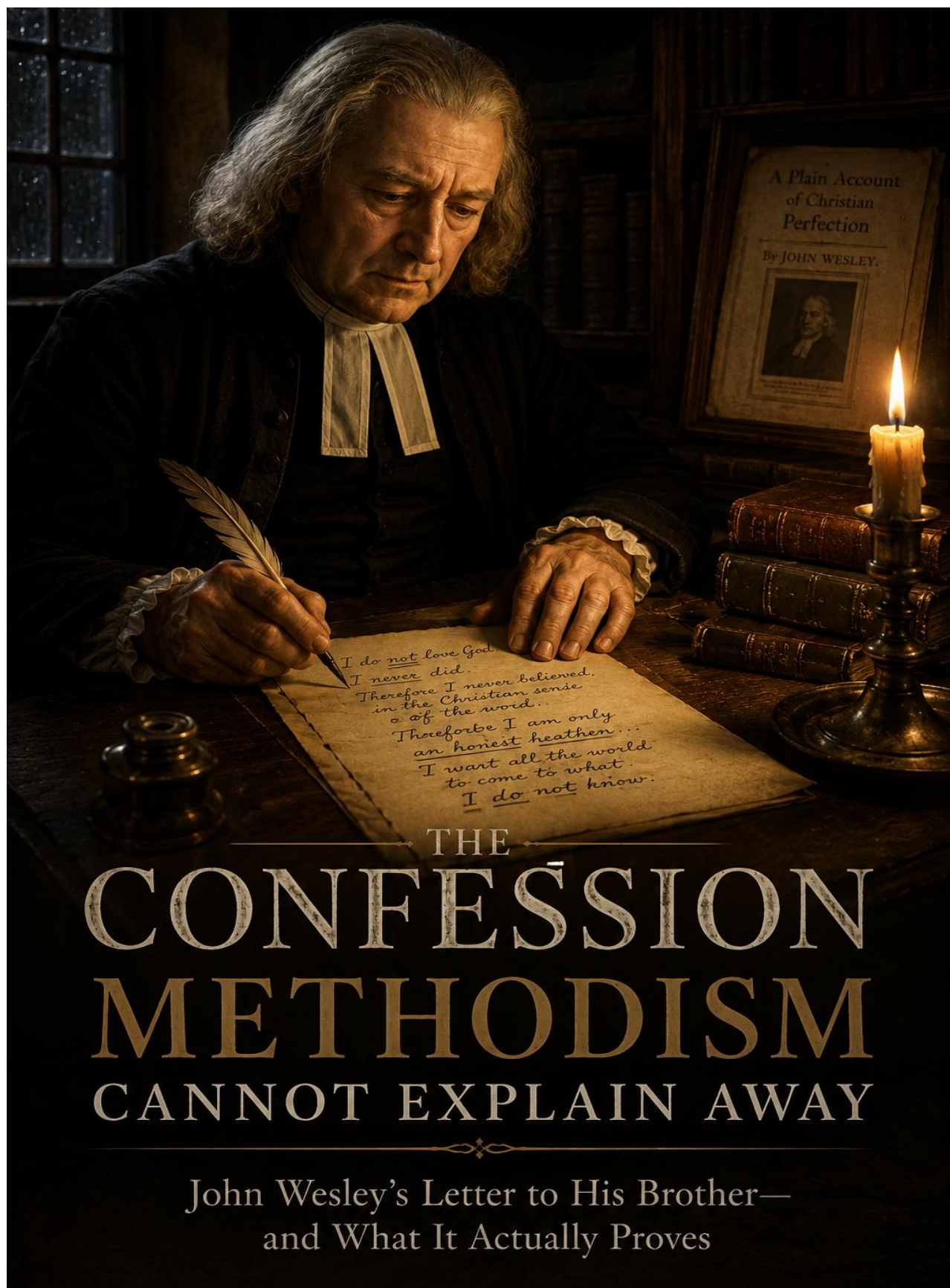




THE
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John Wesley's Letter to His Brother—
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On June 27, 1766, John Wesley — sixty-three years old, nearly three decades into the Methodist revival, the man history would call the “Prince of the Arminians” — wrote to his brother Charles:

“I do not love God. I never did. Therefore, I never believed, in the Christian sense of the word. Therefore, I am only an honest heathen... I want all the world to come to what I do not know.”

The authenticity of this letter is *not* in dispute. It is preserved in the standard collections of Wesley's correspondence and reproduced by the Wesley Center Online. What is disputed — fiercely, and predictably — is what it means.

Wesleyan scholars offer three lines of defense: that Wesley was describing a temporary crisis of assurance, that he was holding himself to an impossibly high standard of felt love for God, or that his words must be read against the backdrop of his lifelong ministry rather than taken as a flat statement of fact.

Each of these explanations shares a common feature: none of them comes from the text. They are imported *into* the letter to soften what the letter says — by followers of Wesley's teaching, 250 years after Wesley himself wrote them. As if they — so far removed from the life of the man himself are in any position to “interpret” his own confession. As if he the so-called “Prince of the Arminians” did not comprehend the plain meaning of his own words! And once that is seen clearly, the explanations collapse. Not because they are unkind to Wesley, but because they are not arguments. They are possibilities, hypotheticals offered for what appears to be a very obvious reason: They are followers of a man's “ministry” which has denominations named after him or built on his teaching, millions or hundreds of millions of subscribers to it and him. So, there is no surprise as to *why* such redactions of his own words — which again, are *not* in dispute by any credible scholarship which claims Wesley himself did not pen them — would be attempted. They are alternatives offered without evidence, and a hypothetical alternative is not a *demonstrated* one.

Strip away the cushioning and read the words as Wesley wrote them. He does not say he struggles to feel God's love. He does not say his assurance is weak. He does not say his obedience is imperfect. He says:

- I do *not* love God.
- I *never* did.

- Therefore I *never* believed, in the *Christian* sense.
- Therefore I am only an honest heathen.
- I call the world to what I myself do not know.
- I have no direct witness of the invisible things

This is not a lament. It is a syllogism. “Therefore” is a summary word. It is a conclusion word. It summarizes and concludes a prior thought. Wesley understood language, grammar, meaning and tense. He was a much-beloved preacher, orator and writer – not an untrained, unschooled ignoramus who did not understand basic grade-school grammar. He did not say these things once – and then quickly qualify or clarify them. Rather, he stated and – re-stated them repeatedly for emphasis. Wesley reasons *from premise to conclusion*, and *the conclusion is devastating*: a man who spent his life proclaiming Christ confesses, in his own handwriting, that he has never known Christ at all, has never loved Him or believed in Him nor had any internal witness of or from Him. Yet he is the modern father / founder of Wesleyan – Arminianism! All modern Arminian / Synergists / Wesleyan / Pentecostals / “Free will salvation” advocates honour and advance Wesley’s theology. *Think about this!*

A. If He Is Wrong About This, Why Trust Him About Anything Else?

This is Wesley’s *own* verdict on his own soul — not a critic’s inference, not a hostile reconstruction by an enemy, but the sworn testimony of the one man with direct access to the evidence - himself. If Wesley could be so catastrophically mistaken about the most basic fact of his own spiritual condition — whether he loved God at all — on what credible ground should anyone trust his judgment about prevenient grace, free will, perfectibility, or the nature of saving faith? A theologian’s authority rests on the *reliability* of his discernment and ability to formulate theological truth and inference *accurately*. Here, by his own admission, that discernment failed him completely, for decades, on the one question a man is best positioned to answer about himself.

B. He Names Himself Correctly — He Just Doesn’t See the Implication

Wesley does not merely say he lacks assurance. He calls himself “an honest *heathen*” who has never loved God or believed “in the Christian sense of the word” — as though there were some other, lesser sense available to a “man of God.” But Scripture allows no such category. One is either “natural” – without the Spirit or “spiritual” – possessing the Holy Spirit. Every true believer is therefore a “spiritual” man or woman- even if or when they may act more like a natural man. The natural man, Paul writes, does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Wesley did not claim he struggled with natural tendencies, weaknesses – as every true child of God does in some form (James 2:10; 3:2). Had that been his confession, this article would not be written. Wesley has, without realizing it, given the biblical description of the unregenerate mind and then attached his own name to it. He correctly diagnosed his condition. He simply refused, or failed to draw the conclusion that diagnosis demands; by his own admission, he was not then and never was “born again,” regenerate by the Holy Spirit.

C. No Child of God Talks Like This

Every true believer can say, with full honesty: I have loved God imperfectly. I have failed to attain His standard. I wish I had loved Him more. I have stumbled often along the journey. That confession is the universal experience of *every* regenerate soul, and Scripture is full of men who made it.

✚ **No true believer can say: I have *never* loved God. I *never* believed. I am an honest *heathen*.**

The difference is not one of degree. It is categorical. “I love Him imperfectly” and “I have never loved Him at all” do not sit on the same theological, logical, actual spectrum. One confesses failure within faith, the other confesses the total absence of it. Wesley said the second thing, in plain words, repeated for emphasis, decades after Aldersgate – the moment that Wesleyan, Methodists generally acknowledge was the moment of his “conversion” as he heard someone reading a portion from Luther’s work on Romans and felt “warm” inside. That statement is not consistent with a regenerate person’s self-estimation in any form. It is consistent with exactly what he called it: heathenism – the absence of the regenerating power and presence of the Holy Spirit’s person, grace, light and truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Wesley himself diagnosed and admitted it honestly and honestly confessed.

The Weight of Who Is Speaking

James warns that those who teach will be judged with *greater* strictness (James 3:1). Wesley was not a private man working out his own assurance in silence. He spent his public ministry opposing the doctrines of grace — attacking Calvin’s and other’s like Witfield’s theology, contesting the sovereignty of God in salvation, building a movement on the premise that man cooperates with grace rather than receiving it as an unconditional gift. He did this in print, from the pulpit, for the better part of his life.

✚ **And by his own confession, he did it all without *ever* having believed.**

This is not merely Wesley's tragedy. It is the indictment of the system he built from his own pen! If the founder of a movement could preach for decades while confessing he had never been converted, the question is no longer just about the man — it is about the foundation. A house built out of plumb does not correct itself as it rises. It only reveals, more clearly with each additional story, how far off the foundation truly was.

Soli Deo Gloria