

**METHODISM IN ITS  
ORIGIN, ECONOMY, AND  
PRESENT POSITION: A  
SERMON IN THREE PARTS**

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Methodism in Its Origin, Economy, and Present Position: A Sermon in Three Parts by James Dixon

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**JAMES DIXON**

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# METHODISM

IN TWO

ORIGIN, ECONOMY, AND PRESENT POSITION :

A SERMON IN THREE PARTS,

THE SUBSTANCE OF WHICH WAS

PREACHED BEFORE THE WESLEYAN-METHODIST CONFERENCE,

IN CITY-ROAD CHAPEL, LONDON,

ON MONDAY, THE FIRST OF AUGUST, MDCCCXLII.

PUBLISHED BY THEIR ORDER.

BY THE REV. JAMES DIXON,

EX-PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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IN preparing for the press the Sermon delivered before the Conference, it was found necessary to re-compose the whole. The arrangement and topics remain unaltered; but liberty has been taken in introducing new arguments and illustrations in support of the several positions then laid down.

It has been thought best to divide the discourse into three distinct parts, as each subject—though it is hoped the whole is in unity with itself—may be regarded as complete.

Whatever reception the Sermon may meet with amongst his Brethren and the people in general, the Author feels it a happiness to bear his humble testimony to the great work which God has wrought in the world, by the instrumentality of Methodism.

To his Brethren, in Conference, who unanimously requested the publication of the Sermon, the Author owes, and tenders, his warmest acknowledgments. But in the circumstances in which it now appears, it would be wrong to claim for it their *official confirmation*.

A general approval—without being pledged to every sentiment—is all that the Author understood as meant by the vote for its publication; and if, in its enlarged form, it may secure this, together with the promotion of a spirit of increased confidence and piety in the body, his highest hopes will be gratified.

MANCHESTER, *March 11th*, 1843.

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## METHODISM

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ORIGIN, ECONOMY, AND PRESENT POSITION :

A SERMON.

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NEVERTHELESS, WHEREUNTO WE HAVE ALREADY ATTAINED, LET US  
WALK BY THE SAME RULE, LET US MIND THE SAME THING.—  
PHILIPPIANS III. 16.

THE Apostle was naturally solicitous that the disciples at Philippi should, after his time, remain faithful to the principles of the Gospel which he had taught. Had his advice been universally regarded, innumerable heresies, which have corrupted and deformed the truth itself, would have been avoided, and superstitious observances, the bane of the purity, vigour, and life of the church, prevented. The history of Christianity is a faithful record of the consequences of a departure from the apostolic injunction. A divergence, in various degrees, from the simple and uncorrupt doctrines of our Lord and his Apostles, together with the principles and precedents of the truly primitive church, has led to most disastrous consequences. The effects are seen in the early growth of error, which, continuing to accumulate with the progress of time, at length grew to such a height as to obscure the truth, and present living Christianity, for ages, as little better than one enormous heresy.

From the same cause, communities and nations, bearing the Christian name, have sunk to the lowest point of moral degradation. With no clear enunciation of the Gospel to guide their footsteps, no faithful exhibition of the Saviour's cross, no offer of that which constitutes the essence and power of religion,—salvation by faith, and no spiritual worship leading the penitent and believing into the presence of Almighty God; they naturally glided into a state of superstition, irreligion, and practical impiety. As the truth elevates and makes free, so the substitution of falsehood and human ceremonies in its place, bewilders and enslaves. Through a long and dreary period, scarcely any thing presents itself to the eye of the observer, as associated with the Christian name, but mental and spiritual prostration, followed by the iron rule of despotism. That sacred system of reli-

gion, which, when preserved in its own pure and unsophisticated doctrines and ordinances, administers knowledge, salvation, the consolations of grace, the motives and power of holiness, and, consequently, leads to freedom;—in the hands of its designing corrupters, only ministered bewildering fables, polluting dogmas, the dread of ghostly and mysterious powers possessed only by themselves, and issued in the almost universal extinction of true religion for many ages. All this, with much more, constitutes the dreary picture of Christianity in every place; and the whole resulted from inattention to the apostolic injunction delivered to the primitive church: "*Whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.*"

The same caution is applicable to ourselves, as a Christian body. The duty, however, must rest on the evidence of several important facts. It supposes that, in our leading and essential views, principles, and proceedings, our system corresponds with the primitive model. If we have not "*walked by this rule,*" we can be under no obligation to continue to "*mind the same thing;*" rather, the obligation would lie on the other side, and it would be our duty to abandon our ancient landmarks, and inquire, with Pilate, though in a different spirit, "*What is truth?*" This point must be at once conceded. No Christian community can be under a necessity to remain in heresy, in schism, or in obstinate separation, if these cases of sin can be made out against it. But if, on the other hand, it rests on the one "*foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone;*" and if "*a dispensation of the Gospel has been committed to it;*" if the Lord has wrought a great spiritual work in the world by its instrumentality; if its order and discipline are found to conserve and advance this work in the souls of the people under its influence; if deep, wide, and great religious interests on a large scale, and an extended surface, are involved in its existing doctrines and polity; if a numerous, intelligent, and pious people are obviously "*making their calling and election sure,*" under its fostering care; and, moreover, if the blessing of God continues to crown its efforts for the conversion of men, at home and abroad;—then it is clearly the duty of such a church to be faithful to its trust, to "*walk by the same rule, and to mind the same thing.*"

That which is thus stated hypothetically, regarding any church in general, must now be examined as to ours in particular. If it can be made out, that, by the blessing of God, the true doctrines of the Gospel are held, a system of means originated, and a spirit of genuine religion created identical with New-Testament truth, times, and precedents, then the apostolic exhortation must be applicable to us. Methodism is a great fact. Irrespective of reasoning, it exists; and the means of its formation is a question worthy of examination, as

well as its spirit, doctrines, and polity. It cannot be deemed, we hope, unsuitable to the present important occasion, impartially to review our position as a Christian community. The times are peculiar; the doctrines and principles of church polity are being sifted; we are not likely to be left to repose in peace; assaults from many quarters are being made upon us already; and, judging from the attitude assumed by some parties, perhaps more formidable and virulent opposition may be expected. In this state of things, it is our duty to examine whether our "*house is built on the sand,*" or "*on a rock.*"

In considering our position as a Christian community, it will be requisite,

I. TO EXAMINE THE QUESTION IN ITS PURELY SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS BEARINGS;

II. TO INVESTIGATE THE SUBJECT IN ITS ECCLESIASTICAL OR ECONOMICAL ASPECTS;

III. TO JUDGE OF THE HARMONY OF ITS PRINCIPLES AND MEANS, WITH THE OBVIOUS DESIGNS OF THE GOSPEL, IN EVANGELIZING THE WORLD.

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#### PART I.

WE ARE TO EXAMINE THE QUESTION OF OUR POSITION IN A PURELY SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS POINT OF VIEW.

THE character of the movement which is now, and, indeed, has long been, going on, must be sought primarily in the purely religious spirit of Methodism. Forms and professions, in our case, were preceded by a living piety, which gave them all their peculiar cast.

Genuine Christianity is obviously intended to produce practical and saving results; and such results must originate in divine power. In the absence of such fruit, we have reason to suspect that the truth is not announced, and that any church-system failing in this point, however applauded, is either vicious in principle, or corruptly administered. On the other hand, when we behold the preaching of the word in "*power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;*" the services of the sanctuary administering grace, consolation, and spiritual life, to those who devoutly wait upon God; the prayers of the church answered in "*showers of blessing;*" and all issuing in the illumination, pardon, and holiness of great numbers of persons, previously "*dead in trespasses and in sins;*" then we have proof of sound doctrine, a genuine religious, and, indeed, a directly divine, result.

Both our Lord and his Apostles put the test of a true and valid commission on this practical proof: "*Beware,*" said our Saviour,