

7. Beware of allegorizing or spiritualizing too much.
8. Take care of anything awkward or affected, either in your gesture or pronunciation.
9. Tell each other if you observe anything of this kind.
- Q. 13. Is there any part of the work of an assistant wherein only some of our assistants need be employed?
- A. There is. Let those and those only to whom we shall write from time to time:
 1. Visit the classes in each place and write new lists of all the members.
 2. Regulate the Bands.
 3. Deliver new tickets [tokens].
 4. Keep watch-nights and lovefeasts.
 5. Take and send us up an exact account of the behaviour of the stewards, housekeepers, schoolmasters and leaders.⁸¹ . . .

Editor's postscript. Because they have nothing of distinctive doctrinal interest in them, the Minutes for the Conference of 1748 are omitted. There were no further published minutes until 1765, when annual publication was begun — and has been continued ever since. Wesley's manuscript copies of the minutes of the conferences of 1749, 1755 and 1758 were preserved and were published by the Wesley Historical Society in its *Proceedings*, Vol. IV (Pt. 5), 1904, pp. 63-73. Of these, a passage from the Bristol Conference of 1758 records a brief review of the doctrine of Christian perfection, then being agitated more actively than before both by the Methodists and their critics. The following short passage from the sessions of Monday, August 14, and Tuesday, August 15, is reprinted here (and should be compared with the sermon and "thoughts" on that topic, below, pp. 252 ff.; 283 ff.).



Monday, August 14, 1758

We revised that part of our former conferences [minutes] which relates to Justification and all agreed that there was no need of retracting or altering anything.

⁸¹. Q. 14-16 omitted; they cover the appointments and calendar for the ensuing year.

Tuesday, August 15, 1758

- Q. Did you affirm that perfection excludes all infirmities, ignorance and mistake?
 - A. We continually affirm just the contrary.
 - Q. Do you say: "Every one who is not saved from all sin is in a state of damnation"?
 - A. So far from it that we will not say any one is in a state of damnation that fears God and really strives to please him.
 - Q. In what manner would you advise those who think they have attained to speak of their own experience?
 - A. With great wariness and with the deepest humility and self-abasement before God.
 - Q. How should young preachers especially speak of perfection in public?
 - A. Not too minutely or circumstantially, but rather in general and scriptural terms.
 - Q. Have they that are perfect need of the merits of Christ? Can they pray for forgiveness?
 - A. 1. Every one may *mistake* as long as he lives.
 2. A *mistake* in *opinion* may *occasion* a mistake in *practice* (as in [the case of] Mr. De Renty).
 3. Every *such mistake* is a transgression of the perfect law.
 4. Therefore every such mistake, were it not for the blood of atonement, would expose to eternal damnation.
 5. It follows that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may well say, for themselves as well as their brethren, "Forgive us our trespasses" [cf. Mt. 6:12, as in B.C.P. version of the Lord's Prayer].
 - Q. What then does Christian perfection imply?
 - A. The loving God with all the heart, so that every evil temper is destroyed and every thought and word and work springs from and is conducted to that end by the pure love of God and our neighbour.



THE RULES OF THE UNITED SOCIETIES ⁸²

1. In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me
- ⁸². See reference to these rules above, p. 143. The copy text here is the first edition, 1743 (cf. Green, *Bibliography*, #43); see also *Works*, VIII, 269-71.

in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily) I gave those advices from time to time which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

2. This was the rise of the United Society, first at London and then in other places. Such a society is no other than *a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.*

3. That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies called "classes," according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class, one of whom is styled the Leader. It is his business: (1) To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor; (2) To meet the minister and the stewards of the society once a week; to pay to the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding; and to show their account of what each person has contributed.

4. There is one only condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies — "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation:

First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practised. Such is the taking the name of God in vain; the profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling; drunkenness, *buying or selling spirituous liquors*, or *drinking them*, unless in cases of extreme necessity; *fighting*, quarreling, brawling; going to law; returning evil for evil, or railing for

railing; the *using many words* in buying or selling; the *buying or selling uncustomed goods*; the giving or taking things on usury; *uncharitable* or *unprofitable* conversation; doing to others as we would not they should do unto us; doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as the *putting on of gold or costly apparel*; the *taking such diversions* as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus, the *singing those songs* or *reading those books* which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God; softness and needless self-indulgence; laying up treasures upon earth.

5. It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation:

Secondly, by doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all men: to their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison; to their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that "we are not to do good unless our heart be free to it"; by doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them, preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business (and that so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only); by all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed; by running with patience the race that is set before them, "denying themselves and taking up their cross daily" [cf. Lk. 9:23]; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should "say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake" [cf. Mt. 5:11].

6. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation: thirdly, *by attending upon all the ordinances of God*. Such are the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence.

7. These are the General Rules of our societies, all [of] which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word — the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these, we know, his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto him who watches over that soul as one that must

give account. I will admonish him of the error of his ways. I will bear with him for a season. But if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

RULES OF THE BANDS ⁸³

The design of our meeting is to obey that command of God, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (Jas. 5:16).

To this end, we intend:

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer suited to the state of each person present.

6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins and temptations.

Some of the questions proposed to every one before he is admitted among us may be to this effect:

1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?
2. Have you peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you?
10. Do you desire that, in doing this, we should come as close as possi-

⁸³. See reference above, p. 143. The copy text here is the first edition (1744); see also *Works*, VIII, 272-73.

ble; that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?

11. Is it your desire and design to be, on this and all other occasions, entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart without exception, without disguise and without reserve?

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers; the five following at every meeting:

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity ¹

Editor's introduction. Wesley was fond of dilating on the Christian ideal. In *The Character of a Methodist* and *The Principles of a Methodist* (1742), in the *Appeals* (1744-45) and in his sermons he frequently undertook to delineate the character of the perfect Christian — without, however, claiming this character for himself or ascribing it to other living persons. Here, in this *Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*, he again invokes the ideal, now to turn it to apologetic purposes.

In 1749 Dr. Conyers Middleton (1683-1750), a Cambridge don who was essentially a deist, published *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which Are Supposed to Have Subsisted in the Christian Church from the Earliest Ages through Several Successive Centuries: By Which It Is Shown that We Have No Sufficient Reason to Believe, Upon the Authority of the Primitive Fathers, that Any Such Powers Were Continued to the Church After the Days of the Apostles*. His ostensible aim was to reject the doctrinal authority of "Christian antiquity" and "to fix the religion of Protestants on its proper basis, that is, on the sacred Scriptures . . ." (p. cxi). But an orthodox reader could scarcely miss the point that Middleton's sweeping rejection of the "miraculous powers" in the period immediately following the apostolic age might readily be

¹. The copy text is the first edition (Dublin, 1753), collated with the third edition (Bristol, 1761), *Works* (Pine), XVIII, 252-75, and the sixth (1779).