What it means to be a Methodist

The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not their opinions of any sort. Their assenting to any system of religion, their embracing any particular set of ideas, their accepting the teaching of one man or of another, are all quite beside the point. Whoever, therefore, imagines that a Methodist is a person of such or such an opinion is grossly ignorant of the whole affair. They completely mistake the truth.

We indeed believe that "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). We believe the written word of God is the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice. We believe Christ is the eternal, supreme God. But as for all beliefs that do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think. So that whatever they are, whether right or wrong, they are not distinguishing marks of a Methodist.

And while a Methodist always exercises their love of God by unceasing prayer and rejoicing, and giving thanks in everything, this commandment is written in their heart, “those who love God must love their brother and sister also” (1 John 4:21b). And they accordingly love their neighbor as themself. They love everyone as their own soul. Their heart is full of love to all humankind, to every child of “the Father of the spirits of all flesh” (Numbers 16:22). Being a stranger, enemy, or outcast, is no barrier to a Methodist’s love...

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 their heart by the Holy Spirit given to them” (Romans 5:5).

A Methodist is 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” (Mark 12:30). God is the joy of their heart and the desire of their soul that is constantly crying out, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:25-26)!

Contemporary English version by Steven W. Manskar, based on “The Character of a Methodist”contained in The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 8:339-347, ed. Thomas Jackson