
- **1 Corinthians 14:40** -- 'Let all things be done decently and in order'—Wesley's guard against excess.
- **Mark 16:17** -- 'These signs shall follow them that believe'—came to Wesley's mind during his own healing.
- **Revelation 2:5** -- Ephesus losing its lampstand—a church can lose its spiritual power.