

The Character of a Methodist. (1742)

1. THE distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another, are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever therefore imagines, that a Methodist is, a man of such or such an opinion is grossly ignorant of the whole affair, he mistakes the truth totally. We believe indeed, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God; and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule, both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish church. We believe Christ to be the eternal supreme God, and herein are we distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think. So that whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist.

2. Neither are words or phrases of any sort. We do not place our religion, or any part of it, in being attached to any peculiar mode of speaking, any quaint or uncommon set of expressions. The most obvious, easy, common words, wherein our meaning can be conveyed, we prefer before others, both ordinary occasions, and when we speak of the things of God. We never therefore willingly or designedly deviate from the most usual way of speaking; unless when we express scripture truths, in scripture words, (which we presume no Christian will condemn) neither do we affect to use any particular expressions of scripture, more frequently than others, unless they are such as are frequently used by the inspired writers themselves. So that it is as gross an error, to place the marks of a Methodist in his words, as in opinions of any sort.

3. Nor do we desire to be distinguished by actions, customs, or usages, of an indifferent nature. Our religion does not in doing what God has not enjoined, or abstaining from what he hath not forbidden. It does not lie in the form of our apparel, in the posture of our body, or the covering of our heads; abstaining from marriage, nor from meats, which are all good if received with thanksgiving. Therefore neither will any man who knows whereof he affirms, fix the mark of a Methodist here; in any actions or customs purely indifferent, undetermined by the word of God.

4. Nor, lastly, is he to be distinguished by laying the whole stress of religion on any single part or it. If you say, "Yes, he is; for he thinks we are saved by faith alone:" I answer, you do not understand the terms. By salvation he means holiness of heart and life. And this he affirms to spring from true faith alone. Can even a nominal Christian deny it? Is this placing a part of religion for the whole? Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid! Yea we establish the law. We do not place the whole of religion (as too many do, God knoweth) either in doing no harm or in doing good, or in using the ordinances of God. No, nor in all of them together; wherein we know by experience a man may labour many years, and at the end have no true religion at all, no more than he had at the beginning. Much less in any one of these; or, it may be in a scrap of one of them: like her who fancies herself a virtuous woman, only because she is not a prostitute; or him who dreams he is an honest man, merely because he does not rob or steal. May the Lord God of my fathers preserve me, from such a poor, starved religion as this! were this the mark of a Methodist, I would sooner chose to be a sincere Jew, Turk, or Pagan.

5. "What then is the mark? Who is a Methodist according to your own account?" I answer: A Methodist is one, who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost given unto him: one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, "Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon Earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!"

6. He is therefore happy in God, yea, always happy, as having in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, and overflowing his soul with peace and joy. Perfect love having now cast out fear, he rejoices evermore. He rejoices in the Lord always, even in God his Saviour: And in the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom he hath now received the Atonement. Having found redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of his sins, he cannot but rejoice whenever he looks back on the horrible pit out of which he is delivered, when he sees all his transgressions blotted out as a cloud, and his iniquities as a thick cloud. He cannot but rejoice, whenever he looks on the state wherein he now is, being justified freely, and having peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. For he that believeth hath the witness of this in himself: being now the son of God by faith: because he is a son. God hath poured forth the spirit of his son unto his heart, crying out, Abba, Father! And the Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God. He rejoiceth also, whenever he looks forward, in hope of the

glory that shall be revealed: yea, his joy is full and all his bones cry out: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten me again to a living hope—of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not, reserved in heaven for me.

7. And he who hath this hope thus full of immortality, in everything giveth thanks: as knowing that this (whatsoever it is) is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning him. From him therefore he cheerfully receives all, saying, *Good is the will of the Lord*: and whether the Lord giveth or taketh away, equally blessing the name of the Lord. For he hath learned in whatsoever state he is therewith to be content. He knoweth both how to be abased and how to abound. Everywhere and in all things he is instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need, whether in ease or pain, whether in sickness or health, whether in life or death, he giveth thanks from the ground of the heart to him who order it for good: Knowing that as every good gift cometh from above, so none but good can come from the father of lights, into whose hands he has wholly committed his body and soul, as into the hands of a faithful Creator. He is therefore careful (anxiously or uneasily careful) for nothing: As having cast all his care on him that careth for him, and in all things resting on him, after making his request known to him with thanksgiving.

8. For indeed he prays without ceasing. It is given him always to pray and not to faint. Not that he is always in the house of prayer; though he neglects no opportunity of being there. Neither is he always on his knees, although he often is, or on his face, before the Lord his God. Nor yet is he always crying aloud to God, or calling upon him in words. For many times the spirit maketh intercession for him with groans that cannot be uttered: but at all times the language of his heart is this, "Thou brightness of the eternal glory, unto thee is my mouth, though without a voice, and my silence speaketh unto thee." And this is true prayer, the lifting up the heart to God. This is the essence of prayer, and this alone. But his heart is ever lifted up to God, and at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted by any person or thing. In retirement, on company, in leisure, business or conversation his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon him, and everywhere seeing him that is invisible.

9. And while he thus always exercises his love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, that he who loveth God, loves his brother also. And he accordingly loves his neighbour as himself; he loves every man as his own soul. His heart is full of love to all mankind, to every child of the father of the spirits of all flesh. That a man is not personally known to him is no bar to his love: No, nor that he is known to be such as he approves not, that he repays hatred for his good-will. For he loves his enemies, yea, and the enemies of God, the evil and the unthankful. And if it be not in his power to do good to them that hate him, yet he ceases not to pray for them, though they continue to spurn his love, and still despitefully use him and persecute him.

10. For he is pure in heart. The love of God has purified his heart from all revengeful passions, from envy, malice, and wrath; from every unkind temper or malign affection. It hath cleansed him from pride and haughtiness of spirit, whereof alone cometh contention. And he hath now put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; so that he forbears and forgives, if he had a quarrel against any; even as God in Christ hath forgiven him. And indeed all possible ground for contention, on his part, is utterly cut off. For none can take from him what he desires; seeing he loves not the world, nor any of the things of the world; being now crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him; being dead to all that is in the world, both to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. For all his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name.

11. Agreeable to this his one desire, is the one design of his life, namely, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him. His one intention at all times and in all things is, not to please himself, but him whom his soul loveth. He has a single eye. And because his eye is single, his whole body is full of light. Indeed where the loving eye of the soul is continually fixed upon God, there can be no darkness at all, but the whole is light; as when the bright shining of a candle doth enlighten the house. God then reigns alone. All that is in the soul is holiness to the Lord. There is not a motion in his heart, but is according to his will. Every thought that arises points to him, and is in obedience to the law of Christ.

12. And the tree is known by its fruits. For as he loves God, so he keeps his commandments. Not only some, or most of them, but all, from the least to the greatest. He is not content to keep the whole law, and offend in one point; but has

in all points, a conscience void of offence, towards God and towards man. Whatever God has forbidden, he avoids; whatever God hath enjoined he doth; and that whether it be little or great, hard or easy, joyous or grievous to the flesh. He runs the ways of God's commandments, now he hath set his heart at liberty. It is his glory so to do; it is his daily crown of rejoicing, To do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven; knowing it is the highest privilege of the angels of God, of those that excel in strength, to fulfil his commandments and hearken to the voice of his word.

13. All the commandments of God he accordingly keeps, and that with all his might. For his obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength. He continually presents his soul and body, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God; entirely and without reserve devoting himself, all he has, and all he is, to his glory. All the talents he has received, he constantly employs, according to his master's will; every power and faculty of his soul, every member of his body. Once he yielded them unto sin and the devil, as instruments of unrighteousness; but now, being alive from the dead, he yields them all, as instruments of righteousness unto God.

14. By consequence, whatsoever he doth, it is all to the glory of God. In all his employments of every kind, he not only aims at this, (which is implied in having a single eye) but actually attains it. His business and refreshments as well as his prayers, all serve to this great end. Whether he sit in his house, or walk by the way, whether he lie down or rise up, he is promoting in all he speaks or does, the one business of his life; whether he put on his apparel, or labour or eat and drink, or divert himself from too wasting labour, it all tends to advance the glory of God, by peace and good-will among men. His one invariable rule is this, Whatever ye do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

15. Nor do the customs of the world at all hinder his running the race that is set before him. He knows that vice does not lose its nature, though it becomes ever so fashionable; and remembers, that every man is to give an account of himself to God. He cannot therefore, even follow a multitude to do evil. He cannot fare sumptuously every day, or make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. He cannot lay up treasures upon earth, no more than he can take fire into his bosom. He cannot adorn himself (on any pretence) with gold or costly apparel, he

cannot join in, or countenance any diversion, which has the least tendency to vice, of any kind. He cannot speak evil of his neighbour no more than he can lie, either for God or man. He cannot utter an unkind word of any one; for love keeps the door of his lips. He cannot speak idle words. No corrupt communication ever comes out of his mouth, as is all that which is not good, to the use of edifying, not fit to minister grace to the hearers. But whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are justly of good report, he thinks and speaks, and acts, adorning the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in all things.

16. Lastly, as he has time, he does good unto all men; unto neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison; but much more does he labour to do good to their souls, as of the ability which God giveth: to awaken those that sleep in death; to bring those who are awakened to the atoning blood, that being justified by faith, they may have peace with God, and to provoke those who have peace with God, to abound more in love and in good works. And he is willing to spend and be spent herein, even to be offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith, so they may all come unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

17. These are the principles and practices of our sect, these are the marks of a true Methodist. By these alone do those who are in derision so called, desire to be distinguished from other men. If any man say "Why these are only the common, fundamental principles of Christianity!" Thou hast said; So I mean; this is the very truth; I know they are no other; and I would to God both thousand all men knew, that I, and all who follow my judgment, do vehemently refuse to be distinguished from other men, by any but the common principles of Christianity. The plain, old Christianity that I teach, renouncing and detesting all other marks of distinction. And whosoever *is* that I *preach* (let him be called what he will; for names change not the nature of things) he is a Christian not in name only, but in heart and in life. He has inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word. He thinks speaks, and lives according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ. His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ he so walks as Christ also walked.

18. By these marks, by these fruits of a living faith do we labour to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world, from all those whose minds or lives are not

according to the gospel of Christ. But from real Christians of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all: Not from any, who sincerely follow after what they know they have not yet attained. No: whosoever doth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother. And I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that we be in no wise divided among ourselves. Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine? I ask no farther question. If it be, give me thy hand. For opinions or terms, let us not destroy the work of God. Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough. I give thee the right-hand of fellowship. If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels and mercies, let us strive together for the faith of the gospel; walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, and endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace: remembering, there is one body and one spirit, even as we are called with one hope of our calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all!

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John Wesley, MA