

Who Are Free Methodists?

People sometimes ask, *"What's the difference between Free Methodists and Methodists? Why are they called Free Methodists? What are Free Methodists like?"* As you read the following paragraphs, we hope you'll come to know better who Free Methodists are and what they are about.

People with a Rich Heritage

As the name implies, Free Methodists trace their heritage back to original Methodism as led by its founder, John Wesley. When Methodism came to America, churches and annual conferences spread across the land. In 1860, in western New York and Illinois, the Free Methodist Church came into being. In New York a group of 1,000 Methodist laymen held several conventions and were joined by evangelical Methodist pastors. On August 23, 1860, the new denomination came into being.

Issues that were important to them included slavery in America. While the mother church did not take a stand, those who took the name "Free" Methodist opposed slavery. Another issue in that time was the widespread practice of renting and selling church pews, thus relegating the poor to benches in the back of the sanctuary. "Free" Methodists called for free seats for all and emphasized tithes and offerings to support the church's ministries. Freedom in worship, in contrast to deadening formalism, was also important to "Free" Methodists.

As a result, the newly named Free Methodists sought to maintain the heritage of original Methodism with its warm-hearted, biblical message and lifestyle.

Students of the Bible

The inspired, authoritative Word of God is the basis of faith for Free Methodists. They endeavor to live their lives according to its teachings (James 1:22-25). Their churches offer Bible classes for all ages, preschool through adults, so that all may grow in grace and faith.

Devoted to Christ

Free Methodists are among those who have experienced spiritual birth through faith in Jesus Christ, as explained by Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3:1-17. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, described his own conversion by saying that when Christ came into his life, "My heart was strangely warmed." The life-changing miracle of spiritual birth makes a Free Methodist, or any other believer, "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). A personal relationship with Jesus Christ and an obedient walk with Him characterize Free Methodist Christians.

Seeking to Live Holy Lives

As a people, Free Methodists seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and live disciplined lives in accord with the Bible's teachings. The Bible speaks of being "sanctified," which has two meanings: *set apart* and *cleansed*. Being set apart unto

Christ and cleansed and filled by the Holy Spirit is more than a goal. It is a way of life taught in the Scriptures.

Worshipping Christians

Free Methodists seek to worship God "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). From church to church, and in multiple services of some local congregations, varieties of worship styles may be found. Yet, the heart of worship is to glorify God and receive biblical instruction.

Witnessing Christians

The goal of Free Methodists is to represent Jesus Christ in their daily living. They do this both through the way they live and in sharing the gospel's good news with others. Not known to be "hard sell" in their witness, they seek to be humble and winsome in showing forth Christ through their lives and lips.

Generous Christians

Year after year, Free Methodists are at or near the top in per capita giving of tithes and offerings. Because of their love for the Lord, they follow His example in caring and in generosity. Their track record of compassionate outreach to those in need is seen not only in local congregations, but also in institutional ministries for those with needs Christians can help to meet.

A Belonging People

Free Methodists have planted the church and its Christian witness across the North American continent and around the world in nearly 50 countries. As a Christian denomination, Free Methodists belong to the Lord and to each other, even though they speak many world languages. They also belong to various evangelical interdenominational associations.

Global Christians

Taking seriously the Great Commission of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20), Free Methodists have gone across the street, into the inner city and around the world with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Local churches, followed by the denomination's Christian colleges, universities and seminary programs, train and equip men and women for Christian ministry at home and abroad.

People with a Mission

"The mission of the Free Methodist Church is to make known to all people everywhere God's call to wholeness through forgiveness and holiness in Jesus Christ, and to invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith."

-Written by Bob Haslam