Module 1

Assignment

Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart

(Read Introduction through Chapter 8)

1. Moral decay was prominent in Wesley’s days, but perhaps no more so than today. Is there hope for a revival like the Wesleyan revival, or is one already going on in some parts of the world?

2. Does it help to explain the character and mission of John Wesley to learn about his heritage? Comment

3. Are you surprised to learn that Wesley’s parents (Samuel and Susanna) rejected Puritanism and embraced Anglicanism at such early ages? If they had not, is it possible that the Wesleyan revival would not have occurred, or if it did that its theology would have been quite Calvinistic, like George Whitefield’s. Can you imagine Methodists today being Calvinistic?

4. Can you think of a particularly dramatic experience early in life that decisively shaped your spiritual life like Wesley being rescued from the fire of the Epworth’s home when he was not quite six?

5. Why do you think that Wesley’s mother was an important influence in shaping Wesley’s theological views and his future ministry? Comment.

6. Why was 1725 a very important and a decisive year in the life of Wesley?

7. How did Jeremy Taylor's focus on "purity of intention", Thomas à Kempis's focus on the imitation of Christ, and William Law's concept of perfection influence Wesley?

8. Should Wesley have gone to be the rector of Epworth at the urging of his father (Samuel) and older brother (Samuel Jr.)?

9. Comment on Wesley’s interaction with Spangenberg, who was the first person to confront Wesley with the importance of having the internal witness and assurance of the Spirit.

10. Comment on how the Moravian movement (from his first introduction to it with his mission trip to Georgia until his friendship with Böhler back in England) influenced Wesley coming to faith?

11. Do you think it is proper for one to preach faith until they personally come to experience faith for themselves, as Peter Böhler advised Wesley to do?

12. Wesley came to preach the idea of an “instantaneous” work of justifying grace from Böhler. His Aldersgate experience was the consequence of these conversations that Wesley had with Böhler about these matters. Yet even after Aldersgate, Wesley on occasions continued to struggle with "fear and doubt." Why do you think Wesley still suffered on occasions from uncertainty?

13. There has been much controversy over the meaning of Wesley’s Aldersgate experience. Some like Skevington Wood identify it as Wesley’s moment of justifying faith. Others like John Lawson have called it Wesley’s “evangelical conversion,” whereas Wesley’s 1725 sense of call into ordained ministry really marked the time that Wesley became a serious Christian. John Fletcher referred to Wesley’s Aldersgate experience as his “Pentecostal conversion” by which Fletcher meant that it was Wesley’s full sanctifying experience. Richard Heitzenrater, the premier historian of Wesley today of Duke University, shows that Wesley really thought he was fully sanctified at Aldersgate, although Heitzenrater shows that Wesley subsequently downsized his “great expectation” (as Heitzenrater terms it). One of the reasons why Heitzenrater believes that Wesley thought he was fully sanctified at Aldersgate because Wesley had come to identify Christian perfection with the full assurance of faith, and Wesley thought he had received this full assurance at that moment, but subsequently withdraw that interpretation. There continues to be a lot of debate among Wesley scholars concerning what Aldersgate really meant for Wesley. One thing is clear, however. Wesley was never the same after this event. His focus on evangelism intensified, and his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit took shape. Can you think of a moment or moments in your spiritual life that have been decisive like this?

14. In 1766, Wesley wrote a private letter to Charles in which he denied he was really a Christian; at best he said he was a “God-fearer.” What do you make of this?

15. Whitefield was naturally prone toward start preaching in the open-air because of his theatrical interests in becoming an actor in early youth? Of course, the precipitating cause for field preaching was his desire to reach the masses of people who were ignored by the Church of England. Whitefield was also more prone toward field preaching because he was a "Low Church" Anglican, and this means that he did not favor the liturgical practices of High Anglicanism. Wesley was a "High Church" Anglican in his theology of worship. So Wesley did not share Whitefield's natural tendency toward extroversion. Nor did he share Whitefield's "Low Church" theology of worship. So why did Wesley follow Whitefield in getting involved in open-air evangelistic preaching?

16. Wesley was excluded from preaching in the Church of England because he was considered an "enthusiast?" Do you think Wesley was guilty of this charge?

17. Samuel Wesley was known as a scholarly priest, but he was also known as a strict disciplinarian among his parishioners and often rebuffed because of it. The fire in the rectory was possibly caused by some of his disgruntled parishioners. Do you think it is risky to be a faithful minister of the gospel?