

## THE CHARACTER OF A METHODIST

(from A Plain Account of Christian Perfection)

10. The first tract I ever wrote expressly on this subject was published in the latter end of this year. That none might be prejudiced before they read it, I gave it the indifferent title of "The Character of a Methodist." In this I described a perfect Christian, placing in the front, "Not as though I had already attained." Part of it I subjoin without any alteration: –

"A Methodist is one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul, which is continually crying, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire besides thee.' My God and my all! 'Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' He is therefore happy in God; yea, always happy, as having in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life, and over-flowing his soul with peace and joy. Perfect love having now cast out fear, he rejoices evermore. 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 unto a living hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for me.'

"And he, who hath this hope, thus full of immortality, in everything giveth thanks, as knowing 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 he giveth or taketh away, equally blessing the name of the Lord. 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 orders it for good; into whose hands he hath wholly committed his body and soul, 'as into the hands of a faithful Creator.' He is therefore anxiously '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.'

"For indeed he 'prays without ceasing;' at all times the language of his heart is this, 'Unto thee is my mouth, though without a voice; and my silence speaketh unto thee.' His heart is lifted up to God at all times, and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or 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 soul fixed on him, and everywhere 'seeing Him that is invisible.'

"And loving God, he 'loves his neighbour as himself;' he loves every man as his own soul. He loves his enemies, yea, and the enemies of God. 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 spurn his love, and still 'despitefully use him, and persecute him.'

"For he is 'pure in heart.' Love has purified his heart from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper. It has cleansed him from pride, whereof 'only cometh contention;' and he hath now 'put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.' And indeed all possible ground for contention, on his part, is 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;' but 'all his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name.'

"Agreeable to this his one desire, is this one design of his life; namely, `to do, not his own will, but the will of Him that sent him.' His one intention at all times and in all places is, not to please himself, but Him whom his soul loveth. He hath a single eye; and because his `eye is single, his whole body is full of light. The whole is light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth enlighten the house.' God 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.'

"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 has enjoined, he does. `He runs the way of God's commandments,' now He hath set his heart at liberty. It is his glory and joy so to do; it is his daily crown of rejoicing, to `do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven.'

"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, all he is, to his glory. All the talents he has, he constantly employs according to his Master's will; every power and faculty of his soul, every member of his body.

"By consequence, `whatsoever he doeth, 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 his refreshments, as well as his prayers, all serve to this great end. Whether he `sit in the 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: `Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, even the Father, through him.'

"Nor do the customs of the world at all hinder his `running the race which is set before him.' He cannot therefore `lay up treasures upon earth,' no more than he can take fire into his bosom. He cannot speak evil of his neighbour, any 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 conversation' ever `comes out of his mouth;' as is all that 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, speaks, and acts, `adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.'"

These are the very words wherein I largely declared, for the first time, my sentiments of Christian perfection. And is it not easy to see, (1.) That this is the very point at which I aimed all along from the year 1725; and more determinately from the year 1730, when I began to be *homo unius libri*, "a man of one book," regarding none, comparatively, but the Bible? Is it not easy to see, (2.) That this is the very same doctrine which I believe and teach at this day; not adding one

point, either to that inward or outward holiness which I maintained eight-and-thirty years ago? And it is the same which, by the grace of God, I have continued to teach from that time till now; as will appear to every impartial person from the extracts subjoined below.