

Theological Equipping Class – The First Great Awakening



Story of the Great Awakening

Context of Times:

- Pre-Revolution America
- Puritan World
- Religious Stagnation

First Wave of the Awakening: (1734)



Jonathan Edwards funeral sermons, after two unexpected deaths in the community, led to a town-wide revival.

- People began to gather in small groups in homes to pray, sing to the Lord, and study their Bibles.
- *“All talk other than spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by; all the conversation in all companies and upon all occasions, was upon these things only, unless so much as was necessary for people, carrying on their ordinary secular business. Other discourse than the things of religion would scarcely be tolerated in any company...the temptation now seemed...to neglect worldly affairs too much, and to spend too much time in the immediate exercise of religion.”* – Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative*
- The revival spread through surrounding towns.



Edwards wrote *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire in New England* to give a thorough account of everything that had been taking place.

After a few years, the revival in Northampton began to die down as people slid back into their sin. Edwards called this “Satan’s great counter-attack.”

Second Wave of the Awakening: (1740)



Traveling Preachers would preach in the open air to great crowds filled with people from multiple denominations.

George Whitefield was English Anglican evangelist who had been preaching to thousands in England and Scotland and revival seemed to follow wherever he went.

- “*My one design is to bring poor souls to Jesus Christ.*” – George Whitefield
- When Whitefield came to America thousands seemed to be converted as they were “pierced with arrows” as he preached.
- The Awakening seemed to spread everywhere he went.
 - “*It seemed as if all the world were growing religious.*” - Benjamin Franklin

Jonathan Edwards wrote to Whitefield and invited him to preach in Northampton, which Whitefield accepted.

- Whitefield preached four times in Edwards’s church over the weekend and revival came as the result, consumed Northampton and the surrounding towns.



- Edwards also played monumental role in “second wave,” both in his preacher and as theologian.
- Preached at his church and traveled to several surrounding towns to help local pastors.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God:

- He displays the true reality of a sinner before a holy God:
 - 1. *“There is nothing that keeps wicked men out of hell, at any one moment, except the mere pleasure of God.”*
 - 2. *“Consider that sinners deserve to be cast into hell... justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment for their sins...the sword of divine justice is every moment brandish over their heads, and it is nothing but the hand of all-powerful mercy, and God’s sovereign will, that holds it back.”*
 - 3. Sinners are already standing under condemnation. God is delaying it.
 - 4. Sinners deserve the wrath of hell for their rebellion. God is delaying it.
 - 5. The devil stands ready to prey upon sinners. God is holding him back.
 - 6. Our wicked hearts would consume us further if God didn’t restrain its evil.
 - *“There is nothing between you and hell except the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up.”*
- Our best efforts change nothing about this reality:
 - 1. All of your efforts to preserve your own life don’t keep you safer for one moment. God keeps you alive.
 - 2. *“All your righteousness has no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell any more than a spiders web can stop a falling rock”*
 - 3. *“If God were only to withdraw His hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God would rush forth with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power. Think of it! If your strength were ten thousand times greater than it is...it would be nothing to withstand or endure the wrath of God.”*
- There’s one way out: Jesus Christ
 - *“And now, you have an extraordinary opportunity, a day wherein Christ has thrown the door of mercy wide open, and stands calling and crying with a loud voice to poor sinners; a day wherein many are flocking to Him, and pressing into the Kingdom of God. Many are daily coming from the east, west, north, and south. Many who were very recently in the same miserable condition that you are in, are now in a happy state, with their hearts filled with love for Him who has loved them and washed them from their sins in His own blood; they are rejoicing ‘in the hope of the glory of God.’”*

Controversy:

As Awakening spread throughout New England, it also brought unrest.

- “Unconverted clergy”
- False Enthusiasm - “Satan’s counterfeit to genuine works of God.”
- “Old Lights” vs “New Lights”

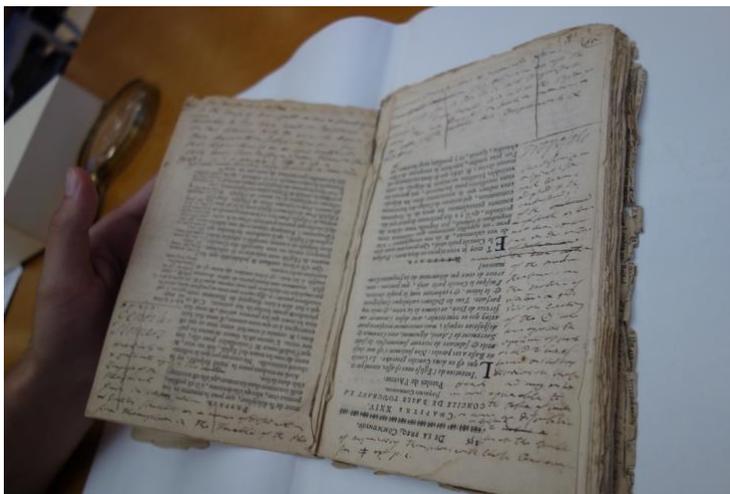
Theology of the Great Awakening

Key Factors of the Revival

1. Prayer
2. Preaching of the Word
3. Repentance

“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” – Acts 4:31

Religious Affections: True work of the Spirit vs Devil’s Counterfeit



Bad: “Enthusiasm” – The Devil’s counterfeit to the genuine work of God

- *“Fallen human nature is fertile ground for a fleshly religiosity which is impressively “spiritual” but ultimately rooted in self-love.” – Richard Lovelace*

Good: True Affections

- *“True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.” – Jonathan Edwards*
- *“Revival, in Edwards understanding, is not a special season of extraordinarily religious excitement...Rather it is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit which restores the people of God to normal spiritual life after a period of corporate declension.” – Richard Lovelace*

Edwards signs of true affections:

- 1. True Affections: God must be truly the source and the object of the affections
 - *“True saints are inexpressibly pleased and delighted with the things of God as opposed to the hypocrite who has his mind pleased and delighted with his own privilege and the happiness which he supposes he has attained.” - Edwards, Religious Affections*
- 2. True Affections: brings about Christian humility

- “True religious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation (a sense that a Christian has or his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart).” – Edwards, *Religious Affections*
- 3. True Affections: bring about Christ-like character
 - “True religious affections tend to, and are attended with, the lamblike, dovelike spirit and temper of Jesus Christ; they naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness, and mercy, as appeared in Christ.” – Edwards, *Religious Affections*
- 4. True Affections: produce the fruit of Christian obedience
 - “Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.” – Edwards, *Religious Affections*
- 5. True Affections: are in line with the Scriptures and promote sound doctrine

Affections	Enthusiasm
Long-lasting	Fleeting
Deep	Superficial
Consistent with beliefs	Sometimes overpowering
Always result in action	Often fail to produce action
Involve mind, will, feelings	Feelings (often) disconnected from the mind and will

Effects of the Great Awakening

Mass Conversions

Roots of Evangelicalism

- Emphasis on heart change, “genuine” conversion, and regeneration
- Emphasis on personal relationship with God
- Emphasis on the Scriptures for spiritual formation
- “It almost seemed that the local ministries in every village were developing tide pools of spiritual interest, reinforced and augmented by news of spiritual activity elsewhere. What Whitfield did was to dig a trench between the pools, unifying these isolated stirrings into a coherent evangelical party in the American church.” – Richard Lovelace
- Common unity around the Spirit’s transformation of the heart and godly affections.

Breaking Down the Hierarchy of Society

- A focus was on the conversion of the individual, not simply belonging to a group
- Lay people began to think for themselves
- Authority shifts from hierarchy to the masses
- Leading to the American Revolution

Rise of Emotions in the Christian Life

- Emotional responses to the Gospel
- Ecstatic experiences of conversion
- Needed to be “heart felt”