

*Epistle to Whitefield (1771)*¹

[Baker list, #328]

Editorial Introduction:

In 1755, at the same time that Charles Wesley was experiencing growing tension with his brother John, he was rebuilding his relationship with George Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon. While they continued to disagree over the issue of predestination, Charles found Whitefield and Huntingdon to be allies in the concern to preserve connection with the Church of England.

Charles's way of working through the dynamics of relationships like these was to articulate his concerns and hopes in verse. In addition to writing the *Epistle to John Wesley* in 1755, which he published immediately, Charles also wrote epistles to George Whitefield, Howell Harris, George Stonehouse, and Nikolaus von Zinzendorf. It is unclear how many of these epistles he sent to their designated recipients, but he did not publish them at that time. They can be found in MS Epistles, elsewhere on this website (the epistle to Whitefield on pp. 45–51).

In 1771, following Whitefield's death and shortly after publishing his *Elegy on Whitefield* (1771), Charles Wesley decided to publish as well his 1755 manuscript epistle to Whitefield. This decision was likely prodded by criticism that the Wesley brothers received from some Calvinist Methodists for publishing pieces praising Whitefield after spending so many years challenging his teaching about predestination. Charles may have hoped that the *Epistle to Whitefield* would demonstrate that he and Whitefield had been actively supporting each other's ministry over the last fifteen years.

Edition:

Charles Wesley. *An Epistle to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield*. London: J. & W. Oliver, 1771.

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**AN
EPISTLE
TO THE REVEREND
MR. GEORGE WHITEFIELD.**

Come on, my Whitefield! (since the strife is past,
And friends at first are friends again at last)
Our hands, and hearts, and counsels let us join
In mutual league, t' advance the work divine,
Our one contention now, our single aim,
To pluck poor souls as brands out of the flame;
To spread the victory of that bloody cross,
And gasp our latest breath in the Redeemer's cause.

Too long, alas! We gave to Satan place,
When party-zeal put on an angel's face,
Too long we listened to the coz'ning fiend,
Whose trumpet sounded, "For the faith contend!"

With hasty blindfold rage, in error's night,
How did we with our fellow-soldiers fight!
We could not then our Father's children know,
But each mistook his brother for his foe.
"Foes to the truth, can you in conscience spare?
Tear them, (the tempter cried) in pieces, tear!"
So thick the darkness, so confused the noise,
We took the stranger's for the shepherd's voice; 20
Rash nature waved the controversial sword,
On fire to fight the battles of the Lord,
Fraternal love from every breast was driv'n,
And bleeding charity returned to heaven.

The Saviour saw our strife with pitying eye,
And cast a look that made the shadows fly:
Soon as the day-spring in his presence shone,
We found the two fierce armies were but one;
Common our hope, and family, and name,
Our arms, our Captain, and our crown the same, 30
Enlisted all beneath Immanuel's sign,
And purchased every soul with precious blood divine.

Then let us cordially again embrace,
Nor e'er infringe the league of gospel-grace;
Let us in Jesus' name to battle go,
And turn our arms against the common foe;

Fight side by side beneath our Captain's eye,
Chase the Philistines, on their shoulders fly,
And, more than conquerors, in the harness die.

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For whether I am born to "*blush above*,"
On earth suspicious of electing love,
Or you, o'erwhelmed with honourable shame,
To shout the universal Saviour's name,
It matters not; if, all our conflicts past,
Before the great white throne we meet at last:
Our only care, while sojourning below,
Our real faith by real love to show:
To blast the aliens' hope, and let them see
How friends of jarring sentiments agree:
Not in a party's narrow banks confined,
Not by a sameness of opinions joined,
But cemented with the Redeemer's blood,
And bound together in the heart of God.

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Can we forget from whence our union came,
When first we simply met in Jesus' name?
The name mysterious of the God UNKNOWN,
Whose secret love allured, and drew us on
Through a long, lonely, legal wilderness,
To find the promised land of gospel peace.

True yoke-fellows, we then agreed to draw 60
Th' intolerable burden of the law,
And jointly lab'ring on with zealous strife,
Strengthened each other's hands to work *for* life:
To turn against the world our steady face,
And, valiant for the truth, enjoy disgrace.

Then, when we served our God through fear alone,
Our views, our studies, and our hearts were one;
No smallest difference damped the social flame:
In Moses' school we thought, and spake the same:
And must we, now in Christ, with shame confess, 70
Our love was greater when our light was less?
When darkly through a glass with servile awe,
We first the spiritual commandment saw,
Could we not then, our mutual love to show,
Through fire and water for each other go?
We could:—we did:—in a strange land I stood,
And beckoned thee to cross th' Atlantic flood:
With true affection winged, thy ready mind,
Left country, fame, and ease, and friends behind,
And, eager all heav'n's counsels to explore, 80
Flew through the wat'ry world and grasped the shore.

Nor did I linger, at my friend's desire,
To tempt the furnace, and abide the fire:
When suddenly sent forth, from the highways
I called poor outcasts to the feast of grace;
Urged to pursue the work by thee begun,
Through good and ill report I still rushed on,
Nor felt the fire of popular applause,
Nor feared the tort'ring flame in such a glorious cause.

Ah! Wherefore did we ever seem to part, 90
Or clash in sentiment, while one in heart?
What dire device did the old serpent find,
To put asunder those whom God had joined?
From folly and self-love opinion rose,
To sever friends who never yet were foes;
To baffle and divert our noblest aim,
Confound our pride, and cover us with shame;
To make us blush beneath her short-lived pow'r,
And glad the world with one triumphant hour.

But lo! The snare is broke, the captive's freed, } 100
By faith on all the hostile powers we tread, }
And crush through Jesus' strength the serpent's head. }
Jesus hath cast the curst accuser down,
Hath rooted up the tares by Satan sown:

Kindled anew the never-dying flame,
And re-baptized our souls into his name.
Soon as the virtue of his name we feel,
The storm of strife subsides, the sea is still,
All nature bows to his benign command,
And two are one in his almighty hand.
One in his hand, O may we still remain,
Fast bound with love's indissoluble chain;
(That adamant which time and death defies,
That golden chain which draws us to the skies!)
His love the tie that binds us to his throne,
His love the bond that perfects us in one;
His love, (let all the ground of friendship see)
His only love constrains our hearts t' agree,
And gives the rivet of eternity!

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