

“The Character of a Methodist”

(A final reflection for Allegan UMC Revival given to us by John Wesley)

A Methodist is one who loves the Lord God with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind and with all the strength. God is the joy of a Methodist’s heart, and the desire of his or her soul, which is continually crying, “Whom have I in heaven, but you? And there is nothing on earth I desire other than you.” My God and may all! You are “the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” A Methodist is, therefore, happy in God- indeed always rejoicing, as if there were a well of water springing up to everlasting life filling the soul to overflowing with peace and joy.

Perfect love having now cast out fear, **a Methodist is always rejoicing.** In fact, the joy is so full that a Methodist’s bones cry out, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth... from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven” for me.

A Methodist who has this hope is so full of eternal life that he or she gives thanks in everything, knowing that this (whatever it is) is the will of God in Christ Jesus. Methodists cheerfully receive everything from Christ, saying, “The Lord’s will is good”; and whatever God gives or takes away, a Methodist equally blesses the Lord’s name. In ease or pain, in sickness or health, in life or death, Methodists give thanks from the bottom of their hearts to God, who orders all things for good. They have wholly committed body and soul “into the hands of a faithful Creator.” They have “cast all care on God who cares for them.” Because of this they fear nothing and “in all things” rest on Christ, having made their “request known to God with thanksgiving.”

For indeed **Methodists “pray without ceasing.”** The constant prayer of the heart is this: “To you, O God, is my mouth, though without a voice. My silence speaks to you, my God.” At all times and in all places a Methodist’s heart is lifted up to God, never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In seclusion or with others, in leisure, business or conversation, a Methodist’s heart is always with the Lord. When going to bed at night and when rising in the morning, “God is in all thoughts.” Methodists walk with God continually. The loving eye of the soul is set on Christ and “seeing God who is invisible” everywhere.

Methodists love God and others as they love themselves. They love every person in the same way they love their own soul. They love enemies, even the enemies of God. If it is not in a Methodist’s power to “do good to those who hate them”, he or she does not stop praying for those who hate, even when they reject the love that is offered and continue to abuse and persecute.

For a Methodist is “pure in heart”. Love has purified the heart from envy, bitterness, resentment, and every unkind temper. Love has cleansed the Methodist from pride, from which comes only strife. Methodists have put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” Indeed, the Methodist has removed all possible ground for strife on his or her part. Because a Methodist does not love the world, nor any of the things of the world, no one can take what he or she desires. All desire is for God and for living as one who bears God’s name.

Accordingly, this one desire is the one purpose of a **Methodist’s life: “To do, not his or her own will, but the will of God.”** A Methodist’s one ambition, at all times and in all places, is not to please self but to please the One who his or her soul loves. A Methodist has a healthy eye. Because “the eye is healthy, the body is full of light. The whole is light, as when the bright shining of a candle enlightens the house.” God reigns alone. All that is in the soul is “holiness to the Lord.” There is not a motion in a Methodist’s heart that is not in accordance with God’s will. Every thought that arises points to God and is in obedience with the law of Christ.

“The tree is known by its fruits.” **Because Methodists love God, they keep God’s commandments- not just some of them or most of them, but all of them, from the least to the greatest.** They are not satisfied to “keep the whole law and fail in one point,” but have in all points “a clear conscience toward God and all people.” Methodists avoid whatever God has forbidden and do whatever God has commanded. A Methodist lives by God’s commandments; now God has set the heart free. It is God’s glory and joy to do this. It is the Methodist’s joy every day to “do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven.”

Because of love for God with the whole heart, **Methodists strive to keep all of God’s commandments with all their might.** Love is the source of this obedience. Therefore, loving God with the whole heart, Methodists serve God with all their strength. A Methodist constantly presents his or her soul and “body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.” Without reserve Methodists completely devote themselves, all they have and are, to the glory of God. Every power and strength of the Methodist’s soul, every part of his or her talents are constantly employed according to the Master’s will.

Consequently, **“Whatever a Methodist does, it is all to the glory of God.”** Methodist not only *aim* at this in all efforts, which is implied in having a healthy eye, but actually *attain* it. Work and leisure, as well as prayers, all serve to this great end. Whether “sitting in the house or walking by the way,” whether lying down or rising up, Methodists promote- in all words and actions- the one business of life. Whether getting dressed, or working, or eating, and drinking, or playing, everything tends to advance the glory of God through peace and goodwill among people.

One invariable rule is this: **“Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”**

The customs of this world do not hinder a Methodist’s “running the race that is set before him or her.” Methodists cannot therefore “store up treasures on earth,” and more that they can take fire into their bosoms. Methodists cannot speak evil of a neighbor anymore than they can lie either for God or human being. Methodists cannot speak an unkind word of anyone, for love keeps the door of the lips. Methodists cannot speak idle words. “No corrupt conversation” comes out of a Methodist’s mouth. Everything that is not “useful for building up” is not fit to “give grace to those who hear.” Methodists think, speak, and act according to “whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable” in such a way that all life is “adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

These words are from John Wesley’s first tract, “The Character of a Methodist”, published in 1739. This excerpt is taken from Wesley’s “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” written in 1777. The words have been revised and updated from the 18th century English in which they were first written by Steve Manskar of The United Methodist Church Board of Discipleship. It appears in the study guide, “A Perfect Love”.