

THE WORKS OF
JOHN WESLEY

VOLUME 9



THE
METHODIST
SOCIETIES

HISTORY, NATURE, AND DESIGN

EDITED BY

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promised is still behind. Therefore, as my work is great, and my time short, I waive that dispute for the present. And perhaps, when I shall have received farther light, I may be convinced that 'gospel holiness' (as Mr. Tucker believes) is 'a necessary qualification, antecedent to justification'²⁰ and that Christ did not *in any degree* fulfil the terms of justification *in our stead*, but having purchased for us sufficient powers and abilities to perform them, then left us to fulfil them ourselves.²¹ This appears to me now to be directly opposite to the gospel of Christ. But I will endeavour, ¹⁰ impartially, to consider what shall be advanced in defence of it. And may he who knoweth my simpleness teach me his way, and give me a right judgment in all things!²²

²⁰ Tucker, pp. 46-47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50; this passage Wesley omitted from *Works* (1772).

²² For the closing phrase see BCP, Collect for Whit Sunday.

GENERAL RULES AND RULES OF THE BAND SOCIETIES

AN INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

Wesley drew up his Rules of the Band Societies (see pp. 77-79 below) in December 1738, before the emergence of the distinctively Methodist societies in Bristol and London. The Methodist societies attracted and included, not only those who were willing to meet 'in band', but also a much larger and less homogeneous group of people who expressed a desire to be saved from their sins, but did not necessarily understand the full implications of belonging to the societies. From 1741 discipline was exercised by renewing or withholding the quarterly ticket of membership, but something more was needed. This became apparent after Wesley had interviewed every member of the societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle upon Tyne. In Newcastle he had felt himself bound to exclude fifty members out of eight hundred for non-performance of their Methodist obligations.

So he published these General Rules in Newcastle in early 1743. They were intended to illustrate the ways in which the three principles—'doing no harm', 'doing good', and 'attending upon all the ordinances of God'—were expected by Wesley to work out in practical living. He claimed that both the principles and their application were based on the New Testament and the practice of the apostolic church (for his understanding of which he placed great faith in William Cave's Primitive Christianity).

In earlier and later editions during his lifetime Charles Wesley's hymn 'A Prayer for those who are convinced of Sin' (beginning 'O most compassionate High Priest') was added as an appendix, and in some editions the Rules of the Band Societies were included. The General Rules (which became the usual name for this work) have been frequently revised and republished since Wesley's time.

For a summary of the thirty-nine editions of the General Rules published during Wesley's lifetime, a stemma illustrating the transmission of the text, and a list of the substantive variant readings from the edited text (based on the 1st edn., Newcastle, Gooding, 1743), see Appendix A, pp. 541ff. For fuller bibliographical details see

T H E
NATURE, DESIGN,
A N D
GENERAL RULES,
O F T H E
United Societies,
I N
*London, Bristol, King's-wood,
and Newcastle upon Tyne.*



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M D C C X L I I I .

Intro.—§3 *General Rules of the United Societies* 69

Bibliography, No. 73. For a stemma of the nineteen editions of the Rules of the Band Societies see *Appendix A*, pp. 541ff., and see also Bibliography, No. 81.

The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the
United Societies

in London, Bristol, Kingswood,
and Newcastle upon Tyne

(1743)

5

1. In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to me 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,¹ 10 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 15 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

2. This was the rise of the United Society, first at London, and then in other places.³ Such a Society is no other than 'a company 20 of men "having the form, and seeking the power of godliness",⁴ 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'.⁵

3. That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are 25 indeed working out their own salvation, each Society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes, according to their

¹ Matt. 3:7.

² Cf. *Plain Account*, I.6, p. 256 below.

³ 18th edn. (New York, Ross, 1788), 'first in Europe, and then in America'.

⁴ Cf. 2 Tim. 3:5.

⁵ See Phil. 2:12.

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 the least; in order

5 To receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor;⁶

To inquire how their souls prosper;

To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require.

10 (2). To meet the Minister and the stewards of the Society once a week, in order:

To pay in to the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding;

To show their account of what each person has contributed; and

15 To inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved.⁷

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,⁸ to be saved from their sins'.⁹ 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,

25 *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.¹⁰

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling.

30 Drunkenness, *buying or selling spirituous liquors; or drinking them* (unless in cases of extreme necessity).¹¹

⁶ Some early Irish edns., beginning with that of Dublin, Powell, 1747, here add, 'and the necessary expenses of the Society'. The 18th edn. (New York, Ross, 1788) reads, 'towards the relief of the church and poor', and adds the footnote: 'These parts refer wholly to towns and cities, where the poor are generally numerous, and church expenses considerable.' The added section sign shows that this footnote applied also to the class receipts noted in the second paragraph of *General Rules*, §3(2). (For many minor variants in the American edn. see Appendix A, pp. 541ff. below.)

⁷ The 1788 New York edn. omits para. 3 and reverses the order of paras. 2 and 4.

⁸ Matt. 3:7, etc. The 1788 New York edn. adds here, 'i.e., a desire'.

⁹ Cf. Matt. 1:21, etc.

¹⁰ See Exod. 20:7, etc.

¹¹ The 4th edn. of the *Discipline* (Kollock, 1788) included, as the first of the 'useful pieces annexed', the 19th American edn. of the *Rules* and added as an extension: '... drinking them; especially the buying or selling the bodies and souls of men, women, or

Fighting, quarrelling, brawling; brother 'going to law'¹² with brother; returning evil for evil,¹³ or railing for railing; the 'using many words'¹⁴ in buying or selling.

The *buying or selling uncustomed goods*.

The *giving or taking things on usury*.¹⁵

5 *Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, especially speaking evil of ministers or those in authority*.¹⁶

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.¹⁷

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as,

The 'putting on of gold or costly apparel', particularly *the wearing of calashes*,¹⁸ *high-heads, or enormous bonnets*;¹⁹

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;

children, with an intention to enslave them'. In the 1789 and subsequent edns. of the *Discipline* this addition became a separate rule, with the omission of 'especially the'. Slaveholding was prohibited by the 'Christmas Conference' of 1784-85, a prohibition vigorously supported by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, but its enforcement seemed impracticable under the prevailing conditions, and it became a dead letter. This rule does not appear in the separately printed 18th edn. of the *Rules* (New York, Ross, 1788), and the history of its insertion remains a mystery, though one suspects that it was done on the initiative of Thomas Coke. It appears only in the reprint of the *Rules* in the 5th edn. of the *Discipline* (New York, Ross, 1789); cf. J. J. Tigert, *A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism* (6th edn., Nashville, 1916), p. 252; cf. also David Sherman, *History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1874), pp. 113-18.

¹² Cf. 1 Cor. 6:6. The 1st edn. read 'going to law', the fuller version appearing first in the 7th Bristol edn. (1762) and the 8th London edn. (1764), and frequently thereafter where these editions were the progenitors of others. The alteration probably resulted from the review of this work on Aug. 26, 1756, at Wesley's Bristol Conference (see Vol. 10 in this edn.).

¹³ See 1 Pet. 3:9.

¹⁴ Cf. Eccus. 20:8, 'He that useth many words shall be abhorred;' see also Eccus. 13:11.

¹⁵ Cf. Lev. 25:36; Isa. 24:2, etc.

¹⁶ 'especially . . . authority' was first added in the 4th edn. (London, Strahan, 1744), certainly by Wesley himself. This was altered in the 7th edn., (Dublin, Powell, 1747) and a few which derived their text from this, to 'especially speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers', whose opening word was altered to 'particularly' in the 7th edn. (Bristol, Pine, 1762), and those stemming from it. In some editions 'of' was inserted before 'ministers'. For the relations between the many editions, the stemma showing their relationships, and the other variant readings, see Appendix A, pp. 541ff. below.

¹⁷ See Matt. 7:12, etc.

¹⁸ A 'calash' is a woman's hooped silk hood.

¹⁹ Cf. 1 Pet. 3:3. 'particularly . . . bonnets' was first added (apparently by Wesley) in the 17th edn. (London, Paramore, 1781), and remained a regular part of the text.

Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.²⁰

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

5 *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:²¹

10 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.²²

To their souls, by instructing, *reproving*, or exhorting all they²³ 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.*'²⁴

15 By doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith,²⁵ 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.

20 By all possible *diligence and frugality*, that the gospel be not blamed.

25 By running with patience the race that is set before them;²⁶ 'denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily';²⁷ submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world;²⁸ and looking that men should 'say all manner of evil of them falsely, for their Lord's sake'.²⁹

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

²⁰ This paragraph was first added by Wesley in the 7th edn. (Bristol, Pine, 1762), and continued as his authorized text. In the 1st edn. it closed, 'paying them'; in which 'for' was first inserted in the 17th edn. (London, Paramore, 1781).

²¹ See Gal. 6:10.

²² See Matt. 25:35-39.

²³ The first three editions read 'we', the correction being made in the major revision of 1744, but only surviving in the 5th (Cork, Harrison, 1748?), the 5th (Limerick, Welsh, 1748?), and Wesley's *Works*, 1772.

²⁴ Cf. Wesley's lengthy challenge to the Moravians, Aug. 5-8, 1740, espec. §16, in refusing to encourage good works, but saying only: 'If you find yourself moved, if your heart is free to it, then reprove, exhort, relieve' (26:30 in this edn.).

²⁵ See Gal. 6:10.

²⁶ See Heb. 12:1.

²⁷ Cf. Luke 9:23.

²⁸ See 1 Cor. 4:13.

²⁹ Cf. Matt. 5:11.

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;

Family and private prayer;³⁰

Searching the Scriptures;³¹ and

Fasting, or abstinence.

7. These are the General Rules of our societies; all 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 one of them,³² let it be made known unto them who watch³³ over that soul, as they that must give account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But if then he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.³⁴

John Wesley

Charles Wesley

May 1, 1743³⁵

*A Prayer for those who are convinced of Sin*³⁶

1. O most compassionate High Priest,
Full of all grace we know thou art;
Faith puts its hand upon thy breast,
And feels beneath thy panting heart.

³⁰ 'Family and' were first added to Wesley's orig. 'Private prayer' in the major 1744 revision.

³¹ See John 5:39; Acts 17:11.

³² From 1764 this became in most edns., 'any of them'.

³³ The 1st edn. and its reprint in 1743 (A, B), both have 'unto him who watches', i.e., John Wesley, 'as one that must give account', 'I' to begin the following sentences, and the signature of JW only.

³⁴ See Ezek. 3:19, etc.

³⁵ The 1st edn. is signed by JW only, and dated 'Feb. 23, 1742/3'. Several edns. from the 8th (London, n.p., 1764), are dated 'May 1, 1764'. The extant American edns. are signed 'Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury', and dated 'May 28, 1787'.

³⁶ This composition by Charles Wesley was published in his *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol, Farley, 1749), II.89-91. The poem was included in all the English edns. of the *General Rules* except the 4th, 1744 (which contained the Band Rules), and that in Wesley's *Works*.

2. Thy panting heart for sinners bleeds;
Thy mercies and compassions move;
Thy groaning Spirit intercedes,
And yearn the bowels of thy love.
- 5 3. Hear then the pleading Spirit's prayer
(The Spirit's will to thee is known)
For all who now thy sufferings share,
And still for full redemption groan.
- 10 4. Poor tempted souls, with tempests tossed,
And strangers to a moment's peace,
Disconsolate, afflicted, lost—
Lost in an howling wilderness.
- 15 5. Torn with an endless war within,
Vexed with the flesh and spirit's strife,
And struggling in the toils of sin,
And agonizing into life.
- 20 6. O let the pris'ners' mournful cries
As incense in thy sight appear,
Their humble wailings pierce the skies,
If haply they may feel thee near!
- 25 7. The captive exiles make their moans,
From sin impatient to be free;
Call home, call home thy banished ones!
Lead captive their captivity!
- 30 8. Show them the blood that bought their peace,
The anchor of their steadfast hope,
And bid their guilty terrors cease,
And bring the ransomed pris'ners up.
- 35 9. Out of the deep regard their cries,
The fallen raise, the mourners cheer;
O Sun of righteousness, arise,
And scatter all their doubt and fear!
- 40 10. Pity the day of feeble things;
O gather ev'ry halting soul,
And drop salvation from thy wings,
And make the contrite sinner whole.
11. Stand by them in the fiery hour,
Their feebleness of mind defend;
And in their weakness show thy power,
And make them patient to the end.
12. O satisfy their soul in drought;
Give them thy saving health to see,
And let thy mercy find them out;
And let thy mercy reach to me.

13. Hast thou the work of grace begun,
And brought them to the birth in vain?
O let thy children see the sun!
Let all their souls be born again!
14. Relieve the souls whose cross we bear,
For whom thy suffering members mourn,
Answer our faith's effectual prayer,
Bid ev'ry struggling child be born. 5
15. Hark how thy turtle-dove complains,
And see us weep for Zion's woe!
Pity thy suffering people's pain;
Avenge us of our inbred foe. 10
16. Whom thou hast bound, O Lord, expel,
And take his armour all away;
The man of sin, the child of hell,
The devil in our nature slay. 15
17. Him and his works at once destroy,
The *being* of all sin erase,
And turn our mourning into joy,
And clothe us with the robes of praise. 20
18. Then when our sufferings all are past,
O let us pure and perfect be,
And gain our calling's prize at last,
For ever sanctified in thee.

Rules of the Band Societies

Drawn up Dec. 25, 1738

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.'¹ 5

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, 10 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. 15
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*² 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. 20

Some of the questions proposed to every one before *he* is admitted amongst 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
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that 25 you are a child of God?⁴
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?⁵
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?⁶

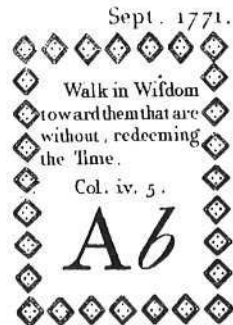
¹ Jas. 5:16.
² The italics are used here and similarly elsewhere in this document to indicate that the alternative 'her' may be substituted as necessary.
³ Rom. 5:1.
⁴ See Rom. 8:16.
⁵ See Rom. 5:5.
⁶ See Rom. 6:14.



*Wm. Newington
Oct 1754*

May 1750.
 * * * * *
 * If ye love me,
 * keep my Com-
 * mandments.
 * John xiv. 15.
 * H

Josiah Dornford



Henry Crisp

June 24 1765
 * * * * *
 * Be merciful unto
 * me, O God, be
 * merciful unto me.
 * Psa. lvii. 1.
 * U

James Case

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
 5 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
 10 possible, 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
 15 reserve?⁷

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers; the five⁸ following at every meeting:⁹

1. What known sins¹⁰ have you committed since our last meeting?
 20 2. What temptations have you met with?
 3. How was you delivered?
 4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin¹¹ or not?
 5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?¹²

⁷ The remainder of p. 9 is blank (having space for about eight lines), as is the whole of the following page, and the top one-third of p. 11—clearly in order to allow further questions or rules to be added by hand. The remainder follows without any break. This pattern was followed exactly in the 1748 Newcastle edn. of the *Rules*, except that the following five questions were also omitted.

⁸ All the early edns. have five rules, but the later ones omit the fifth, and here read 'four'—all except one, which reads 'five' but actually contains four.

⁹ In 1744 the preceding six words are set off in a separate line.

¹⁰ Orig., 'sin'.

¹¹ Orig., 'a sin'.

¹² This question is dropped from the later edns., beginning about 1779 or 1780.

Directions given to the Band Societies

Dec. 25, 1744

You are supposed to have the 'faith that overcometh the world'.¹³ To you therefore it is not grievous,

- I. Carefully to abstain from doing evil; in particular, 5
 1. Neither to *buy nor sell* anything at all on the Lord's Day.
 2. To taste no spirituous liquor, *no dram* of any kind, unless prescribed by a physician.
 3. To be *at a word* both in buying and selling.
 4. To *pawn nothing*, no, not to save life. 10
 5. Not to *mention the fault* of any *behind his back*, and to stop those short that do.
 6. To wear no *needless ornaments*, such as rings, ear-rings, necklaces, lace, ruffles.
 7. To use no *needless self-indulgence*, such as taking snuff or 15 tobacco, unless prescribed by a physician.
- II. Zealously to maintain good works; in particular,
 1. To *give alms* of such things as you possess, and that to the uttermost of your power.
 2. To *reprove* all that sin in your sight, and that in love, and 20 meekness of wisdom.¹⁴
 3. To be patterns of *diligence* and *frugality*, of *self-denial*, and taking up the cross daily.¹⁵
- III. Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God; in particular, 25
 1. To be at church, and at the Lord's table, every week, and at every public meeting of the bands.
 2. To attend the ministry of the Word every morning, unless distance, business, or sickness prevent.
 3. To use private prayer every day, and family prayer if you are 30 the head of a family.
 4. To read the Scriptures, and meditate thereon, at every vacant hour. And, —
 5. To observe as days of fasting or abstinence all *Fridays* in 35 the year.

¹³ Cf. 1 John 5:4.

¹⁵ See Luke 9:23.

¹⁴ Jas. 3:13.