

# ***“Church History: Heroes, Heretics & Holy Wars”***

## ***Sunday School Notes***

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### **CLASS 15: Edwards & Whitefield**

In 1630, Plymouth, Massachusetts was the sight of a Pilgrim/Puritan settlement. They wanted to establish a society based on the Bible, a “city on a hill” for all New England to follow. John Winthrop was their governor. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations became more concerned with material than spiritual things, and future immigrants came who had very little interest in religion.

The American Colonies Religion by Areas (see handout “Religion in the Thirteen Colonies”):

New England – Puritan/Congregationalist

Virginia & Carolina – Episcopalian/Church Of England

Florida & Louisiana – Catholic

Maryland – for a short time, it was the happy tolerant state that allowed for both Protestants and Catholics; official “Act of Toleration Concerning Religion” issued in 1649, though Protestants soon took over; by 1700, Church of England was the official state religion.

### **CALVINISTS**

The very first Calvinist Christians in America were most likely Huguenots from France who settled in Florida in the 1560s. In 1628, Dutch Calvinists (became the Reformed Church in America) settled in New Amsterdam (New York).

**Francis Makemie** (1658 - 1708) – “The Father of American Presbyterianism”

Francis Makemie was a Scottish Presbyterian educated in Glasgow who became the first Presbyterian minister on the North American continent, landing on the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay in 1683. He organized at least 7 Presbyterian churches in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

He was seen as a threat by the Anglicans, who called him a non-conformist. The Governor of New York (Lord Cornbury) had him arrested by the Sheriff of Long Island for preaching without a license (along with another Presbyterian minister, John Hampton). His trial in 1707 was an early test of religious freedom in America. Like the Apostle Paul, who reminded the Roman authorities of his Roman citizenship, Makemie defended himself by citing the law - saying that William & Mary and the Parliament in England had granted liberty to preach in 1688. The governor replied that that did not extend to the colonies. Makemie argued that they were English colonies, and eventually won the trial and secured liberty for Presbyterians to preach in the colonies. New laws passed to prevent those kinds of arrests in the future.

Makemie and 6 others formed the first Presbytery in the colonies in 1706; the first General Assembly was in 1789 in Philadelphia. By the time of the American Revolution, Presbyterians were second in size only to Congregationalists.

The religious fervor of the Puritans in New England had died down by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, though. Increase Mather wrote a book called *The Glory Departing from New England*. Revival was needed.

So speaking of Congregationalists and the need for revival:

**Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)**

Jonathan Edwards and Ben Franklin were born within 2 years of each other at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Both were born in Calvinist households, both were geniuses; yet Franklin rejected Calvinism by his teens and became a rebel/revolutionary eventually, while Edwards became a defender of orthodoxy. Both made lists of resolutions- Franklin for self-improvement, Edwards for God's glory.

Jonathan was the only son of Rev. Timothy Edwards, who had 10 daughters. He was groomed early on for ministry, as his grandfather and others in his extended family were pastors. To enter college, you only needed skill in Greek and Latin, which his father had taught him, so he entered Yale at age 13, got his Bachelors and Masters degrees there by age 18. He struggled with Calvinism, read all the Scientific Revolution writers, but eventually embraced Calvin's theology.

He became pulpit supply for Manhattan Presbyterian Church, but would end up being more Red Sox than Yankees. One year pastorate in Connecticut among farmers when he was 19, then back to Yale where he gazed upon the beautiful 13 year old girl, Sarah Pierpont of New Haven, CT. They were engaged when she was 15, then married when she was 17 and he was 23 (so a little more respectable). Over 22 years they had 11 children, all whom survived childhood.

Solomon Stoddard, his grandfather pastured pastored the church in North Hampton, MA, and took Jonathan on as an assistant pastor. In 1729, Stoddard died and Jonathan was promoted to pastor. He was concerned about the "Tavern Culture" and the "Youth Culture"- people were putting off getting married- 29 yrs. for men, 25 yrs. for women (sound familiar?). An earthquake in 1727 made people think that God was judging the unruly youth. In 1734 a "party girl" told him about her renewed spirituality, and then youth lined up to tell him of their new life; he judged 300 new believers. He wrote "A Faithful Narrative of this Surprising Work of God" and sent it to other clergy.

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was preached in another church in Connecticut. Main idea was that God is a righteous judge who could destroy, but was patient. He had a weak voice, mostly memorized manuscript, stared at the bell rope in the back. But he couldn't finish the sermon, the audience screamed and moaned "How can I be saved?" and "I'm going to hell!" These, and many other instances of repentance and revival, became part of the Great Awakening.

People took sides about the Awakening: The New Lights vs. the Old Lights. Great excesses hurt the Awakening: people burning Puritan books, burning their fancy clothes, people felt very free to challenge authority and criticize pastors, untrained people started preaching. Edwards tried his best to balance the validity of revivals, while looking at the fruits of changed lives, testing everything with Scripture, keeping churches going, respect for pastoral authority, etc. Plus the whole Calvinist idea that true change comes from God. Edwards' own daughters came to faith during the Great Awakenings.

The Edwards family owned slaves, but usually only one at a time. And at least one became a church member. He felt they provided well for them. His son became an anti-slavery advocate.

Edwards reversed his grandfather's lax requirements on membership and communion. He wanted a credible profession of faith and tightened up on membership, taking the warnings of 1 Cor. about eating and drinking judgment seriously. Most of New England had abided by the "halfway covenant"- baptized children of the church who didn't become adult members could still have their

children baptized; which essentially meant the whole community was baptized. He wanted that changed, but the community was outraged and soon voted to remove him as pastor. He was deeply hurt, but preached a goodbye sermon, implying that they would have a lot to answer for on judgment day.

He was offered jobs in Boston and even as far away as Scotland, but he moved 40 miles west to Stockbridge, which was the frontier with Mohawks & Mohicans, and pastored the settlers and Indians there for 7 years. Eventually Princeton called him to be their president in 1757 after Aaron Burr Sr. died; he didn't want to because he had two huge writing projects- "the History of Redemption" and "A Harmony of the OT & NT." What amazing works those would have been! But he died from small pox within months of arriving in Princeton at the age of 54; never saw the American Revolution like Franklin did.

### **George Whitefield (1714-1770)**

Steven Lawson says that George Whitefield was the greatest evangelist in the church since the Apostle Paul! If Calvin was the best theologian, Edwards the greatest philosopher, Spurgeon the greatest preacher, then Whitefield was the greatest itinerant evangelist. Martin Lloyd-Jones: "Whitefield is the most neglected man in church history, the greatest man you've never heard about."

Born in 1714, 300 years ago, in Gloucester, England. Whitefield and the Wesley brothers were part of the Holy Club, a small prayer & Bible Study group at Oxford. Not one of them was a Christian, though they tried to save themselves with religion and spiritual disciplines. Whitefield was the most extreme in dieting, praying in freezing temperatures, making himself sick; despaired trying to save himself, much like Luther, until he realized what regeneration was. He was born again at age 21 and resolved to let others know that they must be converted. Ordained and preaching by the next year. Preached the 3 Rs: "Ruined by sin, Redeemed by the Savior, Regenerated by the Spirit." He was a Calvinist with undaunted zeal for conversion. Early in his ministry London was totally energized by the Gospel. Churches were freaked out by the huge crowds and closed their doors to him, so he started preaching in the fields. Even preached to the coal miners near Bristol whom no churches or schools ever bothered with.

Whitefield's 1740 journey has been called the most extraordinary missionary trip ever (including the apostle Paul's). He had one foot in the British Isles- Scotland, England and Wales, and one foot in the colonies, travelling up and down the eastern seacoast. (Remember that every time he crossed the Atlantic, it would take 2-4 months!) It has been estimated that he preached over 18,000 sermons in 30 years! Preached face-to-face with 10 million people. 30,000 people in Boston gathered to hear him preach one time, easily the largest gathering in the colonies. 300 churches started with the 50,000 converts that resulted from his ministry. He was a celebrity in the colonies. He did not align with a denomination, but was adamant that all Christians were equal.

He was friends with Benjamin Franklin, who helped finance an orphanage in Georgia. When Whitefield came to North Hampton, MA, he and Edwards were fans of each other; Edwards wept openly as he listened to Whitefield preach. Though Whitefield was very critical of other clergy that he deemed unsaved or ineffective, Edwards didn't like the negativity. Revival & outdoor preaching caught on. Whitefield was the straw from which the First Great Awakening burned. Died in 1770 at age 56 of asthma in Massachusetts, worn down by the years of travel and preaching.

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