

Oxford, the Holy Club, and the New Birth

Fall, 1732 – Spring, 1735



Oxford

1. Realizing his and his mother's dream of an Oxford education, renews his studies and his morals
2. Sin rampant on campus: "Where learning keeps its loftiest seat, and hell its firmest throne." (Wesley)
3. Enrolls as a servitor just before his 18th birthday – a most unenviable position
4. Keeps his morals in spite of roommates:

I was quickly solicited to join in the excess of riot with several who lay in the same room. God...gave me grace to withstand them; and once in particular, it being cold, my limbs were so benumbed by sitting alone in my study, because I would not go out among them, that I could scarce sleep all night. But I soon found the benefit of not yielding, for, when they perceived they could not prevail, they let me alone as a singular odd fellow.

The Holy Club

1. Charles Wesley reaches out to him after a year
2. Whitefield embraces the club's rigors
3. The Holy Club described (four 'nots'):
 - a. Not famous
 - b. Not the beginning of the revival

- c. Not evangelical
- d. Not the source of what GW sought - life with God

I began to fast twice a week for thirty-six hours together, prayed many times a day and received the sacrament every Lord's Day. I fasted myself almost to death all the forty-days of Lent, during which I made it a point of duty never to go less than three times a day to public worship, besides seven times a day to my private prayers. Yet I knew no more that I was to be born a new creature in Christ Jesus than if I had never been born at all.

The New Birth

1. How religion was largely perceived by the world
2. How the Holy Club viewed religion
3. Important books being read by Whitefield, and the book which was used to bring him Christ: "The Life of God in the Soul of Man" (Scougal)
4. A sudden conversion – could it be this simple?
5. Whitefield on regeneration: 2 Cor. 5:17
 - a. Not a mere profession of being in Christ but inward change of heart
 - b. Not a physical birth, but a renewed life
 - c. Necessity of the new birth – Bible says so; spirituality and holiness of God demand it; happiness of heaven mandates it; Christ's redemption woefully incomplete without it
 - d. Revolutionary against externalism, moralism, selective godliness, and denominationalism

Conclusions:

- How wretched the ways of works religion
- How mysterious the ways of God w/His servants
- How wonderful the ways of grace to sinners