

The Character of a Methodist

“Not as though I had already attained”

by Rev. John Wesley, A. M.
abridged version by Nick Campbell

- 1 The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his or her opinions of any sort. Their assenting to this or that scheme of religion, their embracing any particular sort of notions, their espousing the judgment of one person or of another, are all quite wide of the point. . . We believe, indeed, that “all Scripture is given by the 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 Roman Church. We believe Christ to be the eternal, supreme God; and herein we are 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, their opinions are no distinguishing marks of a Christian.
- 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 particular mode of speaking, and quaint or uncommon set of expressions. The most obvious, easy common words, wherein our meaning can be conveyed, we prefer before others, both on ordinary occasions, and when we speak of the things of God. . . unless when we express Scripture truth in Scripture words, which, we presume, no Christian will condemn. Neither do we affect to use any particular expressions of Scripture more than others, unless they are such as are more frequently used by the inspired writers themselves.
- 3 Nor do we desire to be distinguished by actions, customs, or usages of an indifferent nature. Our religion does not lie in doing what God has not enjoined, or abstaining from what God has not forbidden . . .
- 4 Nor lastly is a Methodist distinguished by laying the whole stress of religion on any single part of it . . . By salvation we mean holiness of heart and life . . . We do not place the whole of religion (as too many do, God knows!) either in doing no harm, or in doing good, or in using the ordinances of God . . . 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 choose 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 the heart by the Holy Spirit give to them”; one who “loves the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind, and with all their strength.” God is the joy of their heart, and the desire of their soul; which is constantly crying out, “Whom have I upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!”
- 6 The Methodist is therefore happy in God, yes, always happy, as having in them “a well of water springing up into everlasting life,” and overflowing their soul with peace and joy.” “Perfect love” having now “cast out fear,” the Methodist “rejoices evermore.” . . . “Having” found “redemption through Christ’s blood, the forgiveness of their sins,” the Methodist cannot but rejoice,

whenever they look back on the horrible pit out of which they are delivered . . . the Methodist cannot but rejoice, whenever they look on the state wherein they are now; “being justified freely, and having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” . . . the Methodist rejoices also, whenever they look forward, “in hope of the glory that shall be revealed” . . .

- 7 Those who have this hope, thus “full of immortality, in everything gives thanks”; as knowing that this (whatever it is) “is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them.” . . . whether the Lord gives or takes away, equally “blessing the name of the Lord.” . . . Whether in ease or pain, whether in sickness or health, whether in life or death, the Methodist gives thanks from the ground of their heart to God who orders it for good . . . They are therefore “careful” (anxiously or uneasily) “for nothing”; as having “cast all our care on God who cares for us,” and “in all things” resting in God, after “making our request know to God with thanksgiving.”
- 8 For indeed the Methodist “prays without ceasing.” . . . Not that he or she is always in the house of prayer; though they neglect no opportunity of being there. Neither are they always on their knees, although they often are. . . . Their heart is ever lifted up to God, at all times and in all places. . . . In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, their heart is ever with the Lord. Whether they lie down or rise up, God is in all their thoughts; they walk with God continually, having the loving eye of their mind still fixed on God, and everywhere “seeing God that is invisible.”
- 9 And while the Methodist thus always exercises their love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in their heart, “That those who love God, love their brothers and sisters also.” . . . That someone is not personally known to them, is not bar to a Methodist’s love; no, nor that some person is known to be such as we do not approve, someone who repays hatred for good will. For a Methodist “loves their enemies”; yes, and the enemies of God; “the evil and the unthankful.” And if it is not in one’s power to “do good to them that hate you,” yet they cease not to pray for them, though they continue to spurn our love, and still “despitefully use us and persecute us.”
- 10 For the Methodist is “pure in heart.” The love of God has purified their heart from all vengeful passions, from envy, malice and wrath, from every unkind temper or malign affection . . . so that they “forbears and forgives, if they had a quarrel against any; even as God in Christ has forgiven them” . . . For “all their desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of God’s name.”
- 11 Agreeable to this one desire, is the one design of their life, namely, “not to do their own will, but the will of God that sends them.” The Methodist’s own intention at all times and in all things is, not to please themselves, but God whom their soul loves. . . . God then reigns alone. All that is in the soul is holiness to the Lord. . . . Every thought that arises points to God, and is in obedience to the law of Christ.
- 12 And the tree is known by its fruits. . . . Whatever God has forbidden, they avoid; what God has commanded, they do; and it doesn’t matter if it is little or great, hard or easy, joyous or grievous to the flesh . . .
- 13 All the commandments of God the Methodist keeps, and that with all their might. For their obedience is in proportion to their love, the source from whence it flows. . . . All the talents they

have received, they constantly employ according to their Master's will; every power and faculty of their soul, every member of their body

- 14 By consequence, whatever a Methodist does, it is all to the glory of God. . . . Their one invariable rule is this: "Whatsoever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God."
- 15 Nor do the customs of this world at all hinder their "running the race that is set before the," The Methodist knows that vice does not lose its nature, though it becomes ever so fashionable; and remembers, that "every person is to give an account of themselves to God." They cannot, therefore, "follow" even "a multitude to do evil." . . . But "whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are" justly "of good report," the Methodist thinks and speaks, and acts, "adorning the gospel of the our Lord Jesus Christ in all things."
- 16 Lastly, as a Methodist has time, they "do good unto all people," unto neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies: and that in every possible kind; not only their bodies, by "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison"; but much more do they labor to do good to their souls, as of the ability that God gives The Methodist is willing to "Spend and be spent herein," even "to be offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith," so that 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. . . . they are Christians, not in mane only, but in heart and in life. They are inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word. They think, speak and love according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Their soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, they so walk as Christ also walked.
- 18 By these marks, by these fruits of a living faith, do we labor to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world but from real Christians, of whatever 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 does the will of my Father which is in heaven the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Is your heart right, as my heart is with you? I ask no further question. If it be, give me your right hand. . . . Do you love and serve God? It is enough. I give you the right hand of fellowship. . . . let us strive together for the faith of the gospel; walking worthy of the vocation whereby we are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace "