

A walk with Mr O (51)

Wanted: Methodists

Mr O, a friend of mine tells me that he was present at a meeting of ministers where you pleading with the men to become Methodists! But you are not a Methodist, are you?

It all depends on what you mean by the term 'Methodist'

To me, a Methodist is a member of the Methodist Church. And Methodist churches which are evangelical are Arminian, and those which aren't evangelical are liberal – but you are neither of those things.

A lot of people think like you. This is because they only have a sketchy knowledge of church history. There were people called 'Methodist' long before 'The Methodist Church'. True methodism is not primarily a theological position or a church affiliation. ?

What is it then?

It is an obsession with God and especially with the way that God the Holy Spirit deals with people. The focus is on what God does to us – not on what we do, but on what he does. The Lord visits people. He has dealings with them. They experience him. 'Methodism' holds that true Christianity is not only objective but also subjective. It is not just a creed. It is not just believing the right things. It is something inward and intensely personal. Being doctrinally sound is not enough; the Lord Jesus Christ is Someone to be known, to be felt, and to be enjoyed.

There's not a lot of methodism around, then, is there?

No, there isn't. But there used to be. You can find methodists in every century of Christian history, but especially in the 16th century among the first Puritans and, of course, in the revivalists of the 18th century. John and Charles Wesley were Arminians. George Whitefield, Daniel Rowland, and Howell Harris were Calvinists. But they were all Methodists, and they all talked freely about how the Lord had dealt with them personally. He had burdened them with their sins, brought them to have a direct knowledge of Christ, and led them to the point where they knew beyond doubt that they were God's children and that all their sins had been forgiven

Have there been any Methodists since?

Yes. Of course. The obvious examples are C. H. Spurgeon and Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. But we must remember that these names are but representative of thousands of others, men and women alike.

So, methodism is not just for preachers?

Certainly not! Methodism is a particular view of the Christian life. It stresses that true religion is experiential. But it is a fact that wherever you get methodism you get great preaching. This explains why there is not much great preaching around at the moment.

I'm not sure that I'm really following what you're saying, Mr O. Could you please explain the connection?

Great preaching requires a great theme. It also requires great feeling. The methodist preachers had both. They were taken up with God, with his work for us by Christ, and with his work in us by the Holy Spirit. They knew in their souls what it was to be convicted of sin, to have dazzling view of Christ, to know him personally, to feel his presence, to be certain of forgiveness, to be transformed by the miracle of the new birth, to experience inexpressible joy, to be touched by previews of glory. There was a 'follness' about their preaching. It was lively, warm, serious, enthusiastic, and joyful.

Wow! I would love to have heard those men!

Yes, and maybe you would have shouted out, or wept, as they preached. And, however dull the time. You would have sung your head off during the service. Methodist preaching touches people, changes people, and so reforms churches and revolutionises to become methodists?

Yes, Mr O, and I would like to become one too. But where do I start?

How about this? Open your Bible at Jeremiah 29;13, where the Lord says, 'You will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart' Now go to a second place with that promise and tell the Lord that you believe it applies to believers as well as unbelievers.
