Wesleyan Holiness Sermons

Most of this selection of authentic sermons from John Wesley were preached before a general audience, and for that reason refer to holiness along with other gospel topics, however other sermons were preached before a prepared audience. These get more down to the actual message that became immortalized to become what we now know as “Wesleyan Holiness”.

SERMON 1
(text from the 1872 edition)

SALVATION BY FAITH

Preached by John Wesley at St. Mary’s, Oxford, before the University, on June 18, 1738.

“By grace are ye saved through faith.” Eph. 2:8.

1. All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of his mere grace, bounty, or favour; his free, undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved; man having no claim to the least of his mercies. It was free grace that “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul,” and stamped on that soul the image of God, and “put all things under his feet.” The same free grace continues to us, at this day, life, and breath, and all things. For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God’s hand. “All our works, Thou, O God, hast wrought in us.” These, therefore, are so many more instances of free mercy: and whatever righteousness may be found in man, this is also the gift of God.

2. Wherewithal then shall a sinful man atone for any the least of his sins? With his own works? No. Were they ever so many or holy, they are not his own, but God’s. But indeed they are all unholy and sinful themselves, so that every one of them needs a fresh atonement. Only corrupt fruit grows on a corrupt tree. And his heart is altogether corrupt and abominable; being “come short of the glory of God,” the glorious righteousness at first impressed on his soul, after the image of his great Creator. Therefore, having nothing, neither righteousness nor works, to plead, his mouth is utterly stopped before God.

3. If then sinful men find favour with God, it is “grace upon grace!” If God vouchsafe still to pour fresh blessings upon us, yea, the greatest of all blessings, salvation; what can we say to these things, but, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!” And thus it is. Herein “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died” to save us “By grace” then “are ye saved through faith.” Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.

Now, that we fall not short of the grace of God, it concerns us carefully to inquire, -

I. What faith it is through which we are saved.

II. What is the salvation which is through faith.

III. How we may answer some objections.

I. What faith it is through which we are saved.

1. And, first, it is not barely the faith of a heathen.

Now, God requireth of a heathen to believe, “that God is; that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;” and that he is to be sought by glorifying him as God, by giving him thanks for all things, and by a careful practice of moral virtue, of justice, mercy, and truth, toward their fellow creatures. A Greek or Roman, therefore, yea, a Scythian or Indian, was without excuse if he did not believe thus much: the being and attributes of God, a future state of reward and punishment, and the obligatory nature of moral virtue. For this is barely the faith of a heathen.

2. Nor, secondly, is it the faith of a devil, though this goes much farther than that of a heathen. For the devil believes, not only that there is a wise and powerful God, gracious to reward, and just to punish; but also, that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, the Saviour of the world. So we find him declaring, in express terms, “I know
Thee who Thou art; the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34). Nor can we doubt but that unhappy spirit believes all those words which came out of the mouth of the Holy One, yea, and whatsoever else was written by those holy men of old, of two of whom he was compelled to give that glorious testimony, “These men are the servants of the most high God, who show unto you the way of salvation.” Thus much, then, the great enemy of God and man believes, and trembles in believing, --that God was made manifest in the flesh; that he will “tread all enemies under his feet;” and that “all Scripture was given by inspiration of God.” Thus far goeth the faith of a devil.

3. Thirdly. The faith through which we are saved, in that sense of the word which will hereafter be explained, is not barely that which the Apostles themselves had while Christ was yet upon earth; though they so believed on him as to “leave all and follow him;” although they had then power to work miracles, to “heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease;” yea, they had then “power and authority over all devils;” and, which is beyond all this, were sent by their Master to “preach the kingdom of God.”

4. What faith is it then through which we are saved? It may be answered, first, in general, it is a faith in Christ: Christ, and God through Christ, are the proper objects of it. Herein, therefore, it is sufficiently, absolutely distinguished from the faith either of ancient or modern heathens. And from the faith of a devil it is fully distinguished by this: it is not barely a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart. For thus saith the Scripture, “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness;” and, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

5. And herein does it differ from that faith which the Apostles themselves had while our Lord was on earth, that it acknowledges the necessity and merit of his death, and the power of his resurrection.

II. What salvation it is, which is through this faith, is the Second thing to be considered.

1. And, First, whatsoever else it imply, it is a present salvation. It is something attainable, yea, actually attained, on earth, by those who are partakers of this faith. For thus saith the Apostle to the believers at Ephesus, and in them to the believers of all ages, not, Ye shall be (though that also is true), but, “Ye are saved through faith.”

2. Ye are saved (to comprise all in one word) from sin. This is the salvation which is through faith. This is that great salvation foretold by the angel, before God brought his First-begotten into the world: “Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.” And neither here, nor in other parts of holy writ, is there any limitation or restriction. All his people, or, as it is elsewhere expressed, “all that believe in him,” he will save from all their sins; from original and actual, past and present sin, “of the flesh and of the spirit.” Through faith that is in him, they are saved both from the guilt and from the power of it.

3. First. From the guilt of all past sin: for, whereas all the world is guilty before God, insomuch that he “be extreme to mark what is done amiss, there is none that could abide it;” and whereas, “by the law is” only “the knowledge of sin,” but no deliverance from it, so that, “by” fulfilling “the deeds of the law, no flesh can be justified in his sight”: now, “the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, is manifested unto all that believe.” Now, “they are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.” “Him God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for (or by) the remission of the sins that are past.” He hath “blotted out the handwriting that was against us, taking it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” “There is therefore no condemnation now to them which” believe “in Christ Jesus.”

4. And being saved from guilt, they are saved from fear. Not indeed from a filial fear of offending; but from all servile fear; from that fear which hath torment; from fear of punishment; from fear of the wrath of God, whom they now no longer regard as a severe Master, but as an indulgent Father.
“They have not received again the spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father: the Spirit itself also bearing witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God.” They are also saved from the fear, though not from the possibility, of falling away from the grace of God, and coming short of the great and precious promises. Thus have they “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. They rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, through the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them.” And hereby they are persuaded (though perhaps not at all times, nor with the same fullness of persuasion), that “neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

5. Again: through this faith they are saved from the power of sin, as well as from the guilt of it. So the Apostle declares, “Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not” (1 John 3:5ff.). Again, “Little children, let no man deceive you. He that committeth sin is of the devil. Whosoever believeth is born of God. And whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is of God.” Once more: “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18).

6. The that is, by faith, born of God sinneth not (1.) by any habitual sin; for all habitual sin is sin reigning: But sin cannot reign in any that believeth. Nor (2.) by any wilful sin: for his will, while he abideth in the faith, is utterly set against all sin, and abhorreth it as deadly poison. Nor (3.) By any sinful desire; for he continually desireth the holy and perfect will of God. And any tendency to an unholy desire, he by the grace of God, stifleth in the birth. Nor (4.) Doth he sin by infirmities, whether in act, word, or thought; for his infirmities have no concurrence of his will; and without this they are not properly sins. Thus, “he that is born of God doth not commit sin”: and though he cannot say he hath not sinned, yet now “he sinneth not.”

7. This then is the salvation which is through faith, even in the present world: a salvation from sin, and the consequences of sin, both often expressed in the word justification; which, taken in the largest sense, implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on him, and a deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ formed in his heart. So that he who is thus justified, or saved by faith, is indeed born again. He is born again of the Spirit unto a new life, which “is hid with Christ in God.” And as a new-born babe he gladly receives the CFQNQP, “sincere milk of the word, and grows thereby;” going on in the might of the Lord his God, from faith to faith, from grace to grace, until at length, he come unto “a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

III.

The first usual objection to this is,

1. That to preach salvation or justification, by faith only, is to preach against holiness and good works. To which a short answer might be given: “It would be so, if we spake, as some do, of a faith which was separate from these; but we speak of a faith which is not so, but productive of all good works, and all holiness.”

2. But it may be of use to consider it more at large; especially since it is no new objection, but as old as St. Paul’s time. For even then it was asked, “Do we not make void the law through faith?” We answer, First, all who preach not faith do manifestly make void the law; either directly and grossly, by limitations and comments that eat out all the spirit of the text; or indirectly, by not pointing out the only means whereby it is possible to perform it. Whereas, Secondly, “we establish the law,” both by showing its full extent and spiritual meaning; and by calling all to that living way, whereby “the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in them.” These, while they trust in the blood of Christ alone, use all the ordinances which he hath appointed, do all the “good works which he had before prepared that they should walk therein,” and enjoy and manifest all holy and heavenly tempers, even the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.

3. But does not preaching this faith lead men into pride? We answer, Accidentally it may: therefore ought every believer to be earnestly cautioned, in the words of the great Apostle “Because of unbelief,” the first branches “were broken off: and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God! On them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” And while he continues therein, he will remember those words of St. Paul, foreseeing and answering this very
objection (Rom. 3:27), “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” If a man were justified by his works, he would have whereof to glory. But there is no glorying for him “that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5). To the same effect are the words both preceding and following the text (Eph. 2:4ff.): “God, who is rich in mercy, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved), that he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves.” Of yourselves cometh neither your faith nor your salvation: “it is the gift of God;” the free, undeserved gift; the faith through which ye are saved, as well as the salvation which he of his own good pleasure, his mere favour, annexes thereto.

That ye believe, is one instance of his grace; that believing ye are saved, another. “Not of works, lest any man should boast.” For all our works, all our righteousness, which were before our believing, merited nothing of God but condemnation; so far were they from deserving faith, which therefore, whenever given, is not of works. Neither is salvation of the works we do when we believe, for it is then God that worketh in us: and, therefore, that he giveth us a reward for what he himself worketh, only commendeth the riches of his mercy, but leaveth us nothing whereof to glory.

4. "However, may not the speaking thus of the mercy of God, as saving or justifying freely by faith only, encourage men in sin?” Indeed, it may and will: Many will “continue in sin that grace may abound;” But their blood is upon their own head. The goodness of God ought to lead them to repentance; and so it will those who are sincere of heart. When they know there is yet forgiveness with him, they will cry aloud that he would blot out their sins also, through faith which is in Jesus.

And if they earnestly cry, and faint not, it they seek him in all the means he hath appointed; if they refuse to be comforted till he come; “he will come, and will not tarry.” And he can do much work in a short time. Many are the examples, in the Acts of the Apostles, of God’s working this faith in men’s hearts, even like lightning falling from heaven. So in the same hour that Paul and Silas began to preach, the jailer repented, believed, and was baptized; as were three thousand, by St. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, who all repented and believed at his first preaching And, blessed be God, there are now many living proofs that he is still “mighty to save."

5. Yet to the same truth, placed in another view, a quite contrary objection is made: “If a man cannot be saved by all that he can do, this will drive men to despair.” True, to despair of being saved by their own works, their own merits, or righteousness. And so it ought; for none can trust in the merits of Christ, till he has utterly renounced his own. He that “goeth about to stablish his own righteousness” cannot receive the righteousness of God. The righteousness which is of faith cannot be given him while he trusteth in that which is of the law.

6. But this, it is said, is an uncomfortable doctrine. The devil spoke like himself, that is, without either truth or shame, when he dared to suggest to men that it is such. It is the only comfortable one, it is “very full of comfort,” to all self-destroyed, self-condemned sinners. That “whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed that the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” here is comfort, high as heaven, stronger than death! What! Mercy for all? For Zacchaeus, a public robber? For Mary Magdalene, a common harlot? Methinks I hear one say “Then I, even I, may hope for mercy!” And so thou mayest, thou afflicted one, whom none hath comforted! God will not cast out thy prayer. Nay, perhaps he may say the next hour, “Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee;” so forgiven, that they shall reign over thee no more; yea, and that “the Holy Spirit shall bear witness with thy spirit that thou art a child of God.” O glad tidings! Tidings of great joy, which are sent unto all people! “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters: Come ye, and buy, without money and without price.” Whatesoever your sins be, “though red like crimson,” though more than the hairs of your head, “return ye unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

7. When no more objections occur, then we are simply told that salvation by faith only ought not to be preached as the first doctrine, or, at least, not to be preached at all. But what saith the Holy Ghost? “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ.” So then, that “whosoever believeth on him shall be saved,” is, and must be, the foundation of all our preaching; that is, must be preached first. “Well, but not to all.” To whom, then are we not to preach it? Whom shall we except? The poor? Nay; they have a peculiar right to have the gospel preached unto them.
The unlearned? No. God hath revealed these things unto unlearned and ignorant men from the beginning. The young? By no means. “Suffer these,” in any wise, “to come unto Christ, and forbid them not.” The sinners? Least of all. “He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Why then, if any, we are to except the rich, the learned, the reputable, the moral men. And, it is true, they too often except themselves from hearing; yet we must speak the words of our Lord. For thus the tenor of our commission runs, “Go and preach the gospel to every creature.” If any man wrest it, or any part of it, to his destruction, he must bear his own burden. But still, “as the Lord liveth, whatsoever the Lord saith unto us, that we will speak.”

8. At this time, more especially, will we speak, that “by grace are ye saved through faith”: because, never was the maintaining this doctrine more seasonable than it is at this day. Nothing but this can effectually prevent the increase of the Romish delusion among us. It is endless to attack, one by one, all the errors of that Church. But salvation by faith strikes at the root, and all fall at once where this is established. It was this doctrine, which our Church justly calls the strong rock and foundation of the Christian religion, that first drove Popery out of these kingdoms; and it is this alone can keep it out. Nothing but this can give a check to that immorality which hath “overspread the land as a flood.” Can you empty the great deep, drop by drop? Then you may reform us by dissuasives from particular vices. But let the “righteousness which is of God by faith be brought in, and so shall its proud waves be stayed. Nothing but this can stop the mouths of those who “glory in their shame, and openly deny the Lord that bought them.” They can talk as sublimely of the law, as he that hath it written by God in his heart To hear them speak on this head might incline one to think they were not far from the kingdom of God: but take them out of the law into the gospel; begin with the righteousness of faith; with Christ, “the end of the law to every one that believeth;” and those who but now appeared almost, if not altogether, Christians, stand confessed the sons of perdition; as far from life and salvation (God be merciful unto them!) as the depth of hell from the height of heaven.

9. For this reason the adversary so rages whenever “salvation by faith” is declared to the world: for this reason did he stir up earth and hell, to destroy those who first preached it. And for the same reason, knowing that faith alone could overturn the foundations of his kingdom, did he call forth all his forces, and employ all his arts of lies and calumny, to affright Martin Luther from reviving it. Nor can we wonder thereat; for, as that man of God observes, “How would it enrage a proud, strong man armed, to be stopped and set at nought by a little child coming against him with a reed in his hand!” especially when he knew that little child would surely overthrow him, and tread him under foot.

Even so, Lord Jesus! Thus hath Thy strength been ever “made perfect in weakness!” Go forth then, thou little child that believest in him, and his “right hand shall teach thee terrible things!” Though thou art helpless and weak as an infant of days, the strong man shall not be able to stand before thee.

Thou shalt prevail over him, and subdue him, and overthrow him and trample him under thy feet.

Thou shalt march on, under the great Captain of thy salvation, “conquering and to conquer,” until all thine enemies are destroyed, and “death is swallowed up in victory.”

Now, thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, for ever and ever. Amen

SERMON 2
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN

Preached by Charles Wesley at St. Mary’s, Oxford, before the University, on July 25, 1741.

AND many there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was in the world, there have been many in
every age and nation who were almost persuaded to be Christians. But seeing it avails nothing before God to go
only thus far, it highly imports us to consider,

First. What is implied in being almost,

Secondly. What in being altogether, a Christian.

I.

(I.) 1. Now, in the being almost a Christian is implied, First, heathen honesty. No one, I suppose, will make any
question of this; especially, since by heathen honesty here, I mean, not that which is recommended in the
writings of their philosophers only, but such as the common heathens expected one of another, and many of them
actually practised. By the rules of this they were taught that they ought not to be unjust; not to take away their
neighbour’s goods, either by robbery or theft; not to oppress the poor, neither to use extortion toward any; not to
cheat or overreach either the poor or rich, in whatsoever commerce they had with them; to defraud no man of his
right; and, if it were possible, to owe no man anything.

2. Again: the common heathens allowed, that some regard was to be paid to truth, as well as to justice. And,
accordingly, they not only held him in abomination who was forsworn, who called God to witness to a lie; but
him also who was known to be a slanderer of his neighbour, who falsely accused any man. And indeed, little
better did they esteem wilful liars of any sort, accounting them the disgrace of human kind, and the pests of
society.

3. Yet again: there was a sort of love and assistance which they expected one from another. They expected
whatever assistance any one could give another, without prejudice to himself. And this they extended not only to
those little offices of humanity which are performed without any expense or labour, but likewise to the feeding
the hungry, if they had food to spare; the clothing the naked with their own superfluous raiment; and, in general.
The giving, to any that needed, such things as they needed not themselves. Thus far, in the lowest account of it,
heathen honesty went; the first thing implied in the being almost a Christian.

(II.) 4. A second thing implied in the being almost a Christian, is, the having a form of godliness; of that godliness
which is prescribed in the gospel of Christ; the having the outside of a real Christian. Accordingly, the almost
Christian does nothing which the gospel forbids. He taketh not the name of God in vain; he blesseth, and curseth
not; he sweareth not at all, but his communication is, yea, yea; nay, nay. He does not the day of the Lord, nor
profanes not the name of the Lord, nor suffers it to be profaned, even by the stranger that is within his gates. He not only avoids all actual adultery,
fornication, and uncleanness, but every word or look that either directly or indirectly tends thereto; nay, and all
idle words, abstaining both from detraction, backbiting, talebearing, evil speaking, and from “all foolish talking
and jesting”--_GWVTCRGNKC_, a kind of virtue in the heathen moralist’s account; --briefly, from all
conversation that is not “good to the use of edifying,” and that, consequently, “grieves the Holy Spirit of God,
whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.”

5. He abstains from “wine wherein is excess”; from revellings and gluttony. He avoids, as much as in him lies, all
strife and contention, continually endeavouring to live peaceably with all men. And, if he suffer wrong, he
avengeth not himself, neither returns evil for evil. He is no railler, no brawler, no scoffer, either at the faults or
infirmities of his neighbour. He does not willingly wrong, hurt, or grieve any man; but in all things act and
speaks by that plain rule, “Whatsoever thou wouldest not he should do unto thee, that do not thou to another.”

6. And in doing good, he does not confine himself to cheap and easy offices of kindness, but labours and suffers for
the profit of many, that by all means he may help some. In spite of toil or pain, “whatsoever his hand findeth to
do, he doeth it with his might;” whether it be for his friends, or for his enemies; for the evil, or for the good. For
being “not slothful” in this, or in any “business,” as he “hath opportunity” he doeth “good,” all manner of good,
“to all men;” and to their souls as well as their bodies. He reproveth the wicked, instructs the ignorant, confirms
the wavering, quickens the good, and comforts the afflicted. He labours to awaken those that sleep; to lead those
whom God hath already awakened to the “Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,” that they may wash
therein and be clean; and to stir up those who are saved through faith, to adorn the gospel of Christ in all things.

7. He that hath the form of godliness uses also the means of grace; yea, all of them, and at all opportunities. He
constantly frequents the house of God; and that, not as the manner of some is, who come into the presence of the Most High, either loaded with gold and costly apparel, or in all the gaudy vanity of dress, and either by their unseasonable civilities to each other, or the impertinent gaiety of their behaviour, disclaim all pretensions to the form as well as to the power of godliness.

Would to God there were none even among ourselves who fall under the same condemnation! Who come into this house, it may be, gazying about, or with all the signs of the most listless, careless indifference, though sometimes they may seem to use a prayer to God for his blessing on what they are entering upon; who, during that awful service, are either asleep, or reclined in the most convenient posture for it; or, as though they supposed God was asleep, talking with one another, or looking round, as utterly void of employment. Neither let these be accused of the form of godliness.

No; he who has even this, behaves with seriousness and attention, in every part of that solemn service. More especially, when he approaches the table of the Lord, it is not with a light or careless behaviour, but with an air, gesture, and deportment which speaks nothing else but “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

8. To this, if we add the constant use of family prayer, by those who are masters of families, and the setting times apart for private addresses to God, with a daily seriousness of behaviour; he who uniformly practises this outward religion, has the form of godliness. There needs but one thing more in order to his being almost a Christian, and that is, sincerity.

(III.)

9. By sincerity I mean, a real, inward principle of religion, from whence these outward actions flow. And, indeed if we have not this, we have not heathen honesty; no, not so much of it as will answer the demand of a heathen Epicurean poet. Even this poor wretch, in his sober intervals, is able to testify,

_Oderunt peccare boni, virtutis amore;_  
_Oderunt peccare mali, formidine poenae._

[Good men avoid sin from the love of virtue;  
Wicked men avoid sin from a fear of punishment.]

So that, if a man only abstains from doing evil in order to avoid punishment, _Non pasces in cruce corvos_, [Thou shalt not be hanged.], saith the Pagan; there, “thou hast thy reward.” But even he will not allow such a harmless man as this to be so much as a good heathen. If, then, any man, from the same motive, viz., to avoid punishment, to avoid the loss of his friends, or his gain, or his reputation, should not only abstain from doing evil, but also do ever so much good; yea, and use all the means of grace; yet we could not with any propriety say, this man is even almost a Christian. If he has no better principle in his heart, he is only a hypocrite altogether.

10. Sincerity, therefore, is necessarily implied in the being almost a Christian; a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will. It is necessarily implied, that a man have a sincere view of pleasing God in all things; in all his conversation; in all his actions; in all he does or leaves undone.

This design, if any man be almost a Christian, runs through the whole tenor of his life. This is the moving principle, both in his doing good, his abstaining from evil, and his using the ordinances of God.

11. But here it will probably be inquired, “Is it possible that any man living should go so far as this, and, nevertheless, be only almost a Christian? What more than this, can be implied in the being a Christian altogether? I answer, First, that it is possible to go thus far, and yet be but almost a Christian, I learn, not only from the oracles of God, but also from the sure testimony of experience.

12. Brethren, great is “my boldness towards you in this behalf.” And “forgive me this wrong,” if I declare my own folly upon the house-top, for yours and the gospel’s sake. --Suffer me, then, to speak freely of myself, even as of another man. I am content to be abased, so ye may be exalted, and to be yet more vile for the glory of my Lord.

13. I did go thus far for many years, as many of this place can testify; using diligence to eschew all evil, and to have a conscience void of offence; redeeming the time; buying up every opportunity of doing all good to all men; constantly and carefully using all the public and all the private means of grace; endeavouring after a steady seriousness of behaviour, at all times, and in all places; and, God is my record, before whom I stand, doing all
this in sincerity; having a real design to serve God; a hearty desire to do his will in all things; to please him who
had called me to “fight the good fight,” and to “lay hold of eternal life.” Yet my own conscience beareth me
witness in the Holy Ghost, that all this time I was but almost a Christian.

II. If it be inquired, “What more than this is implied in the being altogether a Christian?” I answer,

(I.)

1. First. The love of God. For thus saith his word, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all
thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Such a love is this, as engrosses the whole heart, as
rakes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties.
He that thus loves the Lord his God, his spirit continually “rejoiceth in God his Saviour.” his delight is in the
Lord, his Lord and his All, to whom “in everything he giveth thanks. All his desire is unto God, and to the
remembrance of his name.” his heart is ever crying out, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none
upon earth that I desire beside Thee.” Indeed, what can he desire beside God? Not the world, or the things of the
world: for he is “crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him.” he is crucified to “the desire of the flesh,
the desire of the eye, and the pride of life.” Yea, he is dead to pride of every kind: for “love is not puffed up” but
“he that dwelling in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him,” is less than nothing in his own eyes.

(II.)

2. The Second thing implied in the being altogether a Christian is, the love of our neighbour.

For thus said our Lord in the following words, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” If any man ask, “Who
is my neighbour?” we reply, Every man in the world; every child of his who is the Father of the spirits of all
flesh. Nor may we in any wise except our enemies or the enemies of God and their own souls. But every
Christian loveth these also as himself, yea, “as Christ loved us.” he that would more fully understand what
manner of love this is, may consider St. Paul’s description of it.

It is “long-suffering and kind.” It “envieth not.” It is not rash or hasty in judging. It “is not puffed up;” but
maketh him that loves, the least, the servant of all. Love “doth not behave itself unseemly,” but becometh “all
things to all men.” She “seeketh not her own;” but only the good of others, that they may be saved. “Love is not
provoked.” It casteth out wrath, which he who hath is wanting in love.

“It thinketh no evil. It rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. It covereth all things, believeth all
things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

(III.)

3. There is yet one thing more that may be separately considered, though it cannot actually be separate from the
preceding, which is implied in the being altogether a Christian; and that is the ground of all, even faith. Very
excellent things are spoken of this throughout the oracles of God.

“Every one, saith the beloved disciple, “that believeth is born of God.” “To as many as received him, gave he
power to become the sons of God. Even to them that believe on his name.” And “this is the victory that
overcometh the world, even our faith.” Yea, our Lord himself declares, “He that believeth in the Son hath
everlasting life; and cometh not into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.”

4. But here let no man deceive his own soul. “It is diligently to be noted, the faith which bringeth not forth
repentance, and love, and all good works, is not that right living faith, but a dead and devilish one. For, even the
devils believe that Christ was born of a virgin: that he wrought all kinds of miracles, declaring himself very God:
that, for our sakes, he suffered a most painful death, to redeem us from death everlasting; that he rose again the
third day: that he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father and at the end of the world
shall come again to judge both the quick and dead. These articles of our faith the devils believe, and so they
believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament. And yet for all this faith, they be but devils. They
remain still in their damnable estate lacking the very true Christian faith.” [Homily on the Salvation of Man.]

5. “The right and true Christian faith is (to go on in the words of our own Church), “not only to believe that Holy
Scripture and the Articles of our Faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from
everlasting damnation by Christ. It is a sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that, by the merits of
Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God; whereof doth follow a loving heart, to obey
his commandments."

6. Now, whosoever has this faith, which “purifies the heart” (by the power of God, who dwelleth therein) from
“pride, anger, desire, from all unrighteousness” from “all filthiness of flesh and spirit;” which fills it with love
stronger than death, both to God and to all mankind; love that doeth the works of God, glorying to spend and to
be spent for all men, and that endureth with joy, not only the reproach of Christ, the being mocked, despised, and
hated of all men, but whatsoever the wisdom of God permits the malice of men or devils to inflict, --whosoever
has this faith thus working by love is not almost only, but altogether, a Christian.

7. But who are the living witnesses of these things? I beseech you, brethren, as in the presence of that God before
whom “hell and destruction are without a covering--how much more the hearts of the children of men?” --that
each of you would ask his own heart, “Am I of that number? Do I so far practise justice, mercy, and truth, as
even the rules of heathen honesty require? If so, have I the very outside of a Christian? The form of godliness?
Do I abstain from evil. --from whatsoever is forbidden in the written Word of God? Do I, whatever good my
hand findeth to do, do it with my might? Do I seriously use all the ordinances of God at all opportunities? And is
all this done with a sincere design and desire to please God in all things?”

8. Are not many of you conscious, that you never came thus far; that you have not been even almost a Christian;
that you have not come up to the standard of heathen honesty; at least, not to the form of Christian godliness? --
much less hath God seen sincerity in you, a real design of pleasing him in all things. You never so much as
intended to devote all your words and works. Your business, studies, diversions, to his glory. You never even
designed or desired, that whatsoever you did should be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus, and as such should
be “a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.

9. But, supposing you had, do good designs and good desires make a Christian? By no means, unless they are
brought to good effect. “Hell is paved,” saith one, “with good intentions.” The great question of all, then, still
remains. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart? Can you cry out, “My God, and my All”? Do you desire
nothing but him? Are you happy in God? Is he your glory, your delight, your crown of rejoicing? And is this
commandment written in your heart, “That he who loveth God love his brother also”? Do you then love your
neighbour as yourself? Do you love every man, even your enemies, even the enemies of God, as your own soul?
As Christ loved you? Yea, dost thou believe that Christ loved thee, and gave himself for thee? Hast thou faith in
his blood? Believeth thou the Lamb of God hath taken away thy sins, and cast them as a stone into the depth of
the sea? That he hath blotted out the handwriting that was against thee, taking it out of the way, nailing it to his
cross? Hast thou indeed redemption through his blood, even the remission of thy sins? And doth his Spirit bear
witness with thy spirit, that thou art a child of God?

10. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who now standeth in the midst of us, knoweth, that if any man die
without this faith and this love, good it were for him that he had never been born.

Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and call upon thy God: call in the day when he may be found. Let him not rest,
till he make his “goodness to pass before thee;” till he proclaim unto thee the name of the Lord, “The Lord, the
Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for
thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin.” Let no man persuade thee, by vain words, to rest short
of this prize of thy high calling. But cry unto him day and night, who, “while we were without strength, died for
the ungodly,” until thou knowest in whom thou hast believed, and canst say, “My Lord, and my God!”
Remember, “always to pray, and not to faint,” till thou also canst lift up thy hand unto heaven, and declare to him
that liveth for ever and ever, “Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.”

11. May we all thus experience what it is to be, not almost only; but altogether Christians; being justified freely
by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus; knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ;
rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost
given unto us!
AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST

Preached on Sunday April 4, 1742, before the University of Oxford, by the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A. Student of Christ-Church.

“Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” Eph. 5:14.

In discoursing on these words, I shall, with the help of God, -

First. Describe the sleepers, to whom they are spoken:
Secondly. Enforce the exhortation, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead:” And,
Thirdly. Explain the promise made to such as do awake and arise: “Christ shall give thee light.”

I.

1. And first, as to the sleepers here spoken to. By sleep is signified the natural state of man; that deep sleep of the soul, into which the sin of Adam hath cast all who spring from his loins: That supineness, indolence, and stupidity, that insensibility of his real condition, wherein every man comes into the world, and continues till the voice of God awakes him.

2. Now, “they that sleep, sleep in the night.” The state of nature is a state of utter darkness; a state wherein “darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people.” The poor unawakened sinner, how much knowledge soever he may have as to other things, has no knowledge of himself: in this respect “he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” he knows not that he is a fallen spirit, whose only business in the present world, is to recover from his fall, to regain that image of God wherein he was created. He sees no necessity for the one thing needful, even that inward universal change, that “birth from above,” figured out by baptism, which is the beginning of that total renovation. That sanctification of spirit, soul, and body, “without which no man shall see the Lord.”

3. Full of all diseases as he is, he fancies himself in perfect health. Fast bound in misery and iron, he dreams that he is at liberty. He says, “Peace! Peace!” while the devil, as “a strong, man armed,” is in full possession of his soul. He sleeps on still and takes his rest, though hell is moved from beneath to meet him; though the pit from whence there is no return hath opened its mouth to swallow him up. A fire is kindled around him, yet he knoweth it not; yea, it burns him, yet he lays it not to heart.

4. By one who sleeps, we are, therefore, to understand (and would to God we might all understand it!) a sinner satisfied in his sins; contented to remain in his fallen state, to live and die without the image of God; one who is ignorant both of his disease, and of the only remedy for it; one who never was warned, or never regarded the warning voice of God, “to flee from the wrath to come;” one that never yet saw he was in danger of hell-fire, or cried out in the earnestness of his soul, “What must I do to be saved?”

5. If this sleeper be not outwardly vicious, his sleep is usually the deepest of all: whether he be of the Laodicean spirit, “neither cold nor hot,” but a quiet, rational, inoffensive, good-natured professor of the religion of his fathers; or whether he be zealous and orthodox, and, “after the most straitest sect of our religion,” live “a Pharisee;” that is, according to the scriptural account, one that justifies himself; one that labours to establish his own righteousness, as the ground of his acceptance with God.

6. This is he, who, “having a form of godliness, denies the power thereof;” yea, and probably reviles it, wheresoever it is found, as mere extravagance and delusion. Meanwhile, the wretched self-deceiver thanks God, that he is “not as other men are; adulterers, unjust, extortioners”: no, he doeth no wrong to any man. He “fasts twice in a week,” uses all the means of grace, is constant at church and sacrament, yea, and “gives tithes of all that he has;” does all the good that he can “touching the righteousness of the law,” he is “blameless”: he wants nothing of godliness, but the power; nothing of religion, but the spirit; nothing of Christianity, but the truth and
But know ye not, that, however highly esteemed among men such a Christian as this may be, he is an abomination in the sight of God, and an heir of every woe which the Son of God, yesterday, to-day, and for ever, denounces against “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites”? He hath “made clean the outside of the cup and the platter,” but within is full of all filthiness. “An evil disease cleaveth still unto him, so that his inward parts are very wickedness.” Our Lord fitly compares him to a “painted sepulchre,” which “appears beautiful without;” but, nevertheless, is “full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.” The bones indeed are no longer dry; the sinews and flesh are come upon them, and the skin covers them above: but there is no breath in them, no Spirit of the living God. And, “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” “Ye are Christ’s, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you”: but, if not, God knoweth that ye abide in death, even until now.

This is another character of the sleeper here spoken to. He abides in death, though he knows it not. He is dead unto God, “dead in trespasses and sins.” For, “to be carnally minded is death “ Even as it is written, “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men;” not only temporal death, but likewise spiritual and eternal. “In that day that thou eatest,” said God to Adam, “thou shalt surely die;” not bodily (unless as he then became mortal), but spiritually: thou shalt lose the life of thy soul; thou shalt die to God: shalt be separated from him, thy essential life and happiness.

Thus first was dissolved the vital union of our soul with God; insomuch that “in the midst of” natural “life, we are” now in spiritual “death.” And herein we remain till the Second Adam becomes a quickening Spirit to us; till he raises the dead, the dead in sin, in pleasure, riches or honours. But, before any dead soul can live, he “hears” (hearkens to) “the voice of the Son of God”: he is made sensible of his lost estate, and receives the sentence of death in himself. He knows himself to be “dead while he liveth;” dead to God, and all the things of God; having no more power to perform the actions of a living Christian, than a dead body to perform the functions of a living man.

And most certain it is, that one dead in sin has not “senses exercised to discern spiritual good and evil.” “Having eyes, he sees not; he hath ears, and hears not.” he doth not “taste and see that the Lord is gracious.” he “hath not seen God at any time,” nor “heard his voice,” nor “handled the word of life.” In vain is the name of Jesus “like ointment poured forth, and all his garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia.” The soul that sleepest in death hath no perception of any objects of this kind. His heart is “past feeling,” and understandeth none of these things.

And hence, having no spiritual senses, no inlets of spiritual knowledge, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; nay, he is so far from receiving them, that whatsoever is spiritually discerned is mere foolishness unto him. He is not content with being utterly ignorant of spiritual things, but he denies the very existence of them. And spiritual sensation itself is to him the foolishness of folly. “How,” saith he, “can these things be? How can any man know that he is alive to God?” Even as you know that your body is now alive. Faith is the life of the soul; and if ye have this life abiding in you, ye want no marks to evidence it to yourself, but GNGIEJQLyRPGWOCVQL, that divine consciousness, that witness of God, which is more and greater than ten thousand human witnesses.

If he doth not now bear witness with thy spirit, that thou art a child of God, O that he might convince thee, thou poor unawakened sinner, by his demonstration and power, that thou art a child of the devil! O that, as I prophesy, there might now be “a noise and a shaking;” and may “the bones come together, bone to his bone!” Then “come from the four winds, O Breath! And breathe on these slain, that they may live!” And do not ye harden your hearts, and resist the Holy Ghost, who even now is come to convince you of sin, “because you believe not on the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Wherefore, “awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.” God calleth thee now by my mouth; and bids thee know thyself, thou fallen spirit, thy true state and only concern below.

“What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise! Call upon thy God, if so be thy God will think upon thee, that thou perish not.” A mighty tempest is stirred up round about thee, and thou art sinking into the depths of perdition, the gulf of God’s judgements. If thou wouldest escape them, cast thyself into them. “Judge thyself, and thou shalt not be
judged of the Lord."

2. Awake, awake! Stand up this moment, lest thou “drink at the Lord’s hand the cup of his fury.” Stir up thyself to lay hold on the Lord, the Lord thy Righteousness, mighty to save! “Shake thyself from the dust.” At least, let the earthquake of God’s threatenings shake thee. Awake, and cry out with the trembling jailer, “What must I do to be saved?” And never rest till thou believest on the Lord Jesus, with a faith which is his gift, by the operation of his Spirit.

3. If I speak to any one of you, more than to another, it is to thee, who thinkest thyself unconcerned in this exhortation. “I have a message from God unto thee.” In his name, I warn thee “to flee from the wrath to come.” Thou unholy soul, see thy picture in condemned Peter, lying in the dark dungeon, between the soldiers, bound with two chains, the keepers before the door keeping the prison. The night is far spent, the morning is at hand, when thou art to be brought forth to execution.

And in these dreadful circumstances, thou art fast asleep; thou art fast asleep in the devil’s arms, on the brink of the pit, in the jaws of everlasting destruction!

4. O may the Angel of the Lord come upon thee, and the light shine into thy prison! And mayest thou feel the stroke of an Almighty Hand, raising thee, with, “Arise up quickly, gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals, cast thy garment about thee, and follow Me.”

5. Awake, thou everlasting spirit, out of thy dream of worldly happiness! Did not God create thee for himself? Then thou canst not rest till thou restest in him. Return, thou wanderer! Fly back to thy ark, This is not thy home. Think not of building tabernacles here. Thou art but a stranger, a sojourner upon earth; a creature of a day, but just launching out into an unchangeable state. Make haste.

Eternity is at hand. Eternity depends on this moment. An eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery!

6. In what state is thy soul? Was God, while I am yet speaking, to require it of thee, art thou ready to meet death and judgment? Canst thou stand in his sight, who is of “purer eyes than to behold iniquity”? Art thou “meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light”? Hast thou “fought a good fight, and kept the faith”? Hast thou secured the one thing needful? Hast thou recovered the image of God, even righteousness and true holiness? Hast thou put off the old man, and put on the new? Art thou clothed upon with Christ?

7. Hast thou oil in thy lamp? Grace in thy heart? Dost thou “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength”? Is that mind in thee, which was also in Christ Jesus? Art thou a Christian indeed, that is, a new creature? Are old things passed away, and all things become new?

8. Art thou a “partaker of the divine nature”? Knowest thou not, that “Christ is in thee, except thou be reprobate”? Knowest thou, that God “dwelleth in thee, and thou in God, by his Spirit, which he hath given thee”? Knowest thou not that “thy body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, which thou hast of God”? Hast thou the witness in thyself? The earnest of thine inheritance? Hast thou “received the Holy Ghost”? Or dost thou start at the question, not knowing “whether there be any Holy Ghost”?

9. If it offends thee, be thou assured, that thou neither art a Christian, nor desirest to be one. Nay, thy very prayer is turned into sin; and thou hast solemnly mocked God this very day, by praying for the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, when thou didst not believe there was any such thing to be received.

10. Yet, on the authority of God’s Word, and our own Church, I must repeat the question, “Hast thou received the Holy Ghost?” If thou hast not, thou art not yet a Christian. For a Christian is a man that is “anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.” Thou art not yet made a partaker of pure religion and undefiled. Dost thou know what religion is? --that it is a participation of the divine nature; the life of God in the soul of man; Christ formed in the heart; “Christ in thee, the hope of glory;” happiness and holiness; heaven begun upon earth; “a kingdom of God within thee; not meat and drink,” no outward thing; “but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;” an everlasting kingdom brought into thy soul; a “peace of God that passeth all understanding;” a “joy unspeakable, and full of glory”?

11. Knowest thou, that “in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith that worketh by love;” but a new creation? Seest thou the necessity of that inward change, that spiritual birth, that life
from the dead, that holiness? And art thou throughly convinced, that without it no man shall see the Lord? Art thou labouring after it? --”giving all diligence to make thy calling and election sure,” “working out thy salvation with fear and trembling,” “agonizing to enter in at the strait gate”? Art thou in earnest about thy soul? And canst thou tell the Searcher of hearts, “Thou, O God, art the thing that I long for! Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I would love Thee!”

12. Thou hopest to be saved; but what reason hast thou to give of the hope that is in thee? Is it because thou hast done no harm? Or, because thou hast done much good? Or, because thou art not like other men; but wise, or learned, or honest, and morally good; esteemed of men, and of a fair reputation? Alas! All this will never bring thee to God. It is in his account lighter than vanity. Dost thou know Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent? Hath he taught thee, that “by grace we are saved through faith; and that not of ourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast”? Hast thou received the faithful saying as the whole foundation of thy hope, “that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners”? Hast thou learned what that meaneth, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance? I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep”? Art thou (he that heareth, let him understand!) lost, dead, damned already? Dost thou know thy deserts? Dost thou feel thy wants? Art thou “poor in spirit”? Mourning for God, and refusing to be comforted? Is the prodigal “come to himself,” and well content to be therefore thought beside himself” by those who are still feeding upon the husks which he hath left? Art thou willing to live godly in Christ Jesus? And dost thou therefore suffer persecution? Do men say all manner of evil against thee falsely, for the Son of Man’s sake?

13. O that in all these questions ye may hear the voice that wakes the dead; and feel that hammer of the Word, which breaketh the rocks in pieces! “If ye will hear his voice to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts.” Now, “awake, thou that sleepest” in spiritual death, that thou sleep not in death eternal! Feel thy lost estate, and “arise from the dead.” Leave thine old companions in sin and death. Follow thou Jesus, and let the dead bury their dead. “Save thyself from this untoward generation.” “Come out from among them, and be thou separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and the Lord shall receive thee.” “Christ shall give thee light.”

III.

1. This promise, I come, lastly, to explain. And how encouraging a consideration is this, that whosoever thou art, who obeyest his call, thou canst not seek his face in vain! If thou even now “awakest, and arisest from the dead,” he hath bound himself to “give thee light.” “The Lord shall give thee grace and glory;” the light of his grace here, and the light of his glory when thou receivest the crown that fadeth not away. “Thy light shall break forth as the morning, and thy darkness be as the noon-day.” “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shall shine in thy heart; to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” On them that fear the Lord shall “the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” And in that day it shall be said unto thee, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” For Christ shall reveal himself in thee: and he is the true Light.

2. God is light, and will give himself to every awakened sinner that waiteth for him; and thou shalt then be a temple of the living God, and Christ shall “dwell in thy heart by faith;” and, “being rooted and grounded in love, thou shalt be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge.”

3. Ye see your calling, brethren. We are called to be “an habitation of God through his Spirit;” and, through his Spirit dwelling in us, to be saints here, and partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. So exceeding great are the promises which are given unto us, actually given unto us who believe! For by faith “we receive, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God” --the sum of all the promises-- “that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God.”

4. The Spirit of Christ is that great gift of God, which at sundry times, and in divers manners, he hath promised to man, and hath fully bestowed since the time that Christ was glorified. Those promises, before made to the fathers, he hath thus fulfilled: “I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes” (Ezek. 36:27). “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring (Isa. 44:3).

5. Ye may all be living witnesses of these things; of remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. “If thou canst
believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” “Who among you is there that feareth the Lord, and” yet walketh on “in darkness, and hath no light?” I ask thee, in the name of Jesus, Believeth thou that his arm is not shortened at all? That he is still mighty to save? That he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? That he hath now power on earth to forgive sins? “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.” God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven thee. Receive this, “not as the word of man; but as it is indeed, the word of God;” and thou art justified freely through faith.

Thou shalt be sanctified also through faith which is in Jesus, and shalt set to thy seal, even thine, that “God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”

6. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you, and suffer ye the word of exhortation, even from one the least esteemed in the Church. Your conscience beareth you witness in the Holy Ghost, that these things are so, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. “This is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.” This experimental knowledge, and this alone, is true Christianity. He is a Christian who hath received the Spirit of Christ. He is not a Christian who hath not received him. Neither is it possible to have received him, and not know it.

“For, at that day” (when he cometh, saith our Lord), “ye shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.” This is that “Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17).

7. The world cannot receive him, but utterly reject the Promise of the Father, contradicting and blaspheming. But every spirit which confesseth not this is not of God. Yea, “this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come into the world; and even now it is in the world.” he is Antichrist whosoever denies the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, or that the indwelling Spirit of God is the common privilege of all believers, the blessing of the gospel, the unspeakable gift, the universal promise, the criterion of a real Christian.

8. It nothing helps them to say, “We do not deny the assistance of God’s Spirit; but only this inspiration, this receiving the Holy Ghost: and being sensible of it. It is only this feeling of the Spirit, this being moved by the Spirit, or filled with it, which we deny to have any place in sound religion.” But, in only denying this, you deny the whole Scriptures; the whole truth, and promise, and testimony of God.

9. Our own excellent Church knows nothing of this devilish distinction; but speaks plainly of “feeling the Spirit of Christ” [Article 17]; of being “moved by the Holy Ghost” [Office of consecrating Priests] and knowing and “feeling there is no other name than that of Jesus,” [Visitation of the Sick] whereby we can receive” life and salvation. She teaches us all to pray for the “inspiration of the Holy Spirit” [Collect before Holy Communion]; yea, that we may be “filled with the Holy Ghost” [Order of Confirmation]. Nay, and every Presbyter of hers professes to receive the Holy Ghost by the imposition of hands. Therefore, to deny any of these, is, in effect, to renounce the Church of England, as well as the whole Christian revelation.

10. But “the wisdom of God” was always “foolishness with men.” No marvel, then, that the great mystery of the gospel should be now also “hid from the wise and prudent,” as well as in the days of old; that it should be almost universally denied, ridiculed, and exploded, as mere frenzy; and that all who dare avow it still are branded with the names of madmen and enthusiasts! This is “that falling away” which was to come— that general apostasy of all orders and degrees of men, which we even now find to have overspread the earth. “Run to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, and see if ye can find a man,” a man that loveth the Lord his God with all his heart, and serveth him with all his strength. How does our own land mourn (that we look no farther) under the overflowings of ungodliness! What villanies of every kind are committed day by day; yea, too often with impunity, by those who sin with a high hand, and glory in their shame! Who can reckon up the oaths, curses, profaneness blasphemies; the lying, slandering, evil-speaking; the Sabbath-breaking, gluttony, drunkenness, revenge; the whoredoms, adulteries, and various uncleanness; the frauds, injustice, oppression, extortion, which overspread our land as a flood?

11. And even among those who have kept themselves pure from those grosser abominations; how much anger and pride how much sloth and idleness, how much softness and effeminacy how much luxury and self-indulgence, how much covetousness and ambition, how much thirst of praise, how much love of the world, how much fear of man, is to be found! Meanwhile, how little of true religion! For, where is he that loveth either God or his
neighbour, as he hath given us commandment? On the one hand, are those who have not so much as the form of
godliness; on the other, those who have the form only: there stands the open, there the painted, sepulchre. So that
in very deed, whosoever were earnestly to behold any public gathering together of the people (I fear those in our
churches are not to be excepted) might easily perceive, “that the one part were Sadducees, and the other
Pharisees”: the one having almost as little concern about religion, as if there were “no resurrection, neither angel
nor spirit;” and the other making it a mere lifeless form, a dull round of external performances, without either
true faith, or the love of God, or joy in the Holy Ghost!

12. Would to God I could except us of this place! “Brethren, my heart’s desire, and prayer to God, for you is, that ye
may be saved” from this overflowing of ungodliness; and that here may its proud waves be stayed! But is it so
indeed? God knoweth, yea, and our own consciences, it is not. Ye have not kept yourselves pure. Corrupt are we
also and abominable; and few are there that understand any more; few that worship God in spirit and in truth.
We, too, are “a generation that set not our hearts aright, and whose spirit cleaveth not steadfastly unto God.” he
hath appointed us indeed to be “the salt of the earth: but if the salt hath lost its savour, it is thenceforth good for
nothing; but to be cast out, and to be trodden underfoot of men.”

13. And “shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?”
Yea, we know not how soon he may say to the sword, “Sword, go through this land!” he hath given us long space
to repent. He lets us alone this year also: but he warns and awakens us by thunder. His judgements are abroad in
the earth; and we have all reason to expect the heaviest of all, even that he “should come unto us quickly, and
remove our candlestick out of its place, except we repent and do the first works;” unless we return to the
principles of the Reformation, the truth and simplicity of the gospel. Perhaps we are now resisting the last effort
of divine grace to save us. Perhaps we have well-nigh “filled up the measure of our iniquities,” by rejecting the
counsel of God against ourselves, and casting out his messengers.

14. O God, “in the midst of wrath, remember mercy!” Be glorified in our reformation, not in our destruction! Let us
“hear the rod, and him that appointed it!” Now that Thy “judgements are abroad in the earth,” let the inhabitants
of the world “learn righteousness!”

15. My brethren, it is high time for us to awake out of sleep before the “great trumpet of the Lord be blown,” and
our land become a field of blood. O may we speedily see the things that make for our peace, before they are hid
from our eyes! “Turn Thou us, O good Lord, and let Thine anger cease from us. O Lord, look down from heaven,
behold and visit this vine;” and cause us to know “the time of our visitation.” “Help us, O God of our salvation,
for the glory of Thy name! O deliver us, and be merciful to our sins, for Thy name’s sake! And so we will not go
back from Thee. O let us live, and we shall call upon Thy name. Turn us again, O Lord God of Hosts! Show the
light of Thy countenance, and we shall be whole.”

“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power
that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages; world without end. --
Amen!”

SERMON 4
(text of the 1872 edition)

SCRIPTURAL CHRISTIANITY

[This Sermon was originally published in a separate pamphlet, accompanied by the following address “to the
reader,” to which was affixed the author’s signature: “It was not my design, when I wrote, ever to print the latter
part of the following Sermon: But the false and scurrilous accounts of it which have been published, almost in every
corner of the nation, constrain me to publish the whole, just as it was preached; that men of reason may judge for
themselves.--ED.]
Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. Ezek. 33:4.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” Acts 4:31.

1. The same expression occurs in the second chapter, where we read, “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all” (the Apostles, with the women, and the mother of Jesus, and his brethren) “with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost:” one immediate effect whereof was, they “began to speak with other tongues;” insomuch that both the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and the other strangers who “came together, when this was noised abroad, heard them speak, in their several tongues, the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:1-6).

2. In this chapter we read, that when the Apostles and brethren had been praying, and praising God, “the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” Not that we find any visible appearance here, such as had been in the former instance: nor are we informed that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were then given to all or any of them; such as the gifts of “healing, of working” other “miracles, of prophecy, of discerning spirits, the speaking with divers kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:9, 10).

3. Whether these gifts of the Holy Ghost were designed to remain in the church throughout all ages, and whether or no they will be restored at the nearer approach of the “restitution of all things,” are questions which it is not needful to decide. But it is needful to observe this, that, even in the infancy of the church, God divided them with a sparing hand. Were all even then prophets? Were all workers of miracles? Had all the gifts of healing? Did all speak with tongues? No, in no wise.

Perhaps not one in a thousand. Probably none but the teachers in the church, and only some of them (1 Cor. 12:28-30). It was therefore, for a more excellent purpose than this, that “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.”

4. It was, to give them (what none can deny to be essential to all Christians in all ages) the mind which was in Christ, those holy fruits of the Spirit, which whosoever hath not, is none of his; to fill them with “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness” (Gal. 5:22-24); to endue them with faith (perhaps it might be rendered, fidelity), with meekness and temperance; to enable them to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts, its passions and desires; and in consequence of that inward change, to fulfil all outward righteousness; to “walk as Christ also walked,” in “the work of faith, in the patience of hope, the labour of love” (1 Thess. 1:3).

5. Without busying ourselves, then, in curious, needless inquiries, touching those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, let us take a nearer view of these his ordinary fruits, which we are assured will remain throughout all ages; --of that great work of God among the children of men, which we are used to express by one word, “Christianity;” not as it implies a set of opinions, a system of doctrines, but as it refers to men’s hearts and lives. And this Christianity it may be useful to consider under three distinct views:

I. As beginning to exist in individuals:
II. As spreading from one to another:
III. As covering the earth.

I design to close these considerations with a plain, practical application.

I. And, first, let us consider Christianity in its rise, as beginning to exist in individuals.

Suppose, then, one of those who heard the Apostle Peter preaching repentance and remission of sins, was pricked to the heart, was convinced of sin, repented, and then believed in Jesus. By this faith of the operation of God, which was the very substance, or subsistence, of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1,) the demonstrative evidence of invisible things, he instantly received the Spirit of adoption, whereby he now cried, “Abba, Father” (Rom.

Preached by John Wesley at St. Mary's, Oxford, before the University, August 24, 1744.

Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. Ezek. 33:4.
8:15). Now first it was that he could call Jesus Lord, by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:3), the Spirit itself bearing witness with his spirit, that he was a child of God (Rom. 8:16). Now it was that he could truly say, “I live not, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

2. This, then, was the very essence of his faith, a divine GNGIEIQ (evidence or conviction) of the love of God the Father, through the Son of his love, to him a sinner, now accepted in the Beloved. And, “being justified by faith, he had peace with God” (Rom. 5:1), yea, “the peace of God ruling in his heart;” a peace, which passing all understanding, kept his heart and mind from all doubt and fear, through the knowledge of him in whom he had believed. He could not, therefore, “be afraid of any evil tidings;” for his “heart stood fast, believing in the Lord.” he feared not what man could do unto him, knowing the very hairs of his head were all numbered. He feared not all the powers of darkness, whom God was daily bruising under his feet. Least of all was he afraid to die; nay, he desired to “depart, and to be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23); who, “through death, had destroyed him that had the power of death, even the devil; and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their life-time,” till then, “subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15).

3. The love of God was also shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which was given unto him” (Rom. 5:5). “Because he was a son God had sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4:6). And that filial love of God was continually increased by the witness he had in himself (1 John 5:10) of God’s pardoning love to him; by “beholding what manner of love it was which the Father had bestowed upon him, that he should be called a child of God” (1 John 3:1). So that God was the. Desire of his eyes, and the joy of his heart; his portion in time and in eternity.

4. The love of God was also shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which was given unto him” (Rom. 5:5). “Because he was a son God had sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4:6). And that filial love of God was continually increased by the witness he had in himself (1 John 5:10) of God’s pardoning love to him; by “beholding what manner of love it was which the Father had bestowed upon him, that he should be called a child of God” (1 John 3:1). So that God was the. Desire of his eyes, and the joy of his heart; his portion in time and in eternity.

5. And “love is not puffed up” (1 Cor. 13:4). It abases to the dust every soul wherein it dwells.
the need he had to be watered of God every moment; so he continued daily in all the ordinances of God, the stated channels of his grace to man: “in the Apostles’ doctrine,” or teaching, receiving that food of the soul with all readiness of heart; in “the breaking of bread,” which he found to be the communion of the body of Christ; and “in the prayers” and praises offered up by the great congregation. And thus, he daily grew in grace, increasing in strength, in the knowledge and love of God.

9. But it did not satisfy him, barely to abstain from doing evil. His soul was athirst to do good. The language of his heart continually was, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” My Lord went about doing good; and shall not I tread in his steps?” As he had opportunity therefore, if he could do no good of a higher kind, he fed the hungry, clothed the naked, helped the fatherless or stranger, visited and assisted them that were sick or in prison. He gave all his goods to feed the poor. He rejoiced to labour or to suffer for them; and whereinsoever he might profit another, there especially to “deny himself.” he counted nothing too dear to part with for them, as well remembering the word of his Lord, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:40).

10. Such was Christianity in its rise. Such was a Christian in ancient days. Such was every one of those who, when they heard the threatenings of the chief priests and elders, “lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and were all filled with the Holy Ghost. The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul:” So did the love of him in whom they had believed constrain them to love one another! “Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own but they had all things common:” So fully were they crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them! “And they continued steadfastly with one accord in the Apostles’ doctrine, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). “And great grace was upon them all; neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles’ feet: And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” (Acts 4:31-35.)

II.

1. Let us take a view, in the Second place, of this Christianity, as spreading from one to another, and so gradually making its way into the world: For such was the will of God concerning it, who did not “light a candle to put it under a bushel, but that it might give light to all that were in the house.” And this our Lord had declared to his first disciples, “Ye are the salt of the earth,” “the light of the world;” at the same time that he gave that general command, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:13-16).

2. And, indeed, supposing a few of these lovers of mankind to see “the whole world lying in wickedness,” can we believe they would be unconcerned at the sight, at the misery of those for whom their Lord died? Would not their bowels yearn over them, and their hearts melt away for very trouble? Could they then stand idle all the day long, even were there no command from him whom they loved? Rather, would they not labour by all possible means, to pluck some of these brands out of the burning? Undoubtedly they would: they would spare no pains to bring back whomsoever they could of those poor “sheep that had gone astray, to the great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls” (1 Pet. 2:25).

3. So the Christians of old did. They labored, having opportunity, “to do good unto all men” (Gal. 6:10), warning them to flee from the wrath to come; now, now to escape the damnation of hell. They declared, “The times of ignorance God winked at; but now he calleth all men everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30) They cried aloud, Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: “so iniquity shall not be your ruin” (Ezek. 18:30). They “reasoned” with them of “temperance, and righteousness,” or justice--of the virtues opposite to their reigning sins; “and of judgment to come,”--of the wrath of God which would surely be executed on evildoers in that day when he should judge the world (Acts 24:25).

4. They endeavoured herein to speak to every man severally as he had need. To the careless, to those who lay unconcerned in darkness and in the shadow of death, they thundered, “Awake thou that sleepest; arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” But to those who were already awakened out of sleep, and groaning under a sense of the wrath of God, their language was, “We have an Advocate with the Father; he is the propitiation for our sins.” Meantime, those who had believed, they provoked to love and to good works; to patient continuance in
And their labour was not in vain in the Lord. His word ran and was glorified. It grew mightily and prevailed. But so much the more did offences prevail also. The world in general were offended, “because they testified of it, that the works thereof were evil” (John 7:7). The men of pleasure were offended, not only because these men were made, as it were, to reprove their thoughts (“He professeth,” said they, “to have the knowledge of God; he calleth himself the child of the Lord, his life is not like other men’s; his ways are of another fashion; he abstaineth from our ways, as from filthiness; he maketh his boast, that God is his Father” Wis. 2:13-16;) but much more, because so many of their companions were taken away, and would no more run with them to “the same excess of riot.” (1 Pet. 4:4.) The men of reputation were offended, because, as the gospel spread, they declined in the esteem of the people; and because many no longer dared to give them flattering titles, or to pay man the homage due to God only. The men of trade called one another together, and said, “Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth: but ye see and hear that these men have persuaded and turned away much people; so that this our craft is in danger to be set at nought” (Acts 19:25ff.). Above all, the men of religion, so called, the men of outside religion, “the saints of the world,” were offended, and ready at every opportunity to cry out, “Men of Israel, help! We have found these men pestilent fellows, movers of sedition throughout the world” (Acts 24:5). “These are the men that teach all men everywhere against the people, and against this place” (Acts 21:28).

Thus it was that the heavens grew black with clouds, and the storm gathered amain. For the more Christianity spread, the more hurt was done, in the account of those who received it not; and the number increased of those who were more and more enraged at these “men who thus turned the world upside down;” (Acts 17:6;) insomuch that more and more cried out, “Away with such fellows from the earth; it is not fit that they should live;” yea, and sincerely believed, that whosoever should kill them would do God service.

Meanwhile they did not fail to cast out their name as evil; (Luke 6:22;) so that this “sect was everywhere spoken against.” (Acts 27:22.) Men said all manner of evil of them, even as had been done of the prophets that were before them (Matt. 5:12). And whatsoever any would affirm, others would believe; so that offences grew as the stars of heaven for multitude. And hence arose, at the time fore-ordained of the Father, persecution in all its forms. Some, for a season, suffered only shame and reproach; some, “the spoiling of their goods;” “some had trial of mocking and scourging; some of bonds and imprisonment;” and others “resisted unto blood” (Heb. 10:34; 11:36ff.)

Now it was that the pillars of hell were shaken, and the kingdom of God spread more and more.

Sinners were everywhere “turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” he gave his children “such a mouth, and such wisdom, as all their adversaries could not resist;” and their lives were of equal force with their words. But above all, their sufferings spake to all the world.

They “approved themselves the servants of God, in afflictions, in necessities, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours; in perils in the sea, in perils in the wilderness, in weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor. 6:4ff.). And when, having fought the good fight, they were led as sheep to the slaughter, and offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith, then the blood of each found a voice, and the heathen owned, “He being dead, yet speaketh.”

Thus did Christianity spread itself in the earth. But how soon did the tares appear with the wheat, and the mystery of iniquity work, as well as the mystery of godliness! How soon did Satan find a seat, even in the temple of God, “till the woman fled into the wilderness,” and “the faithful were again minished from the children of men!” here we tread a beaten path: the still unceasing corruptions of the succeeding generations have been largely described, from time to time, by those witnesses God raised up, to show that he had “built his church upon a rock, and the gates of hell should not” wholly “prevail against her.” (Matt. 16:18.)
Pet. 1:10, 11ff.:) of this the Spirit which was in them testified: “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isa. 2:1-4.) “In that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, which shall stand for an Ensign of the people.

To it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again to recover the remnant of his people; and he shall set up an Ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth.” (Isa. 11:10-12.) “The wolf shall then dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. They shall not hurt nor destroy, saith the Lord, in all my holy mountain.

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:6-9).

2. To the same effect are the words of the great Apostle, which it is evident have never yet been fulfilled. “Hath God cast away his people? God forbid.” “But through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles.” “And if the diminishing of them be the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness?” “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in: And so all Israel shall be saved.” (Rom. 11:1, 11, 25, 26.)

3. Suppose now the fullness of time to be come, and the prophecies to be accomplished. What a prospect is this! All is peace, “quietness, and assurance for ever.” here is no din of arms, no “confused noise,” no “garments rolled in blood.” “Destructions are come to a perpetual end.” Wars are ceased from the earth. Neither are there any intestine jars remaining; no brother rising up against brother; no country or city divided against itself, and tearing out its own bowels. Civil discord is at an end for evermore, and none is left either to destroy or hurt his neighbour. Here is no oppression to “make” even “the wise man mad;” no extortion to “grind the face of the poor;” no robbery or wrong; no rapine or injustice; for all are “content with such things as they possess.” Thus “righteousness and peace have kissed each other;” (Ps. 85:10;) they have “taken root and filled the land;” “righteousness flourishing out of the earth;” and “peace looking down from heaven.”

4. And with righteousness or justice, mercy is also found. The earth is no longer full of cruel habitations. The Lord hath destroyed both the blood-thirsty and malicious, the envious and revengeful man. Were there any provocation, there is none that now knoweth to return evil for evil; but indeed there is none that doeth evil, no, not one; for all are harmless as doves. And being filled with peace and joy in believing, and united in one body, by one Spirit, they all love as brethren, they are all of one heart and of one soul. “Neither saith any of them, that aught of the things which he possesseth is his own.” There is none among them that lacketh: for every man loveth his neighbour as himself. And all walk by one rule: “Whatever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them.”

5. It follows, that no unkind word can ever be heard among them, no strife of tongues, no contention of any kind, no railing or evil-speaking, but every one “opens his mouth with wisdom, and in his tongue there is the law of kindness.” Equally incapable are they of fraud or guile: their love is without dissimulation: Their words are always the just expression of their thoughts, opening a window into their breast, that whosoever desires may look into their hearts, and see that only love and God are there.

6. Thus, where the Lord Omnipotent taketh to himself his mighty power and reigneth, doth he “subdue all things to himself,” cause every heart to overflow with love, and fill every mouth with praise. “Happy are the people that are in such a case: yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God” (Psalm 144:15.) “Arise, shine;” (saith the Lord:) “for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” “Thou hast known that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty God of Jacob. I have made thy officers peace, and thy exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation and thy gates Praise.” “Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.” “The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory” (Isa. 60:1, 16-19).
IV. Having thus briefly considered Christianity, as beginning, as going on, and as covering the earth, it remains only that I should close the whole with a plain, practical application.

1. And, first, I would ask, Where does this Christianity now exist? Where, I pray, do the Christians live? Which is the country, the inhabitants whereof are all thus filled with the Holy Ghost? --are all of one heart and of one soul? Cannot suffer one among them to lack anything, but continually give to every man as he hath need; who, one and all, have the love of God filling their hearts, and constraining them to love their neighbour as themselves; who have all “put on bowels of mercy, humbleness of mind, gentleness, long-suffering?” who offend not in any kind, either by word or deed, against justice, mercy, or truth; but in every point do unto all men; as they would these should do unto them? With what propriety can we term any a Christian country, which does not answer this description? Why then, let us confess we have never yet seen a Christian country upon earth.

2. I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, if ye do account me a madman or a fool, yet, as a fool bear with me. It is utterly needful that some one should use great plainness of speech towards you. It is more especially needful at this time; for who knoweth but it is the last? Who knoweth how soon the righteous Judge may say, “I will no more be entreated for this people?” “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in this land, they should but deliver their own souls.” And who will use this plainness, if I do not? Therefore I, even I, will speak. And I adjure you, by the living God, that ye steel not your breasts against receiving a blessing at my hands. Do not say in your hearts, _Non persuadebis, etiamsi persuaseris_; [Your persuasions shall not prevail with us, even though they should really convince us.—ED.] or, in other words, “Lord, thou shalt not send by whom thou wilt send; let me rather perish in my blood, than be saved by this man!”

3. Brethren, “I am persuaded better things of you, though I thus speak.” Let me ask you then, in tender love, and in the spirit of meekness, Is this city a Christian city? Is Christianity, scriptural Christianity, found here? Are we, considered as a community of men, so “filled with the Holy Ghost,” as to enjoy in our hearts, and show forth in our lives, the genuine fruits of that Spirit? Are all the Magistrates, all heads and Governors of Colleges and Halls, and their respective Societies (not to speak of the inhabitants of the town), “of one heart “and one soul?” Is “the love of God shed abroad in our hearts?” Are our tempers the same that were in him? And are our lives agreeable thereto? Are we “holy as he who hath called us is holy in all manner of conversation?”

4. I entreat you to observe, that here are no peculiar notions now under consideration; that the question moved is not concerning doubtful opinions of one kind or another, but concerning the undoubted, fundamental branches (if there be any such) of our common Christianity. And for the decision thereof, I appeal to your own conscience, guided by the Word of God. He therefore that is not condemned by his own heart, let him go free.

5. In the fear, then, and in the presence of the great God, before whom both you and I shall shortly appear, I pray you that are in authority over us, whom I reverence for your office sake, to consider (and not after the manner of dissemblers with God), are you “filled with the Holy Ghost?” Are you lively portraits of him whom ye are appointed to represent among men? “I have said, Ye are gods,” ye magistrates and rulers; ye are by office so nearly allied to the God of heaven! In your several stations and degrees, ye are to show forth unto us “the Lord our Governor.” Are all the thoughts of your hearts, all your tempers and desires, suitable to your high calling? Are all your words like unto those which come out of the mouth of God? Is there in all your actions dignity and love? --a greatness which words cannot express, which can flow only from a heart “full of God;” and yet consistent with the character of “man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm?”

6. Ye venerable men, who are more especially called to form the tender minds of youth, to dispel thence the shades of ignorance and error, and train them up to be wise unto salvation, are you “filled with the Holy Ghost?” with all those “fruits of the Spirit,” which your important office so indispensably requires? Is your heart whole with God? Full of love and zeal to set up his kingdom on earth? Do you continually remind those under your care, that the one rational end of all our studies, is to know, love and serve “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent?” Do you inculcate upon them day by day, that love alone never faileth (whereas, whether there be tongues, they shall fail, or philosophical knowledge, it shall vanish away); and that without love, all learning is but splendid ignorance, pompous folly, vexation of spirit? Has all you teach an actual tendency to the love of God, and of all mankind for his sake? Have you an eye to this end in whatever you prescribe, touching the kind, the manner, and the measure of their studies; desiring and labouring that, wherever the lot of these young soldiers of Christ is cast, they may be so many burning and shining lights, adorning the gospel of Christ in all things?
And permit me to ask, Do you put forth all your strength in the vast work you have undertaken? Do you labour herein with all your might? Exerting every faculty of your soul, using every talent which God hath lent you, and that to the uttermost of your power?

7. Let it not be said, that I speak here, as if all under your care were intended to be clergymen. Not so: I only speak as if they were all intended to be Christians. But what example is set them by us who enjoy the beneficence of our forefathers? --by Fellows, Students, Scholars; more especially those who are of some rank and eminence? Do ye, brethren, abound in the fruits of the Spirit, in lowliness of mind, in self-denial and mortification, in seriousness and composure of spirit, in patience, meekness, sobriety, temperance; and in unwearied, restless endeavours to do good in every kind unto all men, to relieve their outward wants, and to bring their souls to the true knowledge and love of God? Is this the general character of Fellows of Colleges? I fear it is not. Rather, have not pride and haughtiness of spirit, impatience and peevishness, sloth and indolence, gluttony and sensuality, and even a proverbial uselessness, been objected to us, perhaps not always by our enemies, nor wholly without ground? O that God would roll away this reproach from us, that the very memory of it might perish for ever!

8. Many of us are more immediately consecrated to God, called to minister in holy things. Are we then patterns to the rest, “in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12)? Is there written on our forehead and on our heart, “Holiness to the Lord?” From what motives did we enter upon this office? Was it indeed with a single eye “to serve God, trusting that we were inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon us this ministration, for the promoting of his glory, and the edifying of his people?” And have we “clearly determined, by God’s grace, to give ourselves wholly to this office?” Do we forsake and set aside, as much as in us lies, all worldly cares and studies? Do we apply ourselves wholly to this one thing, and draw all our cares and studies this way? Are we apt to teach? Are we taught of God, that we may be able to teach others also? Do we know God? Do we know Jesus Christ? Hath “God revealed his Son in us?” And hath he “made us able ministers of the new covenant?” Where then are the “seals of our apostleship?” Who, that were dead in trespasses and sins, have been quickened by our word? Have we a burning zeal to save souls from death, so that for their sake we often forget even to eat our bread? Do we speak plain, “by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2)? Are we dead to the world, and the things of the world, “laying up all our treasure in heaven?” Do we lord over God’s heritage? Or are we the least, the servants of all? When we bear the reproach of Christ, does it sit heavy upon us? Or do we rejoice therein? When we are smitten on the one cheek, do we resent it? Are we impatient of affronts? Or do we turn the other also; not resisting the evil, but overcoming evil with good? Have we a bitter zeal, inciting us to strive sharply and passionately with them that are out of the way? Or is our zeal the flame of love, so as to direct all our words with sweetness, lowliness, and meekness of wisdom?

9. Once more: what shall we say concerning the youth of this place? Have you either the form or the power of Christian godliness? Are you humble, teachable, advisable; or stubborn, self-willed, heady, and highminded? Are you obedient to your superiors as to parents? Or do you despise those to whom you owe the tenderest reverence? Are you diligent in your easy business, pursuing your studies with all your strength? Do you redeem the time, crowding as much work into every day as it can contain? Rather, are ye not conscious to yourselves, that you waste away day after day, either in reading what has no tendency to Christianity, or in gaming, or in--you know not what? Are you better managers of your fortune than of your time? Do you, out of principle, take care to owe no man anything? Do you “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;” to spend it in the more immediate worship of God? When you are in his house, do you consider that God is there? Do you behave “as seeing him that is invisible”? Do you know how to possess your bodies in sanctification and honour?” Are not drunkenness and uncleanness found among you? Yea, are there not of you who “glory in their shame?” Do not many of you “take the name of God in vain,” perhaps habitually, without either remorse or fear? Yea, are there not a multitude of you that are forsworn? I fear, a swiftly-increasing multitude. Be not surprised, brethren. Before God and this congregation, I own myself to have been of the number, solemnly swearing to observe all those customs, which I then knew nothing of; and those statutes, which I did not so much as read over, either then, or for some years after. What is perjury, if this is not? But if it be, O what a weight of sin, yea, sin of no common dye, lieth upon us! And doth not the Most High regard it?
10. May it not be one of the consequences of this, that so many of you are a generation of triflers; triflers with God, with one another, and with your own souls? For, how few of you spend, from one week to another, a single hour in private prayer! How few have any thought of God in the general tenor of your conversation! Who of you is in any degree acquainted with the work of his Spirit, his supernatural work in the souls of men? Can you bear, unless now and then in a church, any talk of the Holy Ghost? Would you not take it for granted, if one began such a conversation, that it was either hypocrisy or enthusiasm? In the name of the Lord God Almighty, I ask, what religion are you of? Even the talk of Christianity, ye cannot, will not bear. O my brethren, what a Christian city is this! “It is time for Thee, Lord, to lay to Thine hand!”

11. For, indeed, what probability, what possibility, rather (speaking after the manner of men), is there that Christianity, scriptural Christianity, should be again the religion of this place? That all orders of men among us should speak and live as men “filled with the Holy Ghost?” By whom should this Christianity be restored? By those of you that are in authority? Are you convinced then that this is scriptural Christianity? Are you desirous it should be restored? And do ye not count your fortune, liberty, life, dear unto yourselves, so ye may be instrumental in the restoring of it? But suppose ye have this desire, who hath any power proportioned to the effect? Perhaps some of you have made a few faint attempts, but with how small success! Shall Christianity then be restored by young, unknown, inconsiderable men? I know not whether ye yourselves could suffer it. Would not some of you cry out, “Young man, in so doing thou reproachest us?” But there is no danger of your being put to the proof; so hath iniquity overspread us like a flood. Whom then shall God send? --the famine, the pestilence (the last messengers of God to a guilty land), or the sword, “the armies of the” Romish “aliens,” to reform us into our first love? Nay, “rather let us fall into thy hand, O Lord, and let us not fall into the hand of man.” Lord, save, or we perish! Take us out of the mire, that we sink not! O help us against these enemies! For vain is the help of man. Unto thee all things are possible.

According to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die; and preserve us in the manner that seemeth to thee good; not as we will, but as thou wilt!

John Wesley
SERMON 6
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

“Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: That is, the word of faith, which we preach.” Rom. 10:5-8.

1. The Apostle does not here oppose the covenant given by Moses, to the covenant given by Christ. If we ever imagined this, it was for want of observing, that the latter as well as the former part of these words were spoken by Moses himself to the people of Israel, and that concerning the covenant which then was. (Deut. 30:11, 12, 14.) But it is the covenant of grace, which God, through Christ, hath established with men in all ages, (as well before and under the Jewish dispensation, as since God was manifest in the flesh,) which St. Paul here opposes to the covenant of works, made with Adam while in Paradise, but commonly supposed to be the only covenant which God had made with man, particularly by those Jews of whom the Apostle writes.

2. Of these it was that he so affectionately speaks in the begin-fling of this chapter: “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness,” (of the justification that flows from his mere grace and mercy, freely forgiving our sins through the Son of his love, through the redemption which is in Jesus,)
“and seeking to establish their own righteousness,” (their own holiness, antecedent to faith in “him that justifieth the ungodly,” as the ground of their pardon and acceptance,) “have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God,” and consequently seek death in the error of their life.

3. They were ignorant that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;” -- that, by the oblation of himself once offered, he had put an end to the first law or covenant, (which, indeed, was not given by God to Moses, but to Adam in his state of innocence,) the strict tenor whereof, without any abatement, was, “Do this, and live;” and, at the same time, purchased for us that better covenant,” Believe, and live;” believe, and thou shalt be saved; now saved, both from the guilt and power of sin, and, of consequence, from the wages of it.

4. And how many are equally ignorant now, even among those who are called by the name of Christ! How many who have now a “zeal for God,” yet have it not “according to knowledge;” but are still seeking “to establish their own righteousness,” as the ground of their pardon and acceptance; and therefore, vehemently refuse to “submit themselves unto the righteousness of God!” Surely my heart’s desire, and prayer to God for you, brethren, is, that ye may be saved. And, in order to remove this grand stumbling-block out of your way, I will endeavour to show, First, what the righteousness is, which is of the law; and what “the righteousness which is of faith;” Secondly, the folly of trusting in the righteousness of the law, and the wisdom of submitting to that which is of faith.

I.

1. And, First, “the righteousness which is of the law saith, The man which doeth these things shall live by them.” Constantly and perfectly observe all these things to do them, and then thou shalt live for ever. This law, or covenant, (usually called the Covenant of Works,) given by God to man in Paradise, required an obedience perfect in all its parts, entire and wanting nothing, as the condition of his eternal continuance in the holiness and happiness wherein he was created.

2. It required that man should fulfil all righteousness, inward and outward, negative and positive: That he should not only abstain from every idle word, and avoid every evil work, but should keep every affection, every desire, every thought, in obedience to the will of God: That he should continue holy, as he which had created him was holy, both in heart, and in all manner of conversation: That he should be pure in heart, even as God is pure; perfect as his Father in heaven was perfect: That he should love the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength; that he should love every soul which God had made, even as God had loved him: That by this universal benevolence, he should dwell in God, (who is love,) and God in him: That he should serve the Lord his God with all his strength, and in all things singly aim at his glory.

3. These were the things which the righteousness of the law required, that he who did them might live thereby. But it farther required, that this entire obedience to God, this inward and outward holiness, this conformity both of heart and life to his will, should be perfect in degree. No abatement, no allowance could possibly be made, for falling short in any degree, as to any jot or tittle, either of the outward or the inward law. If every commandment, relating to outward things, was obeyed, yet that was not sufficient unless every one was obeyed with all the strength, in the highest measure, and most perfect manner. Nor did it answer the demand of this covenant, to love God with every power and faculty, unless he were loved with the full capacity of each, with the whole possibility of the soul.

4. One thing more was indispensably required by the righteousness of the law, namely, that this universal obedience, this perfect holiness both of heart and life, should be perfectly uninterrupted also, should continue without any intermission, from the moment wherein God created man, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, until the days of his trial should be ended, and he should be confirmed in life everlasting.

5. The righteousness, then, which is of the law, speaketh on this wise: “Thou, O man of God, stand fast in love, in the image of God wherein thou art made. If thou wilt remain in life, keep the commandments, which are now written in thy heart. Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. Love, as thyself, every soul that he hath made. Desire nothing but God. Aim at God in every thought, in every word and work. Swerve not, in one motion of body or soul, from him, thy mark, and the prize of thy high calling; and let all that is in thee praise his holy name, every power and faculty of thy soul, in every kind, in every degree, and at every moment of thine existence. ‘This do, and thou shalt live:’ Thy light shall shine, thy love shall flame more and more, till thou art received up into the house of God in the heavens, to reign with him for ever and ever.”
6. “But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? That is, to bring down Christ from above;” (as though it were some impossible task which God required thee previously to perform in order to thine acceptance;) “or, Who shall descend into the deep? That is, to bring up Christ from the dead;” (as though that were still remaining to be done, for the sake of which thou wert to be accepted;) “but what saith it? The word,” according to the tenor of which thou mayest now be accepted as an heir of life eternal, “is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach,” -- the new covenant which God hath now established with sinful man, through Christ Jesus.

7. By “the righteousness which is of faith” is meant, that condition of justification, (and, in consequence, of present and final salvation, if we endure therein unto the end,) which was given by God to fallen man, through the merits and mediation of his only-begotten Son. This was in part revealed to Adam, soon after his fall; being contained in the original promise, made to him and his seed, concerning the Seed of the Woman, who should “bruise the serpent’s head.” (Gen. 3:15.) It was a little more clearly revealed to Abraham, by the angel of God from heaven, saying, “By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, that in thy seed shall all the nations of the world be blessed.” (Gen. 12:15,18.) It was yet more fully made known to Moses, to David, and to the Prophets that followed; and, through them, to many of the people of God in their respective generations. But still the bulk even of these were ignorant of it; and very few understood it clearly. Still “life and immortality” were not so “brought to light” to the Jews of old, as they are now unto us “by the gospel.”

8. Now, this covenant saith not to sinful man, “Perform unsinning obedience, and live.” If this were the term, he would have no more benefit by all which Christ hath done and suffered for him, than if he was required, in order to life, to “ascend into heaven, and bring down Christ from above;” or to “descend into the deep,” into the invisible world, and “bring up Christ from the dead.” It doth not require any impossibility to be done: (Although to mere man, what it requires would be impossible; but not to man assisted by the Spirit of God:) This were only to mock human weakness.

Indeed, strictly speaking, the covenant of grace doth not require us to do anything at all, as absolutely and indispensably necessary in order to our justification; but only, to believe in Him who, for the sake of his Son, and the propitiation which he hath made, “justifieth the ungodly that worketh not,” and imputes his faith to him for righteousness. Even so Abraham “believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Gen. 15:6.) “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith, -- that he might be the father of all them that believe, -- that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.” (Rom. 4:11.) “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it,” i.e., faith, “was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed,” to whom faith shall be imputed for righteousness, shall stand in the stead of perfect obedience, in order to our acceptance with God, “if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered” to death “for our offences, and was raised again for our justification;” (Rom. 4:23-25:) For the assurance of the remission of our sins, and of a second life to come, to them that believe.

9. What saith then the covenant of forgiveness, of unmerited love, of pardoning mercy? “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” In the day thou believest, thou shalt surely live.

Thou shalt be restored to the favour of God; and in his pleasure is life. Thou shalt be saved from the curse, and from the wrath of God. Thou shalt be quickened, from the death of sin into the life of righteousness. And if thou endure to the end, believing in Jesus, thou shalt never taste the second death; but, having suffered with thy Lord, shalt also live and reign with him for ever and ever.

10. Now, “this word is nigh thee.” This condition of life is plain, easy, always at hand. “It is in thy mouth, and in thy heart,” through the operation of the Spirit of God. The moment “thou believest in thine heart” in him whom God “hath raised from the dead,” and “confessest with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,” as thy Lord and thy God, “thou shalt be saved” from condemnation, from the guilt and punishment of thy former sins, and shalt have power to serve God in true holiness all the remaining days of thy life.

11. What is the difference then between the “righteousness which is of the law,” and the “righteousness which is of faith” -- between the first covenant, or the covenant of works, and the second, the covenant of grace? The essential, unchangeable difference is this: The one supposes him to whom it is given to be already holy and happy, created in the image and enjoying the favour of God; and prescribes the condition whereon he may
continue therein, in love and joy, life and immortality: The other supposes him to whom it is given to be now unholy and unhappy, fallen short of the glorious image of God, having the wrath of God abiding on him, and hastening, through sin, whereby his soul is dead, to bodily death, and death everlasting; and to man in this state it prescribes the condition whereon he may regain the pearl he has lost, may recover the favour and image of God, may retrieve the life of God in his soul, and be restored to the knowledge and the love of God, which is the beginning of life eternal.

12. Again: The covenant of works, in order to man’s continuance in the favour of God, in his knowledge and love, in holiness and happiness, required of perfect man a perfect and uninterrupted obedience to every point of the law of God. Whereas, the covenant of grace, in order to man’s recovery of the favour and the life of God, requires only faith; living faith in Him who, through God, justifies him that obeyed not.

13. Yet, again: The covenant of works required of Adam and all his children, to pay the price themselves, in consideration of which they were to receive all the future blessings of God. But, in the covenant of grace, seeing we have nothing to pay, God “frankly forgives us all.” Provided only, that we believe in Him who hath paid the price for us; who hath given himself a “Propitiation for our sins, for the sins of the whole world.”

14. Thus the first covenant required what is now afar off from all the children of men; namely, unsinning obedience, which is far from those who are “conceived and born in sin.” Whereas, the second requires what is nigh at hand; as though it should say, “Thou art sin! God is love! Thou by sin art fallen short of the glory of God; yet there is mercy with him. Bring then all thy sins to the pardoning God, and they shall vanish away as a cloud. If thou wert not ungodly, there would be no room for him to justify thee as ungodly. But now draw near, in fill assurance of faith. He speaketh, and it is done. Fear not, only believe; for even the just God justifieth all that believe in Jesus.”

II.

1. These things considered, it would be easy to show, as I proposed to do in the Second place, the folly of trusting in the “righteousness which is of the law,” and the wisdom of submitting to “the righteousness which is of faith.”

The folly of those who still trust in the “righteousness which is of the law,” the terms of which are, “Do this, and live,” may abundantly appear from hence: They set out wrong; their very first step is a fundamental mistake: For, before they can ever think of claiming any blessing on the terms of this covenant, they must suppose themselves to be in his state with whom this covenant was made.

But how vain a supposition is this; since it was made with Adam in a state of innocence! How weak, therefore, must that whole building be, which stands on such a foundation! And how foolish are they who thus build on the sand! Who seem never to have considered, that the covenant of works was not given to man when he was “dead in trespasses and sins,” but when he was alive to God, when he knew no sin, but was holy as God is holy; who forget, that it was never designed for the recovery of the favour and life of God once lost, but only for the continuance and increase thereof, till it should be complete in life everlasting.

2. Neither do they consider, who are thus seeking to establish their “own righteousness, which is of the law,” what manner of obedience or righteousness that is which the law indispensably requires.

It must be perfect and entire in every point, or it answers not the demand of the law. But which of you is able to perform such obedience; or, consequently, to live thereby? Who among you fulfils every jot and tittle even of the outward commandments of God? Doing nothing, great or small, which God forbids? Leaving nothing undone which he enjoins? Speaking no idle word? Having your conversation always “meet to minister grace to the hearers?” and, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, doing all to the glory of God?” And how much less are you able to fulfil all the inward commandments of God! Those which require that every temper and motion of your soul should be holiness unto the Lord! Are you able to “love God with all your heart?” to love all mankind as your own soul? To “pray without ceasing?” to have God always before you? And to keep every affection, desire, and thought, in obedience to his law?

3. You should farther consider, that the righteousness of the law requires, not only the obeying every command of God, negative and positive, internal and external, but likewise in the perfect degree. In every instance whatever, the voice of the law is, “Thou shalt serve the Lord thy God with all thy strength.” It allows no abatement of any kind: It excuses no defect: It condemns every coming short of the full measure of obedience, and immediately
pronounces a curse on the offender: It regards only the invariable rules of justice, and saith, “I know not to show mercy.”

4. Who then can appear before such a Judge, who is “extreme to mark what is done amiss?” How weak are they who desire to be tried at the bar where “no flesh living can be justified!” -- none of the offspring of Adam. For, suppose we did now keep every commandment with all our strength; yet one single breach which ever was, utterly destroys our whole claim to life. If we have ever offended in any one point, this righteousness is at an end. For the law condemns all who do not perform uninterrupted as well as perfect obedience. So that, according to the sentence of this, for him who hath once sinned, in any degree, “there remaineth only a fearful looking for of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” of God.

5. Is it not then the very foolishness of folly, for fallen man to seek life by this righteousness? For man, who was “shapen in wickedness, and in sin did his mother conceive him?” man, who is, by nature, all “earthly, sensual, devilish;” altogether corrupt and abominable; in whom, till he find grace, “dwelleth no good thing;” nay, who cannot of himself think one good thought; who is indeed all sin, a mere lump of ungodliness, and who commits sin in every breath he draws; whose actual transgressions, in word and deed, are more in number than the hairs of his head? What stupidity, what senselessness must it be for such an unclean, guilty, helpless worm as this, to dream of seeking acceptance by his own righteousness, of living by “the righteousness which is of the law!”

6. Now, whatsoever considerations prove the folly of trusting in the “righteousness which is of the law,” prove equally the wisdom of submitting to the “righteousness which is of God by faith.” This were easy to be shown with regard to each of the preceding considerations. But, to wave this, the wisdom of the first step hereto, the disclaiming our own righteousness, plainly appears from hence, that it is acting according to truth, to the real nature of things. For, what is it more, than to acknowledge, with our heart as well as lips, the true state wherein we are? To acknowledge that we bring with us into the world a corrupt, sinful nature; more corrupt, indeed, than we can easily conceive, or find words to express? That hereby we are prone to all that is evil, and averse from all that is good; that we are full of pride, self will, unruly passions, foolish desires, vile and inordinate affections; lovers of the world, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? That our lives have been no better than our hearts, but many ways ungodly and unholy; insomuch that our actual sins, both in word and deed, have been as the stars of heaven for multitude; that, on all these accounts, we are displeasing to Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and deserve nothing from him but indignation and wrath and death, the due wages of sin? That we cannot, by any of our righteousness, (for indeed we have none at all,) nor by any of our works, (for they are as the tree upon which they grow,) appease the wrath of God, or avert the punishment we have justly deserved; yea, that, if left to ourselves, we shall only wax worse and worse, sink deeper and deeper into sin, offend God more and more, both with our evil works, and with the evil tempers of our carnal mind, till we fill up the measure of our iniquities, and bring upon ourselves swift destruction? And is not this the very state wherein by nature we are? To acknowledge this, then, both with our heart and lips, that is, to disclaim our own righteousness, “the righteousness which is of the law,” is to act according to the real nature of things, and, consequently, is an instance of true wisdom.

7. The wisdom of submitting to “the righteousness of faith” appears farther, from this consideration, that it is the righteousness of God: I mean here, it is that method of reconciliation with God which hath been chosen and established by God himself, not only as he is the God of wisdom, but as he is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, and of every creature which he hath made. Now, as it is not meet for man to say unto God, “What doest thou?” -- as none who is not utterly void of understanding, will contend with One that is mightier than he, with Him whose kingdom ruleth over all; so it is true wisdom, it is a mark of sound understanding, to acquiesce in whatever he hath chosen; to say in this, as in all things, “It is the Lord: Let him do what seemeth him good.”

8. It may be farther considered, that it was of mere grace, of free love, of undeserved mercy, that God hath vouchsafed to sinful man any way of reconciliation with himself, that we were not cut away from his hand, and utterly blotted out of his remembrance. Therefore, whatever method he is pleased to appoint, of his tender mercy, of his unmerited goodness, whereby his enemies, who have so deeply revolted from him, so long and obstinately rebelled against him, may still find favour in his sight, it is doubtless our wisdom to accept it with all thankfulness.

9. To mention but one consideration more. It is wisdom to aim at the best end by the best means.
Now the best end which any creature can pursue is, happiness in God. And the best end a fallen creature can pursue is, the recovery of the favour and image of God. But the best, indeed the only, means under heaven given to a man, whereby he may regain the favour of God, which is better than life itself, or the image of God, which is the true life of the soul, is the submitting to the “righteousness which is of faith,” the believing in the only-begotten Son of God.

III.

1. Whosoever therefore thou art, who desirest to be forgiven and reconciled to the favour of God, do not say in thy heart, “I must first do this; I must first conquer every sin; break off every evil word and work, and do all good to all men; or, I must first go to church, receive the Lord’s Supper, hear more sermons, and say more prayers.” Alas, my brother! Thou art clean gone out of the way. Thou art still “ignorant of the righteousness of God,” and art “seeking to establish thy own righteousness,” as the ground of thy reconciliation. Knowest thou not, that thou canst do nothing but sin, till thou art reconciled to God? Wherefore, then, dost thou say,” I must do this and this first, and then I shall believe?” Nay, but first believe! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Propitiation for thy sins. Let this good foundation first be laid, and then thou shalt do all things well.

2. Neither say in thy heart, “I cannot be accepted yet, because I am not good enough.” Who is good enough – who ever was – to merit acceptance at God’s hands? Was ever any child of Adam good enough for this? Or will any till the consummation of all things? And as for thee, thou art not good at all: There dwelleth in thee no good thing. And thou never wilt be, till thou believe in Jesus. Rather, thou wilt find thyself worse and worse. But is there any need of being worse, in order to be accepted? Art thou not bad enough already? Indeed thou art, and that God knoweth. And thou thyself canst not deny it. Then delay not. All things are now ready. “Arise, and wash away thy sins.” The fountain is open. Now is the time to wash thee white in the blood of the Lamb. Now he shall “purge” thee as “with hyssop,” and thou shalt “be clean;” He shall “wash” thee, and thou shalt “be whiter than snow.”

3. Do not say, “But I am not contrite enough: I am not sensible enough of my sins.” I know it. I would to God thou wert more sensible of them, more contrite a thousand fold than thou art. But do not stay for this. It may be, God will make thee so, not before thou believest, but by believing. It may be, thou wilt not weep much till thou loveth much because thou hast had much forgiven. In the mean time, look unto Jesus. Behold, how he loveth thee! What could he have done more for thee which he hath not done?

O Lamb of God, was ever pain,
Was ever love like thine?

Look steadily upon him, till he looks on thee, and breaks thy hard heart. Then shall thy “head” be “waters,” and thy “eyes fountains of tears.”

4. Nor yet do thou say, “I must do something more before I come to Christ.” I grant, supposing thy Lord should delay his coming, it were meet and right to wait for his appearing, in doing, so far as thou hast power, whatsoever he hath commanded thee. But there is no necessity for making such a supposition. How knowest thou that he will delay? Perhaps he will appear, as the day-spring from on high, before the morning light. O do not set him a time! Expect him every hour. Now he is nigh! Even at the door!

5. And to what end wouldest thou wait for more sincerity, before thy sins are blotted out? To make thee more worthy of the grace of God? Alas, thou art still “establishing thy own righteousness.” He will have mercy, not because thou art worthy of it, but because his compassions fail not; not because thou art righteous, but because Jesus Christ hath atoned for thy sins.

Again, if there be anything good in sincerity, why dost thou expect it before thou hast faith? - seeing faith itself is the only root of whatever is really good and holy.

Above all, how long wilt thou forget, that whatsoever thou doest, or whatsoever thou hast, before thy sins are forgiven thee, it avails nothing with God toward the procuring of thy forgiveness? Yea, and that it must all be cast behind thy back, trampled under foot, made no account of, or thou wilt never find favour in God’s sight;
because, until then, thou canst not ask it, as a mere sinner, guilty, lost, undone, having nothing to plead, nothing to offer to God, but only the merits of his well-beloved Son, “who loved thee, and gave himself for thee!”

6. To conclude. Whosoever thou art, O man, who hast the sentence of death in thyself, who feelest thyself a condemned sinner, and hast the wrath of God abiding on thee: Unto thee saith the Lord, not, “Do this,” -- perfectly obey all my commands, -- “and live;” but, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

“The word of faith is nigh unto thee:” Now, at this instant, in the present moment, and in thy present state, sinner as thou art, just as thou art, believe the gospel; and “I will be merciful unto thy unrighteousness, and thy iniquities will I remember no more.”

John Wesley
SERMON 7
[text from the 1872 edition]

THE WAY TO THE KINGDOM

“These words naturally lead us to consider, First, the nature of true religion, here termed by our Lord, “the kingdom of God,” which, saith he, “is at hand;” and, Secondly, the way thereto, which he points out in those words, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

I. 1. We are, First, to consider the nature of true religion, here termed by our Lord, “the kingdom of God.” The same expression the great Apostle uses in his Epistle to the Romans, where he likewise explains his Lord’s words, saying, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” (Rom. 14:17.)

2. “The kingdom of God,” or true religion, “is not meat and drink.” It is well known that not only the unconverted Jews, but great numbers of those who had received the faith of Christ, were, notwithstanding “zealous of the law,” (Acts 21:20,) even the ceremonial law of Moses. Whatsoever, therefore, they found written therein, either concerning meat and drink offerings, or the distinction between clean and unclean meats, they not only observed themselves, but vehemently pressed the same even on those “among the Gentiles” (or heathens) “who were turned to God;” yea, to such a degree, that some of them taught, wheresoever they came among them, “Except ye be circumcised, and keep the law,” (the whole ritual law,) “ye cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1, 24.)

3. In opposition to these, the Apostle declares, both here and in many other places, that true religion does not consist in meat and drink, or in any ritual observances; nor, indeed in any outward thing whatever; in anything exterior to the heart; the whole substance thereof lying in “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

4. Not in any outward thing; such as forms, or ceremonies, even of the most excellent kind.

Supposing these to be ever so decent and significant, ever so expressive of inward things: supposing them ever so helpful, not only to the vulgar, whose thought reaches little farther than their sight; but even to men of understanding, men of strong capacities, as doubtless they may sometimes be: Yea, supposing them, as in the case of the Jews, to be appointed by God himself; yet even during the period of time wherein that appointment remains in force, true religion does not principally consist therein; nay, strictly speaking, not at all. How much more must this hold concerning such rites and forms as are only of human appointment! The religion of Christ rises infinitely higher, and lies immensely deeper, than all these. These are good in their place; just so far as they are in fact subservient to true religion. And it were superstition to object against them, while they are applied only as occasional helps to human weakness. But let no man carry them farther. Let no man dream that they have any intrinsic worth; or that religion cannot subsist without them. This were to make them an abomination to the Lord.

5. The nature of religion is so far from consisting in these, in forms of worship, or rites and ceremonies, that it does
not properly consist in any outward actions, of what kind so ever. It is true, a man cannot have any religion who is guilty of vicious, immoral actions; or who does to others what he would not they should do to him, if he were in the same circumstance. And it is also true, that he can have no real religion who “knows to do good, and doth it not.” Yet may a man both abstain from outward evil, and do good, and still have no religion. Yea, two persons may do the same outward work; suppose, feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked; and, in the meantime, one of these may be truly religious, and the other have no religion at all: For the one may act from the love of God, and the other from the love of praise. So manifest it is, that although true religion naturally leads to every good word and work, yet the real nature thereof lies deeper still, even in “the hidden man of the heart.”

6. I say of the heart. For neither does religion consist Orthodoxy, or right opinions; which, although they are not properly outward things, are not in the heart, but the understanding. A man may be orthodox in every point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever-blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God; he may assent to all the three creeds, -- that called the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian; and yet it is possible he may have no religion at all, no more than a Jew, Turk, or pagan. He may be almost as orthodox – as the devil, (though, indeed, not altogether; for every man errs in something; whereas we can’t well conceive him to hold any erroneous opinion,) and may, all the while be as great a stranger as he to the religion of the heart.

7. This alone is religion, truly so called: This alone is in the sight of God of great price. The Apostle sums it all up in three particulars, “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” And, First, righteousness. We cannot be at a loss concerning this, if we remember the words of our Lord, describing the two grand branches thereof, on which “hang all the law and the prophets;” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength: This is the first and great commandment;” (Mark 12:30;) the first and great branch of Christian righteousness. Thou shalt delight thyself in the Lord thy God; thou shalt seek and find all happiness in him. He shall be “thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,” in time and in eternity. All thy bones shall say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee!” Thou shalt hear and fulfil His word who saith, “My son, give me thy heart.” And, having given him thy heart, thy inmost soul, to reign there without a rival, thou mayest well cry out, in the fullness of thy heart, “I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my strong rock, and my defence; my Saviour, my God, and my might, in whom I will trust; my buckler, the horn also of my salvation, and my refuge.”

8. And the second commandment is like unto this; the Second great branch of Christian righteousness is closely and inseparably connected therewith; even, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Thou shalt love, -- thou shalt embrace with the most tender good-will, the most earnest and cordial affection, the most inflamed desires of preventing or removing all evil, and of procuring for him every possible good, --Thy neighbour; -- that is, not only thy friend, thy kinsman, or thy acquaintance; not only the virtuous, the friendly, him that loves thee, that prevents or returns thy kindness; but every child of man, every human creature, every soul which God hath made; not excepting him whom thou never hast seen in the flesh, whom thou knowest not, either by face or name; not excepting him whom thou knowest to be evil and unthankful, him that still despitefully uses and persecutes thee: Him thou shalt love as thyself; with the same invariable thirst after his happiness in every kind; the same unwearied care to screen him from whatever might grieve or hurt either his soul or body.

9. Now is not this love “the fulfilling of the law?” the sum of all Christian righteousness? -- of all inward righteousness; for it necessarily implies “bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind,” (seeing “love is not puffed up,”) “gentleness, meekness, long-suffering:” (for love “is not provoked;” but “believeth, hopeth, endureth all things:”) And of all outward righteousness; for “love worketh no evil to his neighbour,” either by word or deed. It cannot willingly hurt or grieve any one. And it is zealous of good works. Every lover of mankind, as he hath opportunity, “doth good unto all men,” being (without partiality and without hypocrisy) “full of mercy and good fruits.”

10. But true religion, or a heart right toward God and man, implies happiness as well as holiness. For it is not only “righteousness,” but also “peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” What peace? “The peace of God,” which God only can give, and the world cannot take away; the peace which “passeth all under-standing,” all barely rational conception; being a supernatural sensation, a divine taste, of “the powers of the world to come;” such as the
natural man knoweth not, how wise soever in the things of this world; nor, indeed, can he know it, in his present state, “because it is spiritually discerned.” It is a peace that banishes all doubt, all painful uncertainty; the Spirit of God bearing witness with the spirit of a Christian, that he is “a child of God.” And it banishes fear, all such fear as hath torment; the fear of the wrath of God; the fear of hell; the fear of the devil; and, in particular, the fear of death: he that hath the peace of God, desiring, if it were the will of God, “to depart, and to be with Christ.”

11. With this peace of God, wherever it is fixed in the soul, there is also “joy in the Holy Ghost;” joy wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost, by the ever-blessed Spirit of God. He it is that worketh in us that calm, humble rejoicing in God, through Christ Jesus, “by whom we have now received the atonement,” MCVCN: the reconciliation with God; and that enables us boldly to confirm the truth of the royal Psalmist’s declaration, “Blessed is the man” (or rather, happy) “whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.” He it is that inspires the Christian soul with that even, solid joy, which arises from the testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God; and that gives him to “rejoice with joy unspeakable, in hope of the glory of God;” hope both of the glorious image of God, which is in part and shall be fully “revealed in him;” and of that crown of glory which fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for him.

12. This holiness and happiness, joined in one, are sometimes styled, in the inspired writings, “the kingdom of God,” (as by our Lord in the text,) and sometimes, “the kingdom of heaven.” It is termed “the kingdom of God,” because it is the immediate fruit of God’s reigning in the soul. So soon as ever he takes unto himself his mighty power, and sets up his throne in our hearts, they are instantly filled with this “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” It is called “the kingdom of heaven” because it is (in a degree) heaven opened in the soul. For whosoever they are that experience this, they can aver before angels and men, Everlasting life is won, Glory is on earth begun, according to the constant tenor of Scripture, which everywhere bears record, God “hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son” (reigning in his heart) “hath life,” even life everlasting. (1 John 5:11, 12.) For “this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3.) And they, to whom this is given, may confidently address God, though they were in the midst of a fiery furnace,

Thee, Lord, safe shielded by thy power,
Thee, Son of God, JEHOVAH, we adore;
In form of man descending to appear:
To thee be ceaseless hallelujahs given,
Praise, as in heaven thy throne, we offer here;
For where thy presence is display’d, is heaven.

13. And this “kingdom of God,” or of heaven, “is at hand.” As these words were originally spoken, they implied that “the time” was then fulfilled, God being “made manifest in the flesh,” when he would set up his kingdom among men, and reign in the hearts of his people. And is not the time now fulfilled? For, “Lo! (saith he,) I am with you always,” you who preach remission of sins in my name, “even unto the end of the world.” (Matt. 28:20.) Wheresoever, therefore, the gospel of Christ is preached, this his “kingdom is nigh at hand.” It is not far from every one of you. Ye may this hour enter thereinto, if so be ye hearken to his voice, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

II.

1. This is the way: walk ye in it. And, First, “repent;” that is, know yourselves. This is the first repentance, previous to faith; even conviction, or self-knowledge. Awake, then, thou that sleepest.

Know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art. Know that corruption of thy inmost nature, whereby thou art very far gone from original righteousness, whereby “the flesh lusteth” always “contrary to the Spirit,” through that “carnal mind” which “is enmity against God,” which “is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Know that thou art corrupted in every power, in every faculty of thy soul; that thou art totally corrupted in every one of these, all the foundations being out of course. The eyes of thine understanding are darkened, so that they cannot discern God, or the things of God. The clouds of ignorance and error rest upon thee, and cover thee with the shadow of death. Thou knowest nothing yet as thou oughtest to know, neither God, nor the world, nor thyself. Thy will is no longer the will of God, but is utterly perverse and distorted, averse from
all good, from all which God loves, and prone to all evil, to every abomination which God hateth.

Thy affections are alienated from God, and scattered abroad over all the earth. All thy passions, both thy desires and aversions, thy joys and sorrows, thy hopes and fears, are out of frame, are either undue in their degree, or placed on undue objects. So that there is no soundness in thy soul; but “from the crown of the head, to the sole of the foot,” (to use the strong expression of the Prophet,) there are only “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.”

2. Such is the inbred corruption of thy heart, of thy very inmost nature. And what manner of branches canst thou expect to grow from such an evil root? Hence springs unbelief; ever departing from the living God; saying, “Who is the Lord, that I should serve him? Tush! Thou, God, carest not for it.” Hence independence; affecting to be like the Most High. Hence pride, in all its forms; teaching thee to say, “I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.” From this evil fountain flow forth the bitter streams of vanity, thirst of praise, ambition, covetousness, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. From this arise anger, hatred, malice, revenge, envy, jealousy, evil surmisings: From this, all the foolish and hurtful lusts that now “pierce thee through with many sorrows,” and if not timely prevented, will at length drown thy soul in everlasting perdition.

3. And what fruits can grow on such branches as these? Only such as are bitter and evil continually. Of pride cometh contention, vain boasting, seeking and receiving praise of men, and so robbing God of that glory which he cannot give unto another. Of the lust of the flesh, come gluttony or drunkenness, luxury or sensuality, fornication, uncleanness; variously defiling that body which was designed for a temple of the Holy Ghost: Of unbelief, every evil word and work. But the time would fail, shouldst thou reckon up all; all the idle words thou hast spoken, provoking the Most High, grieving the Holy One of Israel; all the evil works thou hast done, either wholly evil in themselves, or, at least, not done to the glory of God. For thy actual sins are more than thou art able to express, more than the hairs of thy head. Who can number the sands of the sea, or the drops of rain, or thy iniquities?

4. And knowest thou not that “the wages of sin is death?” -- death, not only temporal, but eternal. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die;” for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” It shall die the second death. This is the sentence, “to be punished” with never-ending death, “with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” Knowest thou not that every sinner, not properly, “is in danger of hell-fire” is far too weak; but rather, “is under the sentence of hell-fire;” doomed already, just dragging to execution. Thou art guilty of everlasting death. It is the just reward of thy inward and outward wickedness. It is just that the sentence should now take place. Dost thou see, dost thou feel this? Art thou thoroughly convinced that thou deservest God’s wrath, and everlasting damnation? Would God do thee no wrong, if he now commanded the earth to open, and swallow thee up? If thou wert now to go down quick into the pit, into the fire that never shall be quenched? If God hath given thee truly to repent, thou hast a deep sense that these things are so; and that it is of his mere mercy thou art not consumed, swept away from the face of the earth.

5. And what wilt thou do to appease the wrath of God, to atone for all thy sins, and to escape the punishment thou hast so justly deserved? Alas, thou canst do nothing; nothing that will in anywise make amends to God for one evil work, or word, or thought. If thou couldst now do all things well, if from this very hour, till thy soul should return to God thou couldst perform perfect, uninterrupted obedience, even this would not atone for what is past. The not increasing thy debt would not discharge it. It would still remain as great as ever. Yea, the present and future obedience of all the men upon earth, and all the angels in heaven, would never make satisfaction to the justice of God for one single sin. How vain, then, was the thought of atoning for thy own sins, by anything thou couldest do! It costeth far more to redeem one soul, than all mankind is able to pay. So that were there no other help for a guilty sinner, without doubt he must have perished everlastingly.

6. But suppose perfect obedience, for the time to come, could atone for the sins that are past, this would profit thee nothing; for thou art not able to perform it; no, not in any one point. Begin now: Make the trial. Shake off that outward sin that so easily besetteth thee. Thou canst not. How then wilt thou change thy life from all evil to all good? Indeed, it is impossible to be done, unless first thy heart be changed. For, so long as the tree remains evil, it cannot bring forth good fruit. But art thou able to change thy own heart, from all sin to all holiness? To
quicken a soul that is dead in sin, -- dead to God and alive only to the world? No more than thou art able to
quicken a dead body, to raise to life him that lieth in the grave. Yea, thou art not able to quicken thy soul in any
degree, no more than to give any degree of life to the dead body. Thou canst do nothing, more or less, in this
matter; thou art utterly without strength. To be deeply sensible of this, how helpless thou art, as well as how
guilty and how sinful, -- this is that “repentance not to be repented of,” which is the forerunner of the kingdom of
God.

7. If to this lively conviction of thy inward and outward sins, of thy utter guiltiness and helplessness, there be added
suitable affections, --sorrow of heart, for having despised thy own mercies, -- remorse, and self-condemnation,
having thy mouth stopped, -- shame to lift up thine eyes to heaven, -- fear of the wrath of God abiding on thee, of
his curse hanging over thy head, and of the fiery indignation ready to devour those who forget God, and obey not
our Lord Jesus Christ, - earnest desire to escape from that indignation, to cease from evil, and learn to do well; --
then I say unto thee, in the name of the Lord, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” One step more and
thou shalt enter in. Thou dost “repent.” Now, “believe the gospel.”

8. The gospel, (that is, good tidings, good news for guilty, helpless sinners,) in the largest sense of the word, means,
the whole revelation made to men by Jesus Christ; and sometimes the whole account of what our Lord did and
suffered while he tabernacled among men. The substance of all is, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save
sinners;” or, “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end we might not perish, but
have everlasting life;” or, “He was bruised for our transgressions, he was wounded for our iniquities; the
chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

9. Believe this, and the kingdom of God is thine. By faith thou attainest the promise. “He pardoneth and absolveth
all that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel.” As soon as ever God hath spoken to thy heart, “Be
of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee,” his kingdom comes: Thou hast “righteousness, and peace, and joy in
the Holy Ghost.”

10. Only beware thou do not deceive thy own soul with regard to the nature of this faith. It is not, as some have
fondly conceived, a bare assent to the truth of the Bible, of the articles of our creed, or of all that is contained in
the Old and New Testament. The devils believe this, as well as I or thou! And yet they are devils still. But it is,
over and above this, a sure trust in the mercy of God, through Christ Jesus. It is a confidence in a pardoning God.
It is a divine evidence or conviction that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to
them their” former “trespasses;” and, in particular, that the Son of God hath loved me, and given himself for me;
and that I, even I, am now reconciled to God by the blood of the cross.

11. Dost thou thus believe? Then the peace of God is in thy heart, and sorrow and sighing flee away. Thou art no
longer in doubt of the love of God; it is clear as the noon-day sun. Thou criest out, “My song shall be always of
the loving-kindness of the Lord: With my mouth will I ever be telling of thy truth, from one generation to
another.” Thou art no longer afraid of hell, or death, or him that had once the power of death, the devil; no, nor
painfully afraid of God himself; only thou hast a tender, filial fear of offending him. Dost thou believe? Then thy
“soul doth magnify the Lord,” and thy “spirit rejoiceth in God thy Saviour.” Thou rejoicest in that thou hast
“redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” Thou rejoicest in that “Spirit of adoption,” which
crieth in thy heart, “Abba, Father!” Thou rejoicest in a “hope full of immortality;” in reaching forth unto the
“mark of the prize of thy high calling;” in an earnest expectation of all the good things which God hath prepared
for them that love him.

12. Dost thou now believe? Then “the love of God is” now “shed abroad in thy heart.” Thou lovest him, because he
first loved us. And because thou lovest God, thou lovest thy brother also. And being filled with “love, peace,
joy,” thou art also filled with “long-suffering, gentleness, fidelity, goodness, meekness, temperance,” and all the
other fruits of the same Spirit; in a word, with whatever dispositions are holy, are heavenly or divine. For while
thou “beholdest with open,” uncovered “face” (the veil now being taken away) “the glory of the Lord,” his
glorious love, and the glorious image wherein thou wast created, thou art “changed into the same image, from
glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.”

13. This repentance, this faith, this peace, joy, love, this change from glory to glory, is what the wisdom of the
world has voted to be madness, mere enthusiasm, utter distraction. But thou, O man of God, regard them not; be
thou moved by none of these things. Thou knowest in whom thou hast believed. See that no man take thy crown. Whereunto thou hast already attained, hold fast, and follow, till thou attain all the great and precious promises. And thou who hast not yet known him, let not vain men make thee ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Be thou in nothing terrified by those who speak evil of the things which they know not. God will soon turn thy heaviness into joy. O let not thy hands hang down! Yet a little longer, and he will take away thy fears, and give thee the spirit of a sound mind. He is nigh “that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that rose again, who is even now at the right hand of God, making intercession” for thee.

“Now cast thyself on the Lamb of God, with all thy sins, how many soever they be; and “an entrance shall” now “be ministered unto thee, into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!”

John Wesley
SERMON 9
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE SPIRIT OF BONDAGE AND OF ADOPTION.

“There have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father.” Romans 8:15.

1. ST. PAUL here speaks to those who are the children of God by faith. “Ye,” saith he, who are indeed his children, have drank into his Spirit; “ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear;” “but, because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.” “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

2. The spirit of bondage and fear is widely distant from this loving Spirit of adoption: Those who are influenced only by slavish fear, cannot be termed “the sons of God;” yet some of them may be styled his servants, and are “not far from the kingdom of heaven.”

3. But it is to be feared, the bulk of mankind, yea, of what is called the Christian world, have not attained even this; but are still afar off, “neither is God in all their thoughts.” A few names may be found of those who love God; a few more there are that fear him; but the greater part have neither the fear of God before their eyes, nor the love of God in their hearts.

4. Perhaps most of you, who, by the mercy of God, now partake of a better spirit, may remember the time when ye were as they, when ye were under the same condemnation. But at first ye knew it not, though ye were wallowing daily in your sins and in your blood; till, in due time, ye “received the spirit of fear;” (ye received, for this also is the gift of God;) and afterwards, fear vanished away, and the Spirit of love filled your hearts.

5. One who is in the first state of mind, without fear of love, is in Scripture termed a “natural man:” One who is under the spirit of bondage and fear, is sometimes said to be “under the law:” (Although that expression more frequently signifies one who is under the Jewish dispensation, or who thinks himself obliged to observe all the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law:) But one who has exchanged the spirit of fear for the Spirit of love, is properly said to be “under grace.” Now, because it highly imports us to know what spirit we are of, I shall endeavour to point out distinctly, First, the state of a “natural man:” Secondly, that of one who is “under the law:” And Thirdly, of one who is “under grace.”

I.

1. And, First, the state of a natural man. This the Scripture represents as a state of sleep: The voice of God to him is, “Awake thou that sleepest.” For his soul is in a deep sleep: His spiritual senses are not awake; They discern neither spiritual good nor evil. The eyes of his understanding are closed; They are sealed together, and see not. Clouds and darkness continually rest upon them; for he lies in the valley of the shadow of death. Hence having no inlets for the knowledge of spiritual things, all the avenues of his soul being shut up, he is in gross, stupid
ignorance of whatever he is most concerned to know. He is utterly ignorant of God, knowing nothing concerning
him as he ought to know. He is totally a stranger to the law of God, as to its true, inward, spiritual meaning. He
has no conception of that evangelical holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; nor of the happiness
which they only find whose “life is hid with Christ in God.”

2. And for this very reason, because he is fast asleep, he is, in some sense, at rest. Because he is blind, he is also
secure; He saith, “Tush, there shall no harm happen unto me.” The darkness which covers him on every side,
keeps him in a kind of peace; so far as peace can consist with the works of the devil, and with an earthly, devilish
mind. He sees not that he stands on the edge of the pit, therefore he fears it not. He cannot tremble at the danger
he does not know. He has not understanding enough to fear. Why is it that he is in no dread of God? Because he
is totally ignorant of him: If not saying in his heart, “There is no God;” or, that “he sitteth on the circle of the
heavens, and humbleth” not “himself to behold the things which are done on earth;” yet satisfying himself as
well to all Epicurean intents and purposes, by saying, “God is merciful;” confounding and swallowing up all at
once in that unwieldy idea of mercy, all his holiness and essential hatred of sin; all his justice, wisdom, and truth.
He is in no dread of the vengeance denounced against those who obey not the blessed law of God, because he
understands it not. He imagines the main point is to do thus, to be outwardly blameless; and sees not that it
extends to every temper, desire, thought, motion of the heart. Or he fancies that the obligation hereto is ceased;
that Christ came to “destroy the Law and the Prophets;” to save his people in, not from their sins; to bring them
to heaven without holiness; - Notwithstanding his own words, “Not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away,
till all things are fulfilled;” and “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord! Shall enter into the kingdom of
heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

3. He is secure, because he is utterly ignorant of himself. Hence he talks of “repenting by and by;” he does not
indeed exactly know when, but some time or other before he dies; taking it for granted, that this is quite in his
own power. For what should hinder his doing it, if he will? If he does but once set a resolution, no fear but he
will make it good!

4. But this ignorance never so strongly glares, as in those who are termed, men of learning. If a natural man be one
of these, he can talk at large of his rational faculties, of the freedom of his will, and the absolute necessity of such
freedom, in order to constitute man a moral agent. He reads, and argues, and proves to a demonstration, that
every man may do as he will; may dispose his own heart to evil or good, as it seems best in his own eyes. Thus
the god of this world spreads a double veil of blindness over his heart, lest, by any means, “the light of the
glorious gospel of Christ should shine” upon it.

5. From the same ignorance of himself and God, there may sometimes arise, in the natural man, a kind of joy, in
congratulating himself upon his own wisdom and goodness: And what the world calls joy, he may often possess.
He may have pleasure in various kinds; either in gratifying the desires of the flesh, or the desire of the eye, or the
pride of life; particularly if he has large possessions; if he enjoy an affluent fortune; then he may “clothe” himself
“in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day.” And so long as he thus doeth well unto himself, men
will doubtless speak good of him. They will say, “He is a happy man.” For, indeed, this is the sum of worldly
happiness; to dress, and visit, and talk, and eat, and drink, and rise up to play.

6. It in not surprising, if one in such circumstances as these, dosed with the opiates of flattery and sin, should
imagine, among his other waking dreams, that he walks in great liberty. How easily may he persuade himself,
that he is at liberty from all vulgar errors, and from the prejudice of education; judging exactly right, and keeping
clear of all extremes. “I am free,” may he say, “from all the enthusiasm of weak and narrow souls; from
superstition, the disease of fools and cowards, always righteous over much; and from bigotry, continually
incident to those who have not a free and generous way of thinking.” And too sure it is, that he is altogether free
from the “wisdom which cometh from above,” from holiness, from the religion of the heart, from the whole
mind which was in Christ.

7. For all this time he is the servant of sin. He commits sin, more or less, day by day. Yet he is not troubled: He “is
in no bondage,” as some speak; he feels no condemnation. He contents himself (even though he should profess to
believe that the Christian Revelation is of God) with, “Man is frail.

We are all weak. Every man has his infirmity.” Perhaps he quotes Scripture: “Why, does not Solomon say, --
The righteous man falls into sin seven times a day! -- And, doubtless, they are all hypocrites or enthusiasts who pretend to be better than their neighbours.” If, at any time, a serious thought fix upon him, he stifles it as soon as possible, with, “Why should I fear, since God is merciful, and Christ died for sinners?” Thus, he remains a willing servant of sin, content with the bondage of corruption; inwardly and outwardly unholy, and satisfied therewith; not only not conquering sin, but not striving to conquer, particularly that sin which doth so easily beset him.

8. Such is the state of every natural man; whether he be a gross, scandalous transgressor, or a more reputable and decent sinner, having the form, though not the power of godliness. But how can such an one be convinced of sin? How is he brought to repent? To be under the law? To receive the spirit of bondage unto fear? This is the point which in next to be considered.

II.

1. By some awful providence, or by his word applied with the demonstration of his Spirit, God touches the heart of him that lay asleep in darkness and in the shadow of death. He is terribly shaken out of his sleep, and awakes into a consciousness of his danger. Perhaps in a moment, perhaps by degrees, the eyes of his understanding are opened, and now first (the veil being in part removed) discern the real state he is in. Horrid light breaks in upon his soul; such light, as may be conceived to gleam from the bottomless pit, from the lowest deep, from a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

He at last sees the loving, the merciful God is also “a consuming fire;” that he is a just God and a terrible, rendering to every man according to his words, entering into judgment with the ungodly for every idle word, yea, and for the imaginations of the heart. He now clearly perceives, that the great and holy God is “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;” that he is an avenger of every one who rebelleth against him, and repayeth the wicked to his face; and that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

2. The inward, spiritual meaning of the law of God now begins to glare upon him. He perceives “the commandment is exceeding broad,” and there is “nothing hid from the light thereof.” He is convinced, that every part of it relates, not barely to outward sin or obedience, but to what passes in the secret recesses of the soul, which no eye but God’s can penetrate. If he now hears, “Thou shalt not kill,” God speaks in thunder, “He that hateth his brother is a murderer;” “he that saith unto his brother, Thou fool, is obnoxious to hell-fire.” If the law say, “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” the voice of the Lord sounds in his ears, “He that looketh on a woman to lust after he hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” And thus, in every point, he feels the word of God “quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword.” It “pierces even to the dividing asunder of his soul and spirit, his joints and marrow.” And so much the more, because he is conscious to himself of having neglected so great salvation; of having “trodden under foot the son of God,” who would have saved him from his sins, and “counted the blood of the covenant an unholy,” a common, unsanctifying thing.

3. And as he knows, “all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do,” so he sees himself naked, stripped of all the fig-leaves which he had sewed together, of all his poor pretenses to religion or virtue, and his wretched excuses for sinning against God. He now sets himself like the ancient sacrifices, cleft in sunder, as it were, from the neck downward, so that all within him stands confessed. His heart is bare, and he sees it is all sin, “deceitful above all things, desperately wicked;” that it is altogether corrupt and abominable, more than it is possible for tongue to express; that there dwelleth therein no good thing, but unrighteousness and ungodliness only; every motion thereof, every temper and thought, being only evil continually.

4. And he not only sees, but feels in himself, by an emotion of soul which he cannot describe, that for the sins of his heart were his life without blame, (which yet it is not, and cannot be; seeing “an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.”) he deserves to be cast into the fire that never shall be quenched. He feels that “the wages,” the just reward “of sin,” of his sin above all, “is death;” even the second death; the death which dieth not; the destruction of body and soul in hell.

5. Here ends his pleasing dream, his delusive rest, his false peace, his vain security. His joy now vanishes as a cloud; pleasures, once loved, delight no more. They pall upon the taste: He loathes the nauseous sweet; he is weary to bear them. The shadows of happiness flee away, and sink into oblivion: So that he is stripped of all, and wanders to and fro, seeking rest, but finding none.
6. The fumes of those opiates being now dispelled, he feels the anguish of a wounded spirit. He finds that sin let loose upon the soul (whether it be pride, anger, or evil desire, whether self-will, malice, envy, revenge, or any other) is perfect misery: He feels sorrow of heart for the blessings he has lost, and the curse which is come upon him: remorse for having thus destroyed himself, and despised his own mercies; fear, from a lively sense of the wrath of God, and of the consequences of his wrath, of the punishment which he has justly deserved, and which he sees hanging over is head; -- fear of death, as being to him the gate of hell, the entrance of death eternal; -- fear of the devil, the executioner of the wrath and righteous vengeance of God; -- fear of men, who, if they were able to kill his body, would thereby plunge both body and soul into hell; fear, sometimes arising to such a height, that the poor, sinful, guilty soul, is terrified with everything, with nothing, with shades, with a leaf shaken of the wind. Yea, sometimes it may even border upon distraction, making a man “drunken though not with wine,” suspending the exercise of the memory, of the understanding, of all the natural faculties. Sometimes it may approach to the very brink of despair; so that he who trembles at the name of death, may yet be ready to plunge into it every moment, to “choose strangling rather than life.” Well may such a man roar, like him of old, for the very disquietness of his heart. Well may he cry out, “The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

7. Now he truly desires to break loose from sin, and begins to struggle with it. But though he strive with all his might, he cannot conquer: Sin is mightier than he. He would fain escape; but he is so fast in prison, that he cannot get forth. He resolved against sin, but yet sins on: He sees the snare, and abhors, and runs into it. So much does his boasted reason avail, -- only to enhance his guilt, and increase his misery! Such is the freedom of his will; free only to evil; free to “drink in iniquity like water;” to wander farther and farther from the living God, and do more “despite to the Spirit of grace!”

8. The more he strive, wishes, labours to be free, the more does he feel his chains, the grievous chains of sin, wherewith Satan binds and “leads him captive at his will;” his servant he is, though he repine ever so much; though he rebel, he cannot prevail. He is still in bondage and fear, by reason of sin: Generally, of some outward sin, to which he is peculiarly disposed, either, by nature, custom, or outward circumstance; but always, of some inward sin, some evil temper or unholy affection. And the more he frets against it, the more it prevails; he may bite but cannot break his chain. Thus he toils without end, repenting and sinning, and repenting and sinning again, till at length the poor, sinful, helpless wretch is even at his wit’s end and can barely groan, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

9. This whole struggle of one who is “under the law,” under the “spirit of fear and bondage,” is beautifully described by the Apostle in the foregoing chapter, speaking in the person of an awakened man. “I,” saith he, “was alive without the law once:” (Verse 9:) I had much life, wisdom, strength, and virtue; so I thought: “But, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died:” When the commandment, in its spiritual meaning, came to my heart, with the power of God, my inbred sin was stirred up, fretted, inflamed, and all my virtue died away. “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me:” (Verses 10,11:) It came upon me unaware; slew all my hopes; and plainly showed, in the midst of life I was in death. “Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good:” (Verse 12:) I no longer lay the blame on this, but on the corruption of my own heart. I acknowledge that “the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin:” (Verse 14:) I now see both the spiritual nature of the law; and my own carnal, devilish heart “sold under sin,” totally enslaved: (Like slave bought with money, who were absolutely at their master’s disposal:) “For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, I do not, but what I hate, that I do:” (Verse 15:) Such is the bondage under which I groan; such the tyranny of my hard master. “To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do:” (Verses 18, 19:) “I find a law,” an inward constraining power, “that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in “or consent to “the law of God, after the inward man:” (Verses 21, 22:) In my “mind;” (So the Apostle explains himself in the words that immediately follow; and so, QýGUYýCPVJTYRQL, the inward man, is understood in all other Greek writers:) “But I see another law in my members,” another constraining power, “warring against the law of my mind,” or inward man, “and bringing me into captivity to the law” or power “of sin:” (Verse 23:) Dragging me, as it were, at my conqueror’s chariot-wheels, into the very thing which my soul abhors. “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of this death?” (Verse 24.)

Who shall deliver me from this helpless, dying
life, from this bondage of sin and misery? Till this is done, “I myself” (or rather, that I, CWVQLýGIY, that man I am now personating) “with the mind,” or inward man, “serve the law of God;” my mind, my conscience is on God’s side; “but with my flesh,” with my body, “the law of sin,” (verse 25,) being hurried away by a force I cannot resist.

10. How lively a portraiture is this of one “under the law;” one who feels the burden he cannot shake off; who pants after liberty, power, and love, but is in fear and bondage still! Until the time that God answers the wretched man, crying out, “Who shall deliver me” from this bondage of sin, from this body of death? -- “The grace of God, through Jesus Christ thy Lord.”

III.

1. Them it is that this miserable bondage ends, and he is no more “under the law, but under grace.” This state we are, Thirdly, to consider; the state of one who has found grace or favour in the sight of God, even the Father, and who has the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, reigning in his heart; who has received, in the language of the Apostle, the “Spirit of adoption, whereby” he now cries, “Abba, Father!”

2. “He cried unto the Lord in his trouble, and God delivers him out of his distress.” His eyes are opened in quite another manner than before, even to see a loving, gracious God. While he is calling, “I beseech thee, show me thy glory!” -- he hears a voice in the inmost soul, “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord: I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.” And, it is not long before “the Lord” descends in the cloud, and proclaims the name of the Lord.” Then he sees, but not with eyes of flesh and blood, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquities, and transgressions and sin.”

3. Heavenly, healing light now breaks in upon his soul. He “looks on him whom he had pierced;” and “God, who out of darkness commanded light to shine, shineth in his heart.” He sees the light of the glorious love of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. He hath a divine “evidence of things not seen” by sense, even of the “deep things of God;” more particularly of the love of God, of his pardoning love to him that believes in Jesus. Overpowered with the sight, his whole soul cried out, “My Lord and my God:” For he sees all his iniquities laid on Him, who “bare them in his own body on the tree;” he beholds the Lamb of God taking away his sins. How clearly now does he discern, that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; making him sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him;” -- and that he himself is reconciled to God, by that blood of the covenant!

4. Here end both the guilt and power of sin. He can now say, “I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: And the life which I now live in the flesh,” (even in this mortal body,) “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Here end remorse, and sorrow of heart, and the anguish of a wounded spirit. “God turneth his heaviness into joy.” He made sore, and now his hands bind up. Here ends also that bondage unto fear; for “his heart standeth fast, believing in the Lord.” He cannot fear any longer the wrath of God; for he knows it is now turned away from him, and looks upon Him no more as an angry Judge, but as a loving Father. He cannot fear the devil, knowing he has “no power, except it be given him from above.” He fears not hell; being an heir of the kingdom of heaven: Consequently, he has no fear of death; by reason whereof he was in time past, for so many years, “subject to bondage.” Rather, knowing that “if the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, he hath a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; he groaneth earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with that house which is from heaven.” He groans to shake off this house of earth, that “mortality” may be “swallowed up of life;” knowing that God “hath wrought him for the self-same thing; who hath also given him the earnest of his Spirit.”

5. And “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;” liberty, not only from guilt and fear, but from sin, from that heaviest of all yokes, that basest of all bondage. His labour is not now in vain. The snare is broken, and he is delivered. He not only strives, but likewise prevails; he not only fights, but conquers also. “Henceforth he does not serve sin.” (Chap. 6:6 &c.) He is “dead unto sin, and alive unto God;” “sin doth not now reign,” even “in his mortal body,” nor doth he “obey it in the desires thereof.” He does not “yield his members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness unto God.”
For “being now made free from sin, he is become the servant of righteousness.”

6. Thus, “having peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ,” “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God,” and having power over all sin, over every evil desire, and temper, and word, and work, he is a living witness of the “glorious liberty of the sons of God;” all of whom, being partakers of like precious faith, bear record with one voice, “We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!”

7. It is this spirit which continually, “worketh in them, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” It is he that sheds the love of God abroad in their hearts, and the love of all mankind; thereby purifying their hearts from the love of world, from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It is by him they are delivered from anger and pride, from all vile and inordinate affections. In consequence, they are delivered from evil words and works, from all unholiness of conversation; doing no evil to any child of man, and being zealous of all good works.

8. To sum up all: the natural man neither fears nor loves God; one under the law, fears, -- one under grace, loves him. The first has no light in the things of God, but walks in utter darkness; the second sees the painful light of hell; the third, the joyous light of heaven. He that sleeps in death, has a false peace; he that is awakened, has no peace at all; he that believes, has true peace, -- the peace of God filling and ruling his heart. The Heathen, baptized or unbaptized, hath a fancied liberty, which is indeed licentiousness; the Jew, or one under the Jewish dispensation, is in heavy, grievous bondage; the Christian enjoys the true glorious liberty of the sons of God. An unawakened child of the devil sins willingly, one that is awakened sins unwillingly; a child of God “sinneth not,” but “keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not.” To conclude: the natural man neither conquers nor fights; the man under the law fights with sin, but cannot conquer; the man under grace fights and conquers, yea, is “more than conqueror, through him that loveth him.”

IV.

1. From this plain account of the three-fold state of man, the natural, the legal, and the evangelical, it appears that it is not sufficient to divide mankind into sincere and insincere. A man may be sincere in any of these states; not only when he has the “Spirit of adoption,” but while he has the “spirit of bondage unto fear;” yea, while he has neither this fear, nor love. For undoubtedly there may be sincere Heathens, as well as sincere Jews, or Christians. This circumstance, them does by no means prove, that, a man is in a state of acceptance with God.

“Examine yourselves, therefore,” not only whether ye are sincere, but “whether ye be in the faith.” Examine narrowly, (for it imports you much,) what is the ruling principle in your soul! Is it the love of God? Is it the fear of God? Or is it neither one nor the other? Is it not rather the love of the world? The love of pleasure, or gain? Of ease, or reputation? If so, you are not come so far as a Jew. You are but a Heathen still. Have you heaven in your heart? Have you the Spirit of adoption, ever crying, Abba, Father? Or do you cry unto God, as “out of the belly of hell,” overwhelmed with sorrow and fear? Or are you a stranger to this whole affair, and cannot imagine what I mean? Heathen, pull off the mask! Thou hast never put on Christ! Stand barefaced! Look up to heaven; and own before Him that liveth for ever and ever, thou hast no part, either among the sons of servants of God! Whosoever thou art: Dost thou commit sin, or dost thou not? If thou dost, is it willingly, or unwillingly? In either case, God hath told thee whose thou art: “He that committeth sin is of the devil.” If thou committest it willingly, thou art his faithful servant: He will not fail to reward thy labour. If unwillingly, still thou art his servant. God deliver thee out of his hands!

Art thou daily fighting against all sin? And daily more than conqueror? I acknowledge thee for a child of God. O stand fast in thy glorious liberty! Art thou fighting, but not conquering? Striving for the mastery, but not able to attain? Then thou art not yet a believer in Christ; but follow on, and thou shalt know the Lord. Art thou not fighting at all, but leading an easy, indolent, fashionable life! O how hast thou dared to name the name of Christ, only to make it a reproach among the Heathen? Awake, thou sleeper! Call upon thy God before the deep swallow thee up!

2. Perhaps one reason why so many think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, why they do not discern what state they are in, is because these several states of soul are often mingled together, and in some measure meet in one and the same person. Thus experience shows, that the legal state, or state of fear, is
frequently mixed with the natural; for few men are so fast asleep in sin, but they are sometimes more or less awakened. As the Spirit of God does not “wait for the call of man,” so, at some times he will be heard. He puts them in fear, so that, for a season at least, the Heathen “know themselves to be but men.” They feel the burden of sin, and earnestly desire to flee from the wrath to come. But not long: They seldom suffer the arrows of conviction to go deep into their souls; but quickly stifle the grace of God, and return to their wallowing in the mire.

In like manner, the evangelical state, or state of love, is frequently mixed with the legal. For few of those who have the spirit of bondage and fear, remain always without hope. The wise and gracious God rarely suffers this; “for he remembereth that we are but dust;” and he willeth not that “the flesh should fail before him, or the spirit which he hath made.” Therefore, at such times as he seeth good, he gives a dawning of light unto them that sit in darkness. He cause a part of his goodness to pass before them, and shows he is a “God that heareth the prayer.” They see the promise, which is by faith in Christ Jesus, though it be yet afar off; and hereby they are encouraged to “run with patience the race which is set before them.”

3. Another reason why many deceive themselves, is, because they do not consider how far a man may go, and yet be in a natural, or, at best, a legal state. A man may be of a compassionate and a benevolent temper; he may be affable, courteous, generous, friendly; he may have some degree of meekness, patience, temperance, and of many other moral virtues. He may feel many desires of shaking off all vice, and of attaining higher degrees of virtue. He may abstain from much evil; perhaps from all that is grossly contrary to justice, mercy, or truth. He may do much good, may feed the hungry, clothe the naked, relieve the widow and fatherless. He may attend public worship, use prayer in private, read many books of devotion; and yet, for all this, he may be a mere natural man, knowing neither himself nor God; equally a stranger to the spirit of fear and to that of love; having neither repented, nor believed the gospel.

But suppose there were added to all this a deep conviction of sin, with much fear of the wrath of God; vehement desires to cast off every sin, and to fulfill all righteousness; frequent rejoicing in hope, and touches of love often glancing upon the soul; yet neither do these prove a man to be under grace; to have true, living, Christian faith, unless the Spirit of adoption abide in his heart, unless he can continually cry, “Abba, Father!”

4. Beware, then, thou who art called by the name of Christ, that thou come not short of the mark of thy high calling. Beware thou rest, not, either in a natural state with too many that are accounted good Christians; or in a legal state, wherein those who are highly esteemed of men are generally content to live and die. Nay, but God hath prepared better things for thee, if thou follow on till thou attain. Thou art not called to fear and tremble like devils; but to rejoice and love, like the angels of God. “Thou shalt love the lord thy God will all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Thou shalt “pray without ceasing;” thou shalt “in everything give thanks.” Thou shalt do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. O prove thou “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God!” Now present thyself “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.” “Whereunto thou hast already attained, hold fast,” by “reaching forth unto those things which are before;” until “the God of peace make thee perfect in every good work, working in thee that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ: To whom be glory for ever and ever! Amen!”

John Wesley
SERMON 13

ON SIN IN BELIEVERS

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” 2 Cor. 5:17.

I.

1. Is there then sin in him that is in Christ? Does sin remain in one that believes in him? Is there any sin in them that
are born of God, or are they wholly delivered from it? Let no one imagine this to be a question of mere curiosity; or that it is of little importance whether it be determined one way or the other. Rather it is a point of the utmost moment to every serious Christian; the resolving of which very nearly concerns both his present and eternal happiness.

2. And yet I do not know that ever it was controverted in the primitive Church. Indeed there was no room for disputing concerning it, as all Christians were agreed. And so far as I have observed, the whole body of ancient Christians, who have left us anything in writing, declare with one voice, that even believers in Christ, till they are “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,” have need to “wrestle with flesh and blood,” with an evil nature, as well as “with principalities and powers.”

3. And herein our own Church (as indeed in most points) exactly copies after the primitive; declaring in her Ninth Article, “Original sin is the corruption of the nature of every man, whereby man is in his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek ἀθλεῖν εἰς τὴν φύσιν καὶ αἷμα, is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe, yet this lust hath of itself the nature of sin.”

4. The same testimony is given by all other Churches; not only by the Greek and Romish Church, but by every Reformed Church in Europe, of whatever denomination. Indeed some of these seem to carry the thing too far; so describing the corruption of heart in a believer, as scarce to allow that he has dominion over it, but rather is in bondage thereto; and, by this means, they leave hardly any distinction between a believer and an unbeliever.

5. To avoid this extreme, many well-meaning men, particularly those under the direction of the late Count Zinzendorf, ran into another; affirming, that “all true believers are not only saved from the dominion of sin, but from the being of inward as well as outward sin, so that it no longer remains in them:” And from them, about twenty years ago, many of our countrymen imbibed the same opinion, that even the corruption of nature is no more, in those who believe in Christ.

6. It is true that, when the Germans were pressed upon this head, they soon allowed, (many of them at least,) that “sin did still remain in the flesh, but not in the heart of a believer;” and, after a time, when the absurdity of this was shown, they fairly gave up the point; allowing that sin did still remain, though not reign, in him that is born of God.

7. But the English, who had received it from them, (some directly, some at second or third hand,) were not so easily prevailed upon to part with a favourite opinion: And even when the generality of them were convinced it was utterly indefensible, a few could not be persuaded to give it up, but maintain it to this day.

II.

1. For the sake of these who really fear God, and desire to know “the truth as it is in Jesus,” it may not be amiss to consider the point with calmness and impartiality. In doing this, I use indifferently the words, regenerate, justified, or believers; since, though they have not precisely the same meaning, (the First implying an inward, actual change, the Second a relative one, and the Third the means whereby both the one and the other are wrought,) yet they come to one and the same thing; as everyone that believes, is both justified and born of God.

2. By sin, I here understand inward sin; any sinful temper, passion, or affection; such as pride, self-will, love of the world, in any kind or degree; such as lust, anger, peevishness; any disposition contrary to the mind which was in Christ.

3. The question is not concerning outward sin; whether a child of God commits sin or no. We all agree and earnestly maintain, “He that committeth sin is of the devil.” We agree, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.” Neither do we now inquire whether inward sin will always remain in the children of God; whether sin will continue in the soul as long as it continues in the body: Nor yet do we inquire whether a justified person may relapse either into inward or outward sin; but simply this, Is a justified or regenerate man freed from all sin as soon as he is justified? Is there then no sin in his heart? -- nor ever after, unless he fall from grace?

4. We allow that the state of a justified person is inexpressibly great and glorious. He is born again, “not of blood, nor of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” He is a child of God, a member of Christ, an heir of the
kingdom of heaven. “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth his heart and mind in Christ Jesus.” His very body is a “temple of the Holy Ghost,” and an “habitation of God through the Spirit.” He is “created anew in Christ Jesus:” He is washed, he is sanctified. His heart is purified by faith; he is cleansed “from the corruption that is in the world;” “the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him.” And so long as he “walketh in love,” (which he may always do,) he worships God in spirit and in truth. He keepeth the commandments of God, and doeth those things that are pleasing in his sight; so exercising himself as to “have a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward man:” And he has power both over outward and inward sin, even from the moment he is justified.

III.

1. “But was he not then freed from all sin, so that there is no sin in his heart?” I cannot say this; I cannot believe it; because St. Paul says the contrary. He is speaking to believers, and describing the state of believers in general, when he says, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: These are contrary the one to the other.” (Gal. 5:17) Nothing can be more express. The Apostle here directly affirms that the flesh, evil nature, opposes the Spirit, even in believers; that even in the regenerate there are two principles, “contrary the one to the other.”

2. Again: When he writes to the believers at Corinth, to those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, (1 Cor. 1:2) he says, “I, brethren, could not speak unto you, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. Ye are yet carnal: For whereas there is among you envying and strife, are ye not carnal?” (1 Cor. 3:1-3) Now here the Apostle speaks unto those who were unquestionably believers, -- whom, in the same breath, he styles his brethren in Christ, -- as being still, in a measure, carnal. He affirms, there was envying, (an evil temper,) occasioning strife among them, and yet does not give the least intimation that they had lost their faith. Nay, he manifestly declares they had not; for then they would not have been babes in Christ. And (what is most remarkable of all) he speaks of being carnal, and babes in Christ, as one and the same thing; plainly showing that every believer is (in a degree) carnal, while he is only a babe in Christ.

3. Indeed this grand point, that there are two contrary principles in believers, -- nature and grace, the flesh and the Spirit, runs through all the Epistles of St. Paul, yea, through all the Holy Scriptures; almost all the directions and exhortations therein are founded on this supposition; pointing at wrong tempers or practices in those who are, notwithstanding, acknowledged by the inspired writers to be believers. And they are continually exhorted to fight with and conquer these, by the power of the faith which was in them.

4. And who can doubt, but there was faith in the angel of the church of Ephesus, when our Lord said to him, “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience: Thou hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted?” (Rev. 2:2-4.) But was there, meantime, no sin in his heart? Yea, or Christ would not have added, “Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.” This was real sin which God saw in his heart; of which, accordingly, he is exhorted to repent: And yet we have no authority to say, that even then he had no faith.

5. Nay, the angel of the church at Pergamos, also, is exhorted to repent, which implies sin, though our Lord expressly says, “Thou hast not denied my faith.” (Rev. 2:13, 16) And to the angel of the church in Sardis, he says, “Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.” The good which remained was ready to die; but was not actually dead. (Rev. 3:2) So there was still a spark of faith even in him; which he is accordingly commanded to hold fast. (Rev. 3:3.)

6. Once more: When the Apostle exhorts believers to “cleanse themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” (2 Cor. 7:1,) he plainly teaches, that those believers were not yet cleansed therefrom.

Will you answer, “He that abstains from all appearance of evil, does ipso facto cleanse himself from all filthiness?” Not in any wise. For instance: A man reviles me: I feel resentment, which is filthiness of spirit; yet I say not a word. Here I “abstain from all appearance of evil;” but this does not cleanse me from that filthiness of spirit, as I experience to my sorrow.

7. And as this position, “There is no sin in a believer, no carnal mind, no bent to backsliding,” is thus contrary to the word of God, so it is to the experience of his children. These continually feel an heart bent to backsliding; a
natural tendency to evil; a proneness to depart from God, and cleave to the things of earth. They are daily sensible of sin remaining in their heart, -- pride, self-will, unbelief; and of sin cleaving to all they speak and do, even their best actions and holiest duties. Yet at the same time they “know that they are of God;” they cannot doubt of it for a moment. They feel his

Spirit clearly “witnessing with their spirit, that they are the children of God.” They “rejoice in God through Christ Jesus, by whom they have now received the atonement.” So that they are equally assured, that sin is in them, and that “Christ is in them the hope of glory.”

8. “But can Christ be in the same heart where sin is?” Undoubtedly he can; otherwise it never could be saved therefrom. Where the sickness is, there is the Physician, Carrying on his work within, Striving till he cast out sin. Christ indeed cannot reign, where sin reigns; neither will he dwell where any sin is allowed. But he is and dwells in the heart of every believer, who is fighting against all sin; although it be not yet purified, according to the purification of the sanctuary.

9. It has been observed before, that the opposite doctrine, -- That there is no sin in believers, - is quite new in the church of Christ; that it was never heard of for seventeen hundred years; never till it was discovered by Count Zinzendorf. I do not remember to have seen the least intimation of it, either in any ancient or modern writer; unless perhaps in some of the wild, ranting Antinomians.

And these likewise say and unsay, acknowledging there is sin in their flesh, although no sin in their heart. But whatever doctrine is new must be wrong; for the old religion is the only true one; and no doctrine can be right, unless it is the very same “which was from the beginning.”

10. One argument more against this new, unscriptural doctrine may be drawn from the dreadful consequences of it. One says, “I felt anger to-day.” Must I reply, “Then you have no faith?” Another says, “I know what you advise is good, but my will is quite averse to it.” Must I tell him, “Then you are an unbeliever, under the wrath and the curse of God?” What will be the natural consequence of this? Why, if he believe what I say, his soul will not only be grieved and wounded, but perhaps utterly destroyed; inasmuch as he will “cast away” that “confidence which hath great recompense of reward:” And having cast away his shield, how shall he “quench the fiery darts of the wicked one?” How shall he overcome the world? -- seeing “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” He stands disarmed in the midst of his enemies, open to all their assaults. What wonder then, if he be utterly overthrown; if they take him captive at their will; yea, if he fall from one wickedness to another, and never see good any more? I cannot, therefore, by any means receive this assertion, that there is no sin in a believer from the moment he is justified; First, because it is contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture; -- Secondly, because it is contrary to the experience of the children of God; -- Thirdly, because it is absolutely new, never heard of in the world till yesterday; -- and Lastly, because it is naturally attended with the most fatal consequences; not only grieving those whom God hath not grieved, but perhaps dragging them into everlasting perdition.

IV.

1. However, let us give a fair hearing to the chief arguments of those who endeavour to support it. And it is, First, from Scripture they attempt to prove that there is no sin in a believer. They argue thus: “The Scripture says, Every believer is born of God, is clean, is holy, is sanctified, is pure in heart, has a new heart, is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Now, as ‘that which is born of the flesh is flesh,’ is altogether evil, so ‘that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,’ is altogether good. Again: A man cannot be clean, sanctified, holy, and at the same time unclean, unsanctified, unholy. He cannot be pure and impure, or have a new and an old heart together. Neither can his soul be unholy, while it is a temple of the Holy Ghost.

I have put this objection as strong as possible, that its full weight may appear. Let us now examine it, part by part. And, 1. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, is altogether good.” I allow the text, but not the comment. For the text affirms this, and no more, -- that every man who is “born of the Spirit,” is a spiritual man. He is so: But so he may be, and yet not be altogether spiritual. The Christians at Corinth were spiritual men; else they had been no Christians at all; and yet they were not altogether spiritual: they were still, in part, carnal. -- “But they were fallen from grace.” St. Paul says, No. They were even then babes in Christ. 2. “But a man cannot be clean,
sanctified, holy, and at the same time unclean, unsanctified, unholy.” Indeed he may. So the Corinthians were.

“Ye are washed,” says the Apostle, “ye are sanctified;” namely, cleansed from “fornication, idolatry, drunkenness,” and all other outward sin; (1 Cor. 6:9, 10, 11;) and yet at the same time, in another sense of the word, they were unsanctified; they were not washed, not inwardly cleansed from envy, evil surmising, partiality. 

-- “But sure, they had not a new heart and an old heart together.” It is most sure they had, for at that very time, their hearts were truly, yet not entirely, renewed. Their carnal mind was nailed to the cross; yet it was not wholly destroyed. -- “But could they be unholy while they were ‘temples of the Holy Ghost?’” Yes; that they were temples of the Holy Ghost, is certain; (1 Cor. 6:19;) and it is equally certain, they were, in some degree, carnal, that is, unholy.

2. "However, there is one Scripture more which will put the matter out of question: 'If any man be’ a believer ‘in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.’ (2 Cor. 5:17.) Now certainly a man cannot be a new creature and an old creature at once.” Yes, he may: He may be partly renewed, which was the very case with those at Corinth. They were doubtless “renewed in the spirit of their mind,” or they could not have been so much as “babes in Christ.” yet they had not the whole mind which was in Christ, for they envied one another. “But it is said expressly, ‘Old things are passed away: All things are become new.’” But we must not so interpret the Apostle’s words, as to make him contradict himself. And if we will make him consistent with himself, the plain meaning of the words is this: His old judgment concerning justification, holiness, happiness, indeed concerning the things of God in general, is now passed away; so are his old desires, designs, affections, tempers, and conversation. All these are undeniably become new, greatly changed from what they were; and yet, though they are new, they are not wholly new. Still he feels, to his sorrow and shame, remains of the old man, too manifest taints of his former tempers and affections, though they cannot gain any advantage over him, as long as he watches unto prayer.

3. This whole argument, “If he is clean, he is clean;” “If he is holy, he is holy;” (and twenty more expressions of the same kind may easily be heaped together;) is really no better than playing upon words: It is the fallacy of arguing from a particular to a general; of inferring a general conclusion from particular premises. Propose the sentence entire, and it runs thus: “If he is holy at all, he is holy altogether.” That does not follow: Every babe in Christ is holy, and yet not altogether so. He is saved from sin; yet not entirely: It remains, though it does not reign. If you think it does not remain, (in babes at least, whatever be the case with young men, or fathers) you certainly have not considered the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the law of God; (even the law of love, laid down by St. Paul in the thirteenth of Corinthians;) and that every CPQOKC, disconformity to, or deviation from, this law is sin. Now, is there no disconformity to this in the heart or life of a believer? What may be in an adult Christian, is another question; but what a stranger must he be to human nature, who can possibly imagine, that this is the case with every babe in Christ!

4. "But believers walk after the Spirit, [What follows for some pages is an answer to a paper, published in the Christian Magazine, p. 577-582. I am surprised Mr. Dodd should give such a paper a place in his Magazine, which is directly contrary to our Ninth Article. -- Editor] (Rom. 8:1,) and the Spirit of God dwells in them; consequently, they are delivered from the guilt, the power, or, in one word, the being of sin.”

These are coupled together, as if they were the same thing. But they are not the same thing. The guilt is one thing, the power another, and the being yet another. That believers are delivered from the guilt and power of sin we allow; that they are delivered from the being of it we deny. Nor does it in any wise follow from these texts. A man may have the Spirit of God dwelling in him, and may “walk after the Spirit,” though he still feels “the flesh lusting against the Spirit.”

5. "But the ‘church is the body of Christ;’ (Col. 1:24;) this implies, that its members are washed from all filthiness; otherwise it will follow, that Christ and Belial are incorporated with each other.” Nay, it will not follow from hence, “Those who are the mystical body of Christ, still feel the flesh lusting against the Spirit,” that Christ has any fellowship with the devil; or with that sin which he enables them to resist and overcome.

6. "But are not Christians ‘come to the heavenly Jerusalem,’ where ‘nothing defiled can enter?’” (Heb. 12:22.) Yes; “and to an innumerous company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect:” That is, Earth and heaven all agree;
All is one great family. And they are likewise holy and undefiled, while they “walk after the Spirit;” although sensible there is another principle in them, and that “these are contrary to each other.”

7. "But Christians are reconciled to God. Now this could not be, if any of the carnal mind remained; for this is enmity against God: Consequently, no reconciliation can be effected, but by its total destruction.”

We are “reconciled to God through the blood of the cross:” And in that moment the HTQPGOCÝ UCTMQL, the corruption of nature, which is enmity with God, is put under our feet; the flesh has no more dominion over us. But it still exists; and it is still in its nature enmity with God, lusting against his Spirit.

8. "But `they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts.’” (Gal. 5:24.) They have so; yet it remains in them still, and often struggles to break from the cross. “Nay, but they have `put off the old man with his deeds.’” (Col. 3:9.) They have; and, in the sense above described, “old things are passed away; all things are become new.” A hundred texts may be cited to the same effect; and they will all admit of the same answer. -- “But, to say all in one word, `Christ gave himself for the Church, that it might be holy and without blemish.’” (Eph. 5:25, 27.) And so it will be in the end: But it never was yet, from the beginning to this day.

9. "But let experience speak: All who are justified do at that time find an absolute freedom from all sin.” That I doubt; But, if they do, do they find it ever after? Else you gain nothing. -- “If they do not, it is their own fault.” That remains to be proved.

10. “But, in the very nature of things, can a man have pride in him, and not be proud; anger, and yet not be angry?”

A man may have pride in him, may think of himself in some particulars above what he ought to think, (and so be proud in that particular,) and yet not be a proud man in his general character. He may have anger in him, yea, and a strong propensity to furious anger, without giving way to it. - “But can anger and pride be in that heart, where only meekness and humility are felt?” No; but some pride and anger may be in that heart, where there is much humility and meekness.

“It avails not to say, These tempers are there, but they do not reign: For sin cannot, in any kind or degree, exist where it does not reign; for guilt and power are essential properties of sin. Therefore, where one of them is, all must be.”

Strange indeed! “Sin cannot, in any kind or degree, exist where it does not reign?” Absolutely contrary this to all experience, all Scripture, all common sense. Resentment of an affront is sin; it is CPQOKC, disconformity to the law of love. This has existed in me a thousand times. Yet it did not, and does not, reign. -- “But guilt and power are essential properties of sin; therefore where one is, all must be.” No: In the instance before us, if the resentment I feel is not yielded to, even for a moment, there is no guilt at all, no condemnation from God upon that account. And in this case, it has no power: though it “lusteth against the Spirit,” it cannot prevail. Here, therefore, as in ten thousand instances, there is sin without either guilt or power.

11. “But the supposing sin in a believer is pregnant with everything frightful and discouraging.

It implies the contending with a power that has the possession of our strength; maintains his usurpation of our hearts; and there prosecutes the war in defiance of our Redeemer.” Not so: The supposing sin is in us, does not imply that it has the possession of our strength; no more than a man crucified has the possession of those that crucify him. As little does it imply, that “sin maintains its usurpation of our hearts.” The usurper is dethroned. He remains indeed where he once reigned; but remains in chains. So that he does, in some sense, “prosecute the war,” yet he grows weaker and weaker; while the believer goes on from strength to strength, conquering and to conquer.

12. “I am not satisfied yet: He that has sin in him, is a slave to sin. Therefore you suppose a man to be justified, while he is a slave to sin. Now, if you allow men may be justified while they have pride, anger, or unbelief in them; may, if you aver, these are (at least for a time) in all that are justified; what wonder that we have so many proud, angry, unbelieving believers!

I do not suppose any man who is justified is a slave to sin: Yet I do suppose sin remains (at least for a time) in all that are justified.
“But, if sin remains in a believer, he is a sinful man: If pride, for instance, then he is proud; if self-will, then he is self-willed; if unbelief, then he is an unbeliever; consequently, no believer at all.

How then does he differ from unbelievers, from unregenerate men?” This is still mere playing upon words. It means no more than, if there is sin, pride, self-will in him, then – there is sin, pride, self-will. And this nobody can deny. In that sense then he is proud, or self-willed. But he is not proud or self-willed in the same sense that unbelievers are; that is, governed by pride or self-will. Herein he differs from unregenerate men. They obey sin; he does not. Flesh is in them both. But they “walk after the flesh;” he “walks after the Spirit.”

“But how can unbelief be in a believer?” That word has two meanings. It means either no faith, or little faith; either the absence of faith or the weakness of it. In the former sense, unbelief is not in a believer; in the latter, it is in all babes. Their faith is commonly mixed with doubt or fear; that is, in the latter sense, with unbelief. “Why are ye fearful,” says our Lord, “O ye of little faith?” Again: “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” You see here was unbelief in believers; little faith and much unbelief.

13. “But this doctrine, that sin remains in a believer; that a man may be in the favour of God, while he has sin in his heart; certainly tends to encourage men in sin.” Understand the proposition right, and no such consequence follows. A man may be in God’s favour though he feel sin; but not if he yields to it. Having sin does not forfeit the favour of God; giving way to sin does. Though the flesh in you “lust against the Spirit,” you may still be a child of God; but if you “walk after the flesh,” you are a child of the devil. Now this doctrine does not encourage to obey sin, but to resist it with all our might.

V.

1. The sum of all is this: There are in every person, even after he is justified, two contrary principles, nature and grace, termed by St. Paul the flesh and the Spirit. Hence, although even babes in Christ are sanctified, yet it is only in part. In a degree, according to the measure of their faith, they are spiritual; yet, in a degree they are carnal. Accordingly, believers are continually exhorted to watch against the flesh, as well as the world and the devil. And to this agrees the constant experience of the children of God. While they feel this witness in themselves, they feel a will not wholly resigned to the will of God. They know they are in him; and yet find an heart ready to depart from him, a proneness to evil in many instances, and a backwardness to that which is good. The contrary doctrine is wholly new; never heard of in the church of Christ, from the time of his coming into the world, till the time of Count Zinzendorf; and it is attended with the most fatal consequences. It cuts off all watching against our evil nature, against the Delilah which we are told is gone, though she is still lying in our bosom. It tears away the shield of weak believers, deprives them of their faith and so leaves them exposed to all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

2. Let us, therefore, hold fast the sound doctrine “once delivered to the saints,” and delivered down by them with the written word to all succeeding generations: That although we are renewed, cleansed, purified, sanctified, the moment we truly believe in Christ, yet we are not then renewed, cleansed, purified altogether; but the flesh, the evil nature, still remains (though subdued) and wars against the Spirit. So much the more let us use all diligence in “fighting the good fight of faith.” So much the more earnestly let us “watch and pray” against the enemy within. The more carefully let us take to ourselves, and “put on, the whole armor of God;” that, although “we wrestle” both “with flesh, and blood, and with the principalities, and with powers, and wicked spirits in high places,” we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

John Wesley
SERMON 14

THE REPENTANCE OF BELIEVERS

“Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Mark 1:15.

1. It is generally supposed, that repentance and faith are only the gate of religion; that they are necessary only at the
beginning of our Christian course, when we are setting out in the way to the kingdom. And this may seem to be confirmed by the great Apostle, where, exhorting the Hebrew Christians to “go on to perfection,” he teaches them to leave these first “principles of the doctrine of Christ;” “not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith towards God;” which must at least mean, that they should comparatively leave these, that at first took up all their thoughts, in order to “press forward toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

2. And this is undoubtedly true, that there is a repentance and a faith, which are, more especially, necessary at the beginning: a repentance, which is a conviction of our utter sinfulness, and guiltiness, and helplessness; and which precedes our receiving that kingdom of God, which, our Lord observes, is “within us;” and a faith, whereby we receive that kingdom, even “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

3. But, notwithstanding this, there is also a repentance and a faith (taking the words in another sense, a sense not quite the same, nor yet entirely different) which are requisite after we have “believed the gospel;” yea, and in every subsequent stage of our Christian course, or we cannot “run the race which is set before us.” And this repentance and faith are full as necessary, in order to our continuance and growth in grace, as the former faith and repentance were, in order to our entering into the kingdom of God.

But in what sense are we to repent and believe, after we are justified? This is an important question, and worthy of being considered with the utmost attention.

I. And, First, in what sense are we to repent?

1. Repentance frequently means an inward change, a change of mind from sin to holiness. But we now speak of it in a quite different sense, as it is one kind of self-knowledge, the knowing ourselves sinners, yea, guilty, helpless sinners, even though we know we are children of God.

2. Indeed when we first know this; when we first find the redemption in the blood of Jesus; when the love of God is first shed abroad in our hearts, and his kingdom set up therein; it is natural to suppose that we are no longer sinners, that all our sins are not only covered but destroyed. As we do not then feel any evil in our hearts, we readily imagine none is there. Nay, some well-meaning men have imagined this not only at that time, but ever after; having persuaded themselves, that when they were justified, they were entirely sanctified: yea, they have laid it down as a general rule, in spite of Scripture, reason, and experience. These sincerely believe, and earnestly maintain, that all sin is destroyed when we are justified; and that there is no sin in the heart of a believer; but that it is altogether clean from that moment. But though we readily acknowledge, “he that believeth is born of God,” and “he that is born of God doth not commit sin;” yet we cannot allow that he does not feel it from within: it does not reign, but it does remain. And a conviction of the sin which remains in our heart, is one great branch of the repentance we are now speaking of.

3. For it is seldom long before he who imagined all sin was gone, feels there is still pride in his heart. He is convinced both that in many respects he has thought of himself more highly than he ought to think, and that he has taken to himself the praise of something he had received, and gloried in it as though he had not received it; and yet he knows he is in the favour of God. He cannot, and ought not to, “cast away his confidence.” “The Spirit” still “witnesses with” his “spirit, that he is a child of God.”

4. Nor is it long before he feels self-will in his heart; even a will contrary to the will of God. A will every man must inevitably have, as long as he has an understanding. This is an essential part of human nature, indeed of the nature of every intelligent being. Our blessed Lord himself had a will as a man; otherwise he had not been a man. But his human will was invariably subject to the will of his Father. At all times, and on all occasions, even in the deepest affliction, he could say, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” But this is not the case at all times, even with a true believer in Christ. He frequently finds his will more or less exalting itself against the will of God. He wills something, because it is pleasing to nature, which is not pleasing to God; and he nills (is averse from) something, because it is painful to nature, which is the will of God concerning him. Indeed, suppose he continues in the faith, he fights against it with all his might: but this very thing implies that it really exists, and that he is conscious of it.

5. Now self-will, as well as pride, is a species of idolatry and both are directly contrary to the love of God. The
same observation may be made concerning the love of the world. But this likewise even true believers are liable
to feel in themselves; and every one of them does feel it, more or less, sooner or later, in one branch or another. It
is true, when he first “passes from death unto life,” he desires nothing more but God. He can truly say, “All my
desire is unto Thee, and unto the remembrance of Thy name;” “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is
none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.” But it is not so always. In process of time he will feel again, though
perhaps only for a few moments, either “the desire of the flesh,” or “the desire of the eye,” or “the pride of life.”
Nay, if he does not continually watch and pray, he may find lust reviving; yea, and thrusting sore at him that he
may fall, till he has scarce any strength left in him. He may feel the assaults of inordinate affection; yea, a strong
propensity to “love the creature more than the Creator;” whether it be a child, a parent, a husband, or wife, or
“the friend that is as his own soul.” He may feel, in a thousand various ways, a desire of earthly things or
pleasures. In the same proportion he will forget God, not seeking his happiness in him, and consequently being a
“lover of pleasure more than a lover of God.”

6. If he does not keep himself every moment, he will again feel the desire of the eye; the desire of gratifying his
imagination with something great, or beautiful, or uncommon. In how many ways does this desire assault the
soul! Perhaps with regard to the poorest trifles, such as dress, or furniture; things never designed to satisfy the
appetite of an immortal spirit. Yet, how natural is it for us, even after we have “tasted of the powers of the world
to come,” to sink again into these foolish, low desires of things that perish in the using! How hard is it, even for
those who know in whom they have believed, to conquer but one branch of the desire of the eye, curiosity;
constantly to trample it under their feet; to desire nothing merely because it is new!

7. And how hard is it even for the children of God wholly to conquer the pride of life! St. John seems to mean by
this nearly the same with what the world terms “the sense of honour.” This is no other than a desire of, and
delight in, “the honour that cometh of men;” a desire and love of praise; and, which is always joined with it, a
proportionable fear of dispraise. Nearly allied to this is evil shame; the being ashamed of that wherein we ought
to glory. And this is seldom divided from the fear of man, which brings a thousand snares upon the soul. Now
where is he, even among those that seem strong in the faith, who does not find in himself a degree of all these
evil tempers? So that even these are but in part “crucified to the world;” for the evil root still remains in their
heart.

8. And do we not feel other tempers, which are as contrary to the love of our neighbour as these are to the love of
God? The love of our neighbour “thinketh no evil.” Do not we find anything of the kind? Do we never find any
jealousies, any evil surmisings, any groundless or unreasonable suspicions? He that is clear in these respects, let
him cast the first stone at his neighbour. Who does not sometimes feel other tempers or inward motions, which
he knows are contrary to brotherly love? If nothing of malice, hatred, or bitterness, is there no touch of envy;
particularly toward those who enjoy some real or supposed good, which we desire, but cannot attain? Do we
never find any degree of resentment, when we are injured or affronted; especially by those whom we peculiarly
loved, and whom we had most labored to help or oblige? Does injustice or ingratitude never excite in us any
desire of revenge? Any desire of returning evil for evil, instead of “overcoming evil with good?” This also
shows, how much is still in our heart, which is contrary to the love of our neighbour.

9. Covetousness, in every kind and degree, is certainly as contrary to this as to the love of God; whether, )KNCTI
[TK, the love of money, which is too frequently “the root of all evil;” or RNGQPGZKC, literally, a desire of
having more, or increasing in substance. And how few, even of the real children of God, are entirely free from
both! Indeed one great man, Martin Luther, used to say, he “never had any covetousness in him” (not only in his
converted state, but) “ever since he was born.” But, if so, I would not scruple to say, he was the only man born of
a woman (except him that was God as well as man,) who had not, who was born without it. Nay, I believe, never
was any one born of God, that lived any considerable time after, who did not feel more or less of it many times,
especially in the latter sense. We may therefore set it down as an undoubted truth, that covetousness, together
with pride, and self-will, and anger, remain in the hearts even of them that are justified.

10. It is their experiencing this, which has inclined so many serious persons to understand the latter part of the
seventh chapter to the Romans, not of them that are “under the law,” that are convinced of sin, which is
undoubtedly the meaning of the Apostle, but of them that are “under grace;” that are “justified freely through the
redemption that is in Christ.” And it is most certain, they are thus far right, -- there does still remain, even in
them that are justified, a mind which is in some measure carnal (so the Apostle tells even the believers at Corinth, “Ye are carnal;”) an heart bent to backsliding, still ever ready to “depart from the living God;” a propensity to pride, self-will, anger, revenge, love of the world, yea, and all evil: a root of bitterness, which, if the restraint were taken off for a moment, would instantly spring up; yea, such a depth of corruption, as, without clear light from God, we cannot possibly conceive. And a conviction of all this sin remaining in their hearts is the repentance which belongs to them that are justified.

11. But we should likewise be convinced, that as sin remains in our hearts, so it cleaves to all our words and actions. Indeed it is to be feared, that many of our words are more than mixed with sin; that they are sinful altogether; for such undoubtedly is all uncharitable conversation; all which does not spring from brotherly love; all which does not agree with that golden rule, “What ye would that others should do to you, even so do unto them.” Of this kind is all backbiting, all tale-bearing, all whispering, all evil-speaking, that is, repeating the faults of absent persons; for none would have others repeat his faults when he is absent. Now how few are there, even among believers, who are in no degree guilty of this; who steadfastly observe the good old rule, “Of the dead and the absent, nothing but good!” And suppose they do, do they likewise abstain from unprofitable conversation? Yet all this is unquestionably sinful, and “grieves the Holy Spirit of God.” Yea, and “for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account in the day of judgment.”

12. But let it be supposed, that they continually “watch and pray,” and so do “not enter into” this “temptation;” that they constantly set a watch before their mouth, and keep the door of their lips; suppose they exercise themselves herein, that all their “conversation may be in grace, seasoned with salt, and meet to minister grace to the hearers:” yet do they not daily slide into useless discourse, notwithstanding all their caution? And even when they endeavour to speak for God, are their words pure, free from unholy mixtures? Do they find nothing wrong in their very intention? Do they speak merely to please God, and not partly to please themselves? Is it wholly to do the will of God, and not their own will also? Or, if they begin with a single eye, do they go on “looking unto Jesus,” and talking with him all the time they are talking with their neighbour? When they are reproving sin, do they feel no anger or unkind temper to the sinner? When they are instructing the ignorant, do they not find any pride, any self-preference? When they are comforting the afflicted, or provoking one another to love and to good works, do they never perceive any inward self-commendation: “Now you have spoken well?” Or any vanity – a desire that others should think so, and esteem them on the account? In some or all of these respects, how much sin cleaves to the best conversation even of believers! The conviction of which is another branch of the repentance which belongs to them that are justified.

13. And how much sin, if their conscience is thoroughly awake, may they find cleaving to their actions also! Nay, are there not many of these, which, though they are such as the world would not condemn, yet cannot be commended, no, nor excused, if we judge by the Word of God? Are there not many of their actions which, they themselves know, are not to the glory of God? Many, wherein they did not even aim at this; which were not undertaken with an eye to God? And of those that were, are there not many, wherein their eye is not singly fixed on God – wherein they are doing their own will, at least as much as his; and seeking to please themselves as much, if not more, than to please God? -- And while they are endeavouring to do good to their neighbour, do they not feel wrong tempers of various kinds? Hence their good actions, so called, are far from being strictly such; being polluted with such a mixture of evil: such are their works of mercy. And is there not the same mixture in their works of piety? While they are hearing the word which is able to save their souls, do they not frequently find such thoughts as make them afraid lest it should turn to their condemnation, rather than their salvation? Is it not often the same case, while they are endeavouring to offer up their prayers to God, whether in public or private? Nay, while they are engaged in the most solemn service, even while they are at the table of the Lord, what manner of thoughts arise in them! Are not their hearts sometimes wandering to the ends of the earth; sometimes filled with such imaginations, as make them fear lest all their sacrifice should be an abomination to the Lord? So that they are now more ashamed of their best duties, than they were once of their worst sins.

14. Again: How many sins of omission are they chargeable with! We know the words of the Apostle: “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” But do they not know a thousand instances, wherein they might have done good, to enemies, to strangers, to their brethren, either with regard to their bodies or their souls, and did it not? How many omissions have they been guilty of, in their duty toward God! How many
opportunities of communicating, of hearing his word, of public or private prayer, have they neglected! So great reason had even that holy man, Archbishop Usher, after all his labours for God, to cry out, almost with his dying breath, “Lord, forgive me my sins of omission!”

15. But besides these outward omissions, may they not find in themselves inward defects without number? Defects of every kind: they have not the love, the fear, the confidence they ought to have, toward God. They have not the love which is due to their neighbour, to every child of man; no, nor even that which is due to their brethren, to every child of God, whether those that are at a distance from them, or those with whom they are immediately connected. They have no holy temper in the degree they ought; they are defective in everything, – in a deep consciousness of which they are ready to cry out, with M. De Renty, “I am a ground all overrun with thorns;” or, with Job, “I am vile: I abhor myself, and repent as in dust and ashes.”

16. A conviction of their guiltiness is another branch of that repentance which belongs to the children of God. But this is cautiously to be understood, and in a peculiar sense. For it is certain, “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,” that believe in him, and, in the power of that faith, “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Yet can they no more bear the strict justice of God now, than before they believed. This pronounces them to be still worthy of death, on all the preceding accounts. And it would absolutely condemn them thereto, were it not for the atoning blood. Therefore they are thoroughly convinced, that they still deserve punishment, although it is hereby turned aside from them. But here there are extremes on one hand and on the other, and few steer clear of them. Most men strike on one or the other, either thinking themselves condemned when they are not, or thinking they deserve to be acquitted. Nay, the truth lies between: they still deserve, strictly speaking only the damnation of hell. But what they deserve does not come upon them, because they “have an Advocate with the Father.” His life, and death, and intercession still interpose between them and condemnation.

17. A conviction of their utter helplessness is yet another branch of this repentance. I mean hereby two things: first, that they are no more able now of themselves to think one good thought, to form one good desire, to speak one good word, or do one good work, than before they were justified; that they have still no kind or degree of strength of their own; no power either to do good, or resist evil; no ability to conquer or even withstand the world, the devil, or their own evil nature. They can, it is certain, do all these things; but it is not by their own strength. They have power to overcome all these enemies; for “sin hath no more dominion over them;” but it is not from nature, either in whole or in part; it is the mere gift of God: nor is it given all at once, as if they had a stock laid up for many years; but from moment to moment.

18. By this helplessness I mean, Secondly, an absolute inability to deliver ourselves from that guiltiness or desert of punishment whereof we are still conscious; yea, and an inability to remove, by all the grace we have (to say nothing of our natural powers,) either the pride, self-will, love of the world, anger, and general proneness to depart from God, which we experimentally know to remain in the heart, even of them that are regenerate; or the evil which, in spite of all our endeavours, cleaves to all our words and actions. Add to this, an utter inability wholly to avoid uncharitable, and, much more, unprofitable, conversation: and an inability to avoid sins of omission, or to supply the numberless defects we are convinced of; especially the want of love, and other right tempers both to God and man.

19. If any man is not satisfied of this, if any believes that whoever is justified is able to remove these sins out of his heart and life, let him make the experiment. Let him try whether, by the grace he has already received, he can expel pride, self-will, or inbred sin in general. Let him try whether he can cleanse his words and actions from all mixture of evil; whether he can avoid all uncharitable and unprofitable conversation, with all sins of omission; and, lastly, whether he can supply the numberless defects which he still finds in himself. Let him not be discouraged by one or two experiments, but repeat the trial again and again; and the longer he tries, the more deeply will he be convinced of his utter helplessness in all these respects.

20. Indeed this is so evident a truth, that well nigh all the children of God, scattered abroad, however they differ in other points, yet generally agree in this; -- that although we may “by the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body,” resist and conquer both outward and inward sin: although we may weaken our enemies day by day; -- yet we cannot drive them out. By all the grace which is given at justification we cannot extirpate them. Though we watch and pray ever so much, we cannot wholly cleanse either our hearts or hands. Most sure we cannot, till it shall please our Lord to speak to our hearts again, to speak the second time, “Be clean;” and then only the leprosy
is cleansed. Then only, the evil root, the carnal mind, is destroyed; and inbred sin subsists no more. But if there be no such second change, if there be no instantaneous deliverance after justification, if there be none but a gradual work of God (that there is a gradual work none denies,) then we must be content, as well as we can, to remain full of sin till death; and, if so, we must remain guilty till death, continually deserving punishment. For it is impossible the guilt, or desert of punishment, should be removed from us, as long as all this sin remains in our heart, and cleaves to our words and actions. Nay, in rigorous justice, all we think, and speak, and act, continually increases it.

II.

1. In this sense we are to repent, after we are justified. And till we do so, we can go no farther.

For, till we are sensible of our disease, it admits of no cure. But, supposing we do thus repent, then are we called to “believe the gospel.”

2. And this also is to be understood in a peculiar sense, different from that wherein we believed in order to justification. Believe the glad tidings of great salvation, which God hath prepared for all people. Believe that he who is “the brightness of his Father’s glory, the express image of his person,” is “able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God through him.” He is able to save you from all the sin that still remains in your heart. He is able to save you from all the sin that cleaves to all your words and actions. He is able to save you from sins of omission, and to supply whatever is wanting in you. It is true, this is impossible with man; but with God-Man all things are possible. For what can be too hard for him who hath “all power in heaven and in earth?” Indeed, his bare power to do this is not a sufficient foundation for our faith that he will do it, that he will thus exert his power, unless he hath promised it. But this he has done: he has promised it over and over, in the strongest terms. He has given us these “exceeding great and precious promises,” both in the Old and the New Testament. So we read in the law, in the most ancient part of the oracles of God, “The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.” (Deut. 30:6.) So in the Psalms, “He shall redeem Israel,” the Israel of God, “from all his sins.” So in the Prophet, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. And I will put My Spirit within you, and ye shall keep My judgements, and do them. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses” (Ezek. 36:25, &c.) So likewise in the New Testament, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, -- to perform the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies should serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:68, &c.)

3. You have therefore good reason to believe, he is not only able, but willing to do this; to cleanse you from all your filthiness of flesh and spirit; to “save you from all your uncleannesses.” This is the thing which you now long for; this is the faith which you now particularly need, namely, that the Great Physician, the Lover of my soul, is willing to make me clean. But is he willing to do this to-morrow, or to-day? Let him answer for himself: “To-day, if ye will hear” My “voice, harden not your hearts.” If you put it off till to-morrow, you harden your hearts; you refuse to hear his voice.

Believe, therefore, that he is willing to save you to-day. He is willing to save you now. “Behold, now is the accepted time.” He now saith, “Be thou clean!” Only believe, and you also will immediately find, “all things are possible to him that believeth.”

4. Continue to believe in him that loved thee, and gave himself for thee; that bore all thy sins in his own body on the tree; and he saveth thee from all condemnation, by his blood continually applied. Thus it is that we continue in a justified state. And when we go “from faith to faith, when we have faith to be cleansed from indwelling sin, to be saved from all our uncleannesses, we are likewise saved from all that guilt, that desert of punishment, which we felt before. So that then we may say, not only,

Every moment, Lord, I want
The merit of thy death;
but, likewise, in the full assurance of faith,
Every moment, Lord, I have
The merit of thy death!

For, by that faith in his life, death, and intercession for us, renewed from moment to moment, we are every whit clean, and there is not only now no condemnation for us, but no such desert of punishment as was before, the Lord cleansing both our hearts and lives.

5. By the same faith we feel the power of Christ every moment resting upon us, whereby alone we are what we are; whereby we are enabled to continue in spiritual life, and without which, notwithstanding all our present holiness, we should be devils the next moment. But as long as we retain our faith in him, we “draw water out of the wells of salvation.” Leaning on our Beloved, even Christ in us the hope of glory, who dwelleth in our hearts by faith, who likewise is ever interceding for us at the right hand of God, we receive help from him, to think, and speak, and act, what is acceptable in his sight. Thus does he “prevent” them that believe in all their “doings, and further them with his continual help;” so that all their designs, conversations, and actions are “begun, continued, and ended in him.” Thus doth he “cleanse the thoughts of their hearts, by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit, that they may perfectly love him, and worthy magnify his holy name.”

6. Thus it is, that in the children of God, repentance and faith exactly answer each other. By repentance we feel the sin remaining in our hearts, and cleaving to our words and actions: by faith, we receive the power of God in Christ, purifying our hearts, and cleansing our hands. By repentance, we are still sensible that we deserve punishment for all our tempers, and words, and actions: by faith, we are conscious that our Advocate with the Father is continually pleading for us, and thereby continually turning aside all condemnation and punishment from us. By repentance we have an abiding conviction that there is no help in us: by faith, we receive not only mercy, “but grace to help in” every “time of need. Repentance disclaims the very possibility of any other help; faith accepts all the help we stand in need of, from him that hath all power in heaven and earth. Repentance says, “Without him I can do nothing;” Faith says, “I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.” Through him I can not only overcome, but expel, all the enemies of my soul. Through him I can “love the Lord my God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength;” yea, and “walk in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of my life.”

III.

1. From what has been said we may easily learn the mischievousness of that opinion, -- that we are wholly sanctified when we are justified; that our hearts are then cleansed from all sin. It is true, we are then delivered, as was observed before, from the dominion of outward sin; and, at the same time, the power of inward sin is so broken, that we need no longer follow, or be led by it: but it is by no means true, that inward sin is then totally destroyed; that the root of pride, self-will, anger, love of the world, is then taken out of the heart; or that the carnal mind, and the heart bent to backsliding, are entirely extirpated. And to suppose the contrary is not, as some may think, an innocent harmless mistake. No: it does immense harm: it entirely blocks up the way to any farther change; for it is manifest, “they that are whole not need a physician, but they that are sick.” If, therefore, we think we are quite made whole already, there is no room to seek any further healing.

On this supposition it is absurd to expect a farther deliverance from sin, whether gradual or instantaneous.

2. On the contrary, a deep conviction that we are not yet whole; that our hearts are not fully purified; that there is yet in us a “carnal mind,” which is still in its nature “enmity against God;” that a whole body of sin remains in our heart, weakened indeed, but not destroyed; shows, beyond all possibility of doubt, the absolute necessity of a farther change. We allow, that at the very moment of justification, we are born again: In that instant we experience that inward change from “darkness into marvellous light;” from the image of the brute and the devil, into the image of God; from the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, to the mind which was in Christ Jesus. But are we then entirely changed? Are we wholly transformed into the image of him that created us? Far from it: we still retain a depth of sin; and it is the consciousness of this which constrains us to groan, for a full deliverance, to him that is mighty to save. Hence it is, that those believers who are not convinced of the deep corruption of their hearts, or but slightly, and, as it were, notionally convinced, have little concern about entire sanctification. They may possibly hold the opinion, that such a thing is to be, either at death, or some time they know not when, before it. But they have no great uneasiness for the want of it, and no great hunger or thirst after it. They cannot, until they know themselves better, until they repent in the sense above described, until God unveils the inbred
monster’s face, and shows them the real state of their souls. Then only, when they feel the burden, will they groan for deliverance from it. Then, and not till then, will they cry out, in the agony of their soul,

Break off the yoke of inbred sin,
And fully set my spirit free!
I cannot rest till pure within,
Till I am wholly lost in Thee.

3. We may learn from hence, secondly, that a deep conviction of our demerit, after we are accepted (which in one sense may be termed guilt,) is absolutely necessary, in order to our seeing the true value of the atoning blood; in order to our feeling that we need this as much, after we are justified as ever we did before. Without this conviction, we cannot but account the blood of the covenant as a common thing, something of which we have not now any great need, seeing all our past sins are blotted out. Yea, but if both our hearts and lives are thus unclean, there is a kind of guilt which we are contracting every moment, and which, of consequence, would every moment expose us to fresh condemnation, but that

He ever lives above,
For us to intercede, -
His all-atoning love,
His precious blood, to plead.

It is this repentance, and the faith intimately connected with it, which are expressed in those strong lines, -

I sin in every breath I draw,
Nor do Thy will, nor keep Thy law
On earth, as angels do above:
But still the fountain open stands,
Washes my feet, my heart, my hands,
Till I am perfected in love.

4. We may observe, Thirdly, a deep conviction of our utter helplessness, of our total inability to retain anything we have received, much more to deliver ourselves from the world of iniquity remaining both in our hearts and lives, teaches us truly to live upon Christ by faith, not only as our Priest, but as our King. Hereby we are brought to “magnify him,” indeed; to “give Him all the glory of his grace;” to “make him a whole Christ, an entire Saviour; and truly to set the crown upon his head.” These excellent words, as they have frequently been used, have little or no meaning; but they are fulfilled in a strong and deep sense, when we thus, as it were, go out of ourselves, in order to be swallowed up in him; when we sink into nothing, that he may be all in all. Then, his almighty grace having abolished “every high thing which exalted itself against him,” every temper, and thought, and word, and work “is brought to the obedience of Christ.”

LONDONDEREY, April 24, 1767

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John Wesley
SERMON 16
(text of the 1872 edition)

THE MEANS OF GRACE

“Ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them.” Mal. 3:7.

I.

1. But are there any ordinances now, since life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel? Are there, under the Christian dispensation, any means ordained of God, as the usual channels of his grace? This question could never have been proposed in the apostolical church, unless by one who openly avowed himself to be a
Heathen; the whole body of Christians being agreed, that Christ had ordained certain outward means, for conveying his grace into the souls of men. Their constant practice set this beyond all dispute; for so long as “all that believed were together, and had all things common,” (Acts 2:44,) “they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the Apostles, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42.)

2. But in process of time, when “the love of many waxed cold,” some began to mistake the means for the end, and to place religion rather in doing those outward works, than in a heart renewed after the image of God. They forgot that “the end of” every “commandment is love, out of a pure heart,” with “faith unfeigned;” the loving the Lord their God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves; and the being purified from pride, anger, and evil desire, by a “faith of the operation of God.” Others seemed to imagine, that though religion did not principally consist in these outward means, yet there was something in them wherewith God was well pleased: something that would still make them acceptable in his sight, though they were not exact in the weightier matters of the law, in justice, mercy, and the love of God.

3. It is evident, in those who abused them thus, they did not conduce to the end for which they were ordained: Rather, the things which should have been for their health, were to them an occasion of falling. They were so far from receiving any blessing therein, that they only drew down a curse upon their head; so far from growing more heavenly in heart and life, that they were two-fold more the children of hell than before. Others, clearly perceiving that these means did not convey the grace of God to those children of the devil, began, from this particular case, to draw a general conclusion, -- that they were not means of conveying the grace of God.

4. Yet the number of those who abused the ordinances of God, was far greater than of those who despised them, till certain men arose, not only of great understanding, (sometimes joined with considerable learning,) but who likewise appeared to be men of love, experimentally acquainted with true, inward religion. Some of these were burning and shining lights, persons famous in their generations, and such as had well deserved of the church of Christ, for standing in the gap against the overflowings of ungodliness.

It cannot be supposed, that these holy and venerable men intended any more, at first, than to show that outward religion is nothing worth, without the religion of the heart; that “God is a Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth;” that, therefore, external worship is lost labour, without a heart devoted to God; that the outward ordinances of God then profit much, when they advance inward holiness, but, when they advance it not, are unprofitable and void, are lighter than vanity; yea, that when they are used, as it were in the place of this, they are an utter abomination to the Lord.

5. Yet is it not strange, if some of these, being strongly convinced of that horrid profanation of the ordinances of God, which had spread itself over the whole church, and well nigh driven true religion out of the world, -- in their fervent zeal for the glory of God, and the recovery of souls from that fatal delusion, -- spake as if outward religion were absolutely nothing, as if it had no place in the religion of Christ. It is not surprising at all, if they should not always have expressed themselves with sufficient caution; so that unwary hearers might believe they condemned all outward means, as altogether unprofitable, and as not designed of God to be the ordinary channels of conveying his grace into the souls of men.

Nay, it is not impossible, some of these holy men did, at length, themselves fall into this opinion; in particular those who, not by choice, but by the providence of God, were cut off from all these ordinances; perhaps wandering up and down, having no certain abiding-place, or dwelling in dens and caves of the earth. These, experiencing the grace of God in themselves, though they were deprived of all outward means, as altogether unprofitable, and as not designed of God to be the ordinary channels of conveying his grace into the souls of men.

6. And experience shows how easily this notion spreads, and insinuates itself into the minds of men; especially of those who are throughly awakened out of the sleep of death, and begin to feel the weight of their sins a burden too heavy to be borne. These are usually impatient of their present state; and, trying every way to escape from it, they are always ready to catch at any new thing, any new proposal of ease or happiness. They have probably tried most outward means, and found no ease in them; it may be, more and more of remorse, and fear, and sorrow, and condemnation. It is easy, therefore, to persuade these, that it is better for them to abstain from all those means. They are already weary of striving (as it seems) in vain, of labouring in the fire; and are therefore glad of any pretence to cast aside that wherein their soul has no pleasure, to give over the painful strife, and sink down into
an indolent inactivity.

II.

1. In the following discourse, I propose to examine at large, whether there are any means of grace.

By “means of grace” I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.

I use this expression, means of grace, because I know none better; and because it has been generally used in the Christian church for many ages; -- in particular by our own Church, which directs us to bless God both for the means of grace, and hope of glory; and teaches us, that a sacrament is “an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.”

The chief of these means are prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord’s Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him: And these we believe to be ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.

2. But we allow, that the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion; that, consequently, all these means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity; that if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God, they are not acceptable in his sight; yea, rather, they are an abomination before him, a stink in his nostrils; he is weary to bear them. Above all, if they are used as a kind of commutation for the religion they were designed to subserve, it is not easy to find words for the enormous folly and wickedness of thus turning God’s arms against himself; of keeping Christianity out of the heart by those very means which were ordained for the bringing it in.

3. We allow, likewise, that all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all, cannot conduce, in any degree, either to the knowledge or love of God. Without controversy, the help that is done upon earth, He doeth it himself. It is He alone who, by his own almighty power, worketh in us what is pleasing in his sight; and all outward things, unless He work in them and by them, are mere weak and beggarly elements. Whosoever, therefore, imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever, does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God. We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord’s Supper; but that it is God alone who is the Giver of every good gift, the Author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby, through any of these, there is any blessing conveyed to our soul.

We know, likewise, that he is able to give the same grace, though there were no means on the face of the earth. In this sense, we may affirm, that, with regard to God, there is no such thing as means; seeing he is equally able to work whatsoever pleaseth him, by any, or by none at all.

4. We allow farther, that the use of all means whatever will never atone for one sin; that it is the blood of Christ alone, whereby any sinner can be reconciled to God; there being no other propitiation for our sins, no other fountain for sin and uncleanness. Every believer in Christ is deeply convinced that there is no merit but in Him; that there is no merit in any of his own works; not in uttering the prayer, or searching the Scripture, or hearing the word of God, or eating of that bread and drinking of that cup. So that if no more be intended by the expression some have used, “Christ is the only means of grace,” than this, -- that He is the only meritorious cause of it, it cannot be gainsayed by any who know the grace of God.

5. Yet once more: We allow, though it is a melancholy truth, that a large proportion of those who are called Christians, do to this day abuse the means of grace to the destruction of their souls. This is doubtless the case with all those who rest content in the form of godliness, without the power.

Either they fondly presume they are Christians already, because they do thus and thus;--although Christ was never yet revealed in their hearts, nor the love of God shed abroad therein: -- Or else they suppose they shall infallibly be so barely because they use these means; idly dreaming, (though perhaps hardly conscious thereof,) either that there is some kind of power therein, whereby, sooner or later, (they know not when,) they shall certainly be made holy; or that there is a sort of merit in using them, which will surely move God to give them
holiness, or accept them without it.

6. So little do they understand that great foundation of the whole Christian building, “By grace are ye saved:” Ye are saved from your sins, from the guilt and power thereof, ye are restored to the favour and image of God, not for any works, merits, or deservings of yours, but by the free grace, the mere mercy of God, through the merits of his well-beloved Son: Ye are thus saved, not by any power, wisdom, or strength, which is in you, or in any other creature; but merely through the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, which worketh all in all.

7. But the main question remains: “We know this salvation is the gift and the work of God; but how (may one say who is convinced he hath it not) may I attain thereto?” If you say, “Believe, and thou shalt be saved!” he answers, “True; but how shall I believe?” You reply, “Wait upon God.” “Well; but how am I to wait? In the means of grace, or out of them? Am I to wait for the grace of God which bringeth salvation, by using these means, or by laying them aside?”

8. It cannot possibly be conceived, that the word of God should give no direction in so important a point; or, that the Son of God, who came down from heaven for us men and for our salvation, should have left us undetermined with regard to a question wherein our salvation is so nearly concerned.

And, in fact, he hath not left us undetermined; he hath shown us the way wherein we should go.

We have only to consult the oracles of God; to inquire what is written there; and, if we simply abide by their decision, there can no possible doubt remain.

III.

1. According to this, according to the decision of holy writ all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained; in using, not in laying them aside.

And, First, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer. This is the express direction of our Lord himself. In his Sermon upon the Mount, after explaining at large wherein religion consists, and describing the main branches of it, he adds, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matt. 7:7, 8.) Here we are in the plainest manner directed to ask, in order to, or as a means of, receiving; to seek, in order to find, the grace of God, the pearl of great price; and to knock, to continue asking and seeking, if we would enter into his kingdom.

2. That no doubt might remain, our Lord labours this point in a more peculiar manner. He appeals to every man’s own heart: “What man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven,” the Father of angels and men, the Father of the spirits of all flesh, “give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt. 7:9-11.) Or, as he expresses himself on another occasion, including all good things in one, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13.) It should be particularly observed here, that the persons directed to ask had not then received the Holy Spirit: Nevertheless our Lord directs them to use this means, and promises that it should be effectual; that upon asking they should receive the Holy Spirit, from him whose mercy is over all his works.

3. The absolute necessity of using this means, if we would receive any gift from God, yet farther appears from that remarkable passage which immediately precedes these words: “And he said unto them,” whom he had just been teaching how to pray, “Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and shall say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves: And he from within shall answer, Trouble me not; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you.” (Luke 11:5, 7-9.) “Though he will not give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” How could our blessed Lord more plainly declare, that we may receive of God, by this means, by importunately asking, what otherwise we should not receive at all?

4. “He spake also another parable, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint,” till through this means they should receive of God whatsoever petition they asked of him: “There was in a city a judge which
feared not God, neither regarded man. And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest, by her continual coming, she weary me.” (Luke 18:1-5.) The application of this our Lord himself hath made: “Hear what the unjust judge saith!” Because she continues to ask, because she will take no denial, therefore I will avenge her. “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him? I tell you he will avenge them speedily,” if they pray and faint not.

5. A direction, equally full and express, to wait for the blessings of God in private prayer, together with a positive promise, that, by this means, we shall obtain the request of our lips, he hath given us in those well-known words: “Enter into thy closet, and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” (Matt. 6:6.)

6. If it be possible for any direction to be more clear, it is that which God hath given us by the Apostle, with regard to prayer of every kind, public or private, and the blessing annexed thereto: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally,” (if they ask; otherwise “ye have not, because ye ask not,” (James 4:2,) “and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5).

If it be objected, “But this is no direction to unbelievers; to them who know not the pardoning grace of God: For the Apostle adds, `But let him ask in faith;’ otherwise, `let him not think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord:’” I answer, The meaning of the word faith, in this place, is fixed by the Apostle himself, as if it were on purpose to obviate this objection, in the following: “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering,” nothing doubting, OGFлепKMTKPQОPGQ. Not doubting but God heareth his prayer, and will fulfil the desire of his heart.

The gross, blasphemous absurdity of supposing faith, in this place, to be taken in the full Christian meaning, appears hence: It is supposing the Holy Ghost to direct a man who knows he has not faith, (which is here termed wisdom,) to ask it of God, with a positive promise that “it shall be given him;” and then immediately to subjoin, that it shall not be given him, unless he have it before he asks for it! But who can bear such a supposition? From this scripture, therefore, as well as those cited above, we must infer, that all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer.

7. Secondly. All who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in searching the Scriptures.

Our Lord’s direction, with regard to the use of this means, is likewise plain and clear. “Search the Scriptures,” saith he to the unbelieving Jews, “for they testify of me.” (John 5:39.) And for this very end did he direct them to search the Scriptures, that they might believe in him.

The objection, that “this is not a command, but only an assertion, that they did search the Scriptures,” is shamelessly false. I desire those who urge it, to let us know how a command can be more clearly expressed, than in those terms, (TGWПCVГіVCУвитЧУ.) It is as peremptory as so many words can make it.

And what a blessing from God attends the use of this means, appears from what is recorded concerning the Bereans; who, after hearing St. Paul, “searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed;” -- found the grace of God, in the way which he had ordained. (Acts 17:11, 12.)

It is probable, indeed, that in some of those who had “received the word with all readiness of mind,” “faith came,” as the same Apostle speaks, “by hearing,” and was only confirmed by reading the Scriptures: But it was observed above, that under the general term of searching the Scriptures, both hearing, reading, and meditating are contained.

8. And that this is a means whereby God not only gives, but also confirms and increases, true wisdom, we learn from the words of St. Paul to Timothy: “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

(2 Tim. 3:15.) The same truth (namely, that this is the great means God has ordained for conveying his manifold grace to man) is delivered, in the fullest manner that can be conceived, in the words which immediately follow: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;” consequently, all Scripture is infallibly true; “and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;” to the end “that the man of God may be
9. It should be observed, that this is spoken primarily and directly of the Scriptures which Timothy had known from a child; which must have been those of the Old Testament, for the New was not then wrote. How far then was St. Paul (though he was “not a whit behind the very chief of the Apostles,” nor, therefore, I presume, behind any man now upon earth) from making light of the Old Testament! Behold this, lest ye one day “wonder and perish,” ye who make so small account of one half of the oracles of God! Yea, and that half of which the Holy Ghost expressly declares, that it is “profitable,” as a means ordained of God, for this very thing, “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;” to the end, “the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

10. Nor is this profitable only for the men of God, for those who walk already in the light of his countenance; but also for those who are yet in darkness, seeking him whom they know not. Thus St. Peter, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy:” Literally, “And we have the prophetic word more sure;” confirmed by our being “eye-witnesses of his Majesty,” and “hearing the voice which came from the excellent glory;” unto which – prophetic word; so he styles the Holy Scriptures -- “ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the Day-star arise in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19.) Let all, therefore, who desire that day to dawn upon their hearts, wait for it in searching the Scriptures.

11. Thirdly. All who desire an increase of the grace of God are to wait for it in partaking of the Lord’s Supper: For this also is a direction himself hath given. “The same night in which he was betrayed, he took bread, and brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body;” that is, the sacred sign of my body: “This do in remembrance of me.” Likewise, “he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new testament,” or covenant, “in my blood;” the sacred sign of that covenant; “this do ye in remembrance of me.” “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord’s death till he come:” (1 Cor. 11:23, &c.:) Ye openly exhibit the same by, these visible signs, before God, and angels, and men; ye manifest your solemn remembrance of his death, till he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

Only “let a man” first “examine himself,” whether he understand the nature and design of this holy institution, and whether he really desire to be himself made conformable to the death of Christ; and so, nothing doubting, “let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” (1 Cor. 11:28.)

Here, then, the direction first given by our Lord is expressly repeated by the Apostle: “Let him eat; let him drink;” GUSKGVYôýRKPGVY, both in the imperative mood;) words not implying a bare permission only, but a clear, explicit command; a command to all those either who already are filled with peace and joy in believing, or who can truly say, “The remembrance of our sins is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable.”

12. And that this is also an ordinary, stated means of receiving the grace of God, is evident from those words of the Apostle, which occur in the preceding chapter: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion,” or communication, “of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16.) Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means, whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? Let all, therefore, who truly desire the grace of God, eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

IV.

1. But as plainly as God hath pointed out the way wherein he will be inquired after, innumerable are the objections which men, wise in their own eyes, have, from time to time, raised against it. It may be needful to consider a few of these; not because they are of weight in themselves, but because they have so often been used, especially of late years, to turn the lame out of the way; yea, to trouble and subvert those who did run well, till Satan appeared as an angel of light.

The first and chief of these is, “You cannot use these means (as you call them) without trusting in them.” I pray, where is this written? I expect you should show me plain Scripture for your assertion: Otherwise I dare not receive it; because I am not convinced that you are wiser than God.
If it really had been as you assert, it is certain Christ must have known it. And if he had known it, he would surely have warned us; he would have revealed it long ago. Therefore, because he has not, because there is no tittle of this in the whole revelation of Jesus Christ, I am as fully assured your assertion is false, as that this revelation is of God.

“However, leave them off for a short time, to see whether you trusted in them or no.” So I am to disobey God, in order to know whether I trust in obeying him! And do you avow this advice? Do you deliberately teach to “do evil, that good may come?” O tremble at the sentence of God against such teachers! Their “damnation is just.”

“Nay, if you are troubled when you leave them off, it is plain you trusted in them.” By no means. If I am troubled when I wilfully disobey God, it is plain his Spirit is still striving with me; but if I am not troubled at wilful sin, it is plain I am given up to a reprobate mind.

But what do you mean by “trusting in them?” -- looking for the blessing of God therein? Believing, that if I wait in this way, I shall attain what otherwise I should not? So I do. And so I will, God being my helper, even to my life’s end. By the grace of God I will thus trust in them, till the day of my death; that is, I will believe, that whatever God hath promised, he is faithful also to perform.

And seeing he hath promised to bless me in this way, I trust it shall be according to his word.

2. It has been, Secondly, objected, “This is seeking salvation by works.” Do you know the meaning of the expression you use? What is seeking salvation by works? In the writings of St. Paul, it means, either seeking to be saved by observing the ritual works of the Mosaic law; or expecting salvation for the sake of our own works, by the merit of our own righteousness. But how is either of these implied in my waiting in the way God has ordained, and expecting that he will meet me there, because he has promised so to do?

I do expect that he will fulfil his word, that he will meet and bless me in this way. Yet not for the sake of any works which I have done, nor for the merit of my righteousness; but merely through the merits, and sufferings, and love of his Son, in whom he is always well pleased.

3. It has been vehemently objected, Thirdly, “that Christ is the only means of grace.” I answer, this is mere playing upon words. Explain your term, and the objection vanishes away. When we say, “Prayer is a means of grace,” we understand a channel through which the grace of God is conveyed.

When you say, “Christ is the means of grace,” you understand the sole price and purchaser of it; or, that “no man cometh unto the Father, but through him.” And who denies it? But this is utterly wide of the question.

4. ”But does not the Scripture” (it has been objected, Fourthly) “direct us to wait for salvation? Does not David say, ‘My soul waiteth upon God, for of him cometh my salvation?’ And does not Isaiah teach us the same thing, saying, ‘O Lord, we have waited for thee?’” All this cannot be denied.

Seeing it is the gift of God, we are undoubtedly to wait on him for salvation. But how shall we wait? If God himself has appointed a way, can you find a better way of waiting for him? But that he hath appointed a way hath been shown at large, and also what that way is. The very words of the Prophet, which you cite, put this out of the question. For the whole sentence runs thus: -- “In the way of thy judgments,” or ordinances, “O Lord, have we waited for thee.” (Isaiah 26:8.) And in the very same way did David wait, as his own words abundantly testify: “I have waited for thy saving health, O Lord, and have kept thy law. Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall to keep it unto the end.”

5. ”Yea,” say some, “but God has appointed another way. -- ‘Stand still, and see the salvation of God.'”

Let us examine the Scriptures to which you refer. The first of them, with the context, runs thus:—

“And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes; and they were sore afraid. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward. But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.” (Exod. 14:10, &c.)
This was the salvation of God, which they stood still to see, by marching forward with all their might!

The other passage, wherein this expression occurs stands thus: “There came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee, from beyond the sea. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

And Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord: Even out of all the cities they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation, in the house of the Lord. -- Then upon Jahaziel came the Spirit of the Lord. And he said, Be not dismayed by reason of this great multitude.

To-morrow go ye down against them: Ye shall not need to fight in this battle. Set yourselves: Stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord. And they rose early in the morning, and went forth. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Moab, Ammon, and mount Seir: -- and everyone helped to destroy another.” (2 Chron. 20:2, &c.)

Such was the salvation which the children of Judah saw. But how does all this prove, that we ought not to wait for the grace of God in the means which he hath ordained?

6. I shall mention but one objection more, which, indeed, does not properly belong to this head: Nevertheless, because it has been so frequently urged, I may not wholly pass it by.

“Does not St. Paul say, ‘If ye be dead with Christ, why are ye subject to ordinances?’ (Col. 2:20.) Therefore a Christian, one that is dead with Christ, need not use the ordinances any more.”

So you say, “If I am a Christian, I am not subject to the ordinances of Christ!” Surely, by the absurdity of this, you must see at the first glance, that the ordinances here mentioned cannot be the ordinances of Christ: That they must needs be the Jewish ordinances, to which it is certain a Christian is no longer subject.

And the same undeniably appears from the words immediately following, “Touch not, taste not, handle not;” all evidently referring to the ancient ordinances of the Jewish law.

So that this objection is the weakest of all. And, in spite of all, that great truth must stand unshaken; -- that all who desire the grace of God, are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained.

V.

1. But this being allowed, that all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means he hath ordained; it may still be inquired, how those means should be used, both as to the order and the manner of using them.

With regard to the former, we may observe, there is a kind of order, wherein God himself is generally pleased to use these means in bringing a sinner to salvation. A stupid, senseless wretch is going on in his own way, not having God in all his thoughts, when God comes upon him unawares, perhaps by an awakening sermon or conversation, perhaps by some awful providence, or, it may be, an immediate stroke of his convincing Spirit, without any outward means at all. Having now a desire to flee from the wrath to come, he purposely goes to hear how it may be done. If he finds a preacher who speaks to the heart, he is amazed, and begins searching the Scriptures, whether these things are so? The more he hears and reads, the more convinced he is; and the more he meditates thereon day and night. Perhaps he finds some other book which explains and enforces what he has heard and read in Scripture. And by all these means, the arrows of conviction sink deeper into his soul. He begins also to talk of the things of God, which are ever uppermost in his thoughts; yea, and to talk with God; to pray to him; although, through fear and shame, he scarce knows what to say. But whether he can speak or no, he cannot but pray, were it only in “groans which cannot be uttered.” Yet, being in doubt, whether “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity” will regard such a sinner as him, he wants to pray with those who know God, with the faithful, in the great congregation. But here he observes others go up to the table of the Lord. He considers, “Christ has said, `Do this!’ How is it that I do not? I am too great a sinner. I am not fit. I am not worthy.” After struggling with these scruples a while, he breaks through. And thus he continues in God’s way, in hearing, reading, meditating, praying, and partaking of the Lord’s Supper, till God, in the manner that pleases him, speaks to his heart, “Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace.”

2. By observing this order of God, we may learn what means to recommend to any particular soul.
If any of these will reach a stupid, careless sinner, it is probably hearing, or conversation. To such, therefore, we might recommend these, if he has ever any thought about salvation. To one who begins to feel the weight of his sins, not only hearing the Word of God, but reading it too, and perhaps other serious books, may be a means of deeper conviction. May you not advise him also, to meditate on what he reads, that it may have its full force upon his heart? Yea, and to speak thereof, and not be ashamed, particularly among those who walk in the same path. When trouble and heaviness take hold upon him, should you not then earnestly exhort him to pour out his soul before God; “always to pray and not to faint;” and when he feels the worthlessness of his own prayers, are you not to work together with God, and remind him of going up into the house of the Lord, and praying with all that fear him? But if he does this, the dying word of his Lord will soon be brought to his remembrance; a plain intimation that this is the time when we should second the motions of the blessed Spirit. And thus may we lead him, step by step, through all the means which God has ordained; not according to our own will, but just as the Providence and the Spirit of God go before and open the way.

3. Yet, as we find no command in holy writ for any particular order to be observed herein, so neither do the providence and the Spirit of God adhere to any without variation; but the means into which different men are led, and in which they find the blessing of God, are varied, transposed, and combined together, a thousand different ways. Yet still our wisdom is to follow the leadings of his providence and his Spirit; to be guided herein, (more especially as to the means wherein we ourselves seek the grace of God,) partly by his outward providence, giving us the opportunity of using sometimes one means, sometimes another, partly by our experience, which it is whereby his free Spirit is pleased most to work in our heart. And in the mean time, the sure and general rule for all who groan for the salvation of God is this, -- whenever opportunity serves, use all the means which God has ordained; for who knows in which God will meet thee with the grace that bringeth salvation?

4. As to the manner of using them, whereon indeed it wholly depends whether they should convey any grace at all to the user; it behoves us, First, always to retain a lively sense, that God is above all means. Have a care, therefore, of limiting the Almighty. He doeth whatsoever and whensoever it pleaseth him. He can convey his grace, either in or out of any of the means which he hath appointed.

Perhaps he will. “Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?” Look then every moment for his appearing! Be it at the hour you are employed in his ordinances; or before, or after that hour; or when you are hindered therefrom: He is not hindered. He is always ready, always able, always willing to save. “It is the Lord: Let him do what seemeth him good!” Secondly. Before you use any means, let it be deeply impressed on your soul; -- there is no power in this. It is, in itself, a poor, dead, empty thing: Separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow. Neither is there any merit in my using this; nothing intrinsically pleasing to God; nothing whereby I deserve any favour at his hands, no, not a drop of water to cool my tongue. But, because God bids, therefore I do; because he directs me to wait in this way, therefore here I wait for his free mercy, whereof cometh my salvation.

Settle this in your heart, that the opus operatum, the mere work done, profiteth nothing; that there is no power to save, but in the Spirit of God, no merit, but in the blood of Christ; that, consequently, even what God ordains, conveys no grace to the soul, if you trust not in Him alone. On the other hand, he that does truly trust in Him, cannot fall short of the grace of God, even though he were cut off from every outward ordinance, though he were shut up in the centre of the earth.

Thirdly. In using all means, seek God alone. In and through every outward thing, look singly to the power of his Spirit; and the merits of his Son. Beware you do not stick in the work itself; if you do, it is all lost labour. Nothing short of God can satisfy your soul. Therefore, eye him in all, through all, and above all.

Remember also, to use all means, as means; as ordained, not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness. If, therefore, they actually tend to this, well; but if not, they are dung and dross.

Lastly. After you have used any of these, take care how you value yourself thereon: How you congratulate yourself as having done some great thing. This is turning all into poison. Think, “If God was not there, what does this avail? Have I not been adding sin to sin? How long? O Lord! Save, or I perish! O lay not this sin to my charge!” If God was there, if his love flowed into your heart, you have forgot, as it were, the outward work. You
see, you know, you feel, God is all in all. Be abased.

Sink down before him. Give him all the praise. “Let God in all things be glorified through Christ Jesus”. Let all your bones cry out,” My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: With my mouth will I ever be telling of thy truth, from one generation to another!”

John Wesley
SERMON 17
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

Preached at St. Mary's, Oxford, before the University, on January 1, 1733.

“Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.” Romans 2:29.

1. It is the melancholy remark of an excellent man, that he who now preaches the most essential duties of Christianity, runs the hazard of being esteemed, by a great part of his hearers, “a setter forth of new doctrines.” Most men have so lived away the substance of that religion, the profession whereof they still retain, that no sooner are any of those truths proposed which difference the Spirit of Christ from the spirit of the world, than they cry out, “Thou bringest strange things to our ears; we would know what these things mean:” -- Though he is only preaching to them “Jesus and the resurrection,” with the necessary consequence of it, -- If Christ be risen, ye ought then to die unto the world, and to live wholly unto God.

2. A hard saying this to the natural man, Who is alive unto the world, and dead unto God; and one that he will not readily be persuaded to receive as the truth of God, unless it be so qualified in the interpretation, as to have neither use nor significance left. He “receiveth not the” word “of the Spirit of God,” taken in their plain and obvious meaning; “they are foolishness unto him: Neither” indeed “can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;” -- They are perceivable only by that spiritual sense, which in him was never yet awakened for want of which he must reject, as idle fancies of men, what are both the wisdom and the power of God.

3. That “circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter;” -- that the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ, of one who is in a state of acceptance with God, is not either outward circumcision, or baptism, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of Him that created it; -- is one of those important truths that can only be spiritually discerned. And this the Apostle himself intimates in the next words, - “Whose praise is not of men, but of God.” As if he had said, “Expect not, whoever thou art, who thus followest thy great Master, that the world, the one who follow him not, will say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’ Know that the circumcision of the heart, the seal of thy calling, is foolishness with the world. Be content to wait for thy applause till the day of thy Lord’s appearing. In that day shalt thou have praise of God, in the great assembly of men and angels.” I design First, particularly to inquire, wherein this circumcision of the heart consists; and, Secondly, to mention some reflections that naturally arise from such an inquiry.

I.

1. I am, First, to inquire, wherein that circumcision of the heart consists, which will receive the praise of God. In general we may observe, it is that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, “from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit;” and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so “renewed in the spirit of our mind,” as to be “perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.”

2. To be more particular: Circumcision of heart implies humility, faith, hope, and charity.

   Humility, a right judgment of ourselves, cleanses our minds from those high conceits of our own perfection,
from that undue opinion of our own abilities and attainments, which are the genuine fruit of a corrupted nature. This entirely cuts off that vain thought, “I am rich, and wise, and have need of nothing;” and convinces us that we are by nature wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. “It convinces us, that in our best estate we are, of ourselves, all sin and vanity; that confusion, and ignorance, and error reign over our understanding; that unreasonable, earthly, sensual, devilish passions usurp authority over our will; in a word, that there is no whole part in our soul, that all the foundations of our nature are out of course.

3. At the same time we are convinced, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that, without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing but add sin to sin; that it is He alone who worketh in us by his almighty power, either to will or do that which is good; it being as impossible for us even to think a good thought, without the supernatural assistance of his Spirit, as to create ourselves, or to renew our whole souls in righteousness and true holiness.

4. A sure effect of our having formed this right judgment of the sinfulness and helplessness of our nature, is a disregard of that “honor which cometh of man,” which is usually paid to some supposed excellency in us. He who knows himself, neither desires nor values the applause which he knows he deserves not. It is therefore “a very small thing with him, to be judged by man’s judgment.” He has all reason to think, by comparing what it has said, either for or against him, with what he feels in his own breast, that the world, as well as the god of this world, was “a liar from the beginning.” And even as to those who are not of the world; thought he would choose, if it were the will of God, that they should account of him as of one desirous to be found a faithful steward of his Lord’s goods, if haply this might be a means of enabling him to be of more use to his fellow-servants, yet as this is the one end of his wishing for their approbation, so he does not at all rest upon it: For he is assured, that whatever God wills, he can never want instruments to perform; since he is able, even of these stones, to raise up servants to do his pleasure.

5. this is that lowliness of mind, which they have learned of Christ, who follow his example and tread in his steps. And this knowledge of their disease, whereby they are more and more cleansed from one part of it, pride and vanity, disposes them to embrace, with a willing mind, the second thing implied in circumcision of the heart, -- that faith which alone is able to make them whole, which is the one medicine given under heaven to heal their sickness.

6. The best guide of the blind, the surest light of them that are in darkness, the most perfect instructor of the foolish, is faith. But it must be such a faith as is “mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong-holds,” -- to the overturning all the prejudices of corrupt reason, all the false maxims revered among men, all evil customs and habits, all that “wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God;” as “casteth down imaginations,” reasoning, “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringeth into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

7. ”All things are possible to him that” thus “believeth.” “The eyes of his understanding being enlightened,” he sees what is his calling; even to glorify God, who hath bought him with so high a price, in his body and in his spirit, which now are God’s by redemption, as well as by creation. He feels what is “the exceeding greatness of this power,” who, as he raise up Christ from the dead, so is able to-quicken us, dead in sin,” by his Spirit which dwelleth in us.” “This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith;” that faith, which is not only an unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture, -- and in particular to those important truths, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;” “He bare our sins in his own body on the tree;” “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world;” [N.B. The following part of this paragraph is now added to the Sermon formerly preached.] -- but likewise the revelation of Christ in our hearts; a divine evidence or conviction of his love, his free, unmerited love to me a sinner; a sure confidence in his pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost; a confidence, whereby every true believer is enabled to bear witness, “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” that I have an “Advocate with the Father,” and that “Jesus Christ the righteous” is my Lord, and “the propitiation for my sins,” -- I know he hath “loved me, and given himself for me,” -- He hath reconciled me, even me, to God; and I “have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” 8. Such a faith as this cannot fail to show evidently the power of Him that inspires it, by delivering his children from the yoke of sin, and “purging their consciences from dead works;” by strengthening them so, that they are no longer constrained to obey sin in the desires there of; but instead of yielding their
members unto it, as instruments of unrighteousness,” they now “yield themselves” entirely “unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.”

9. Those who are thus by faith born of God, have also strong consolation through hope. This is the next thing which the circumcision of the heart implies; even the testimony of their own spirit with the Spirit which witnesses in their hearts that (N. B. The following part of this paragraph is now added to the Sermon formerly preached.) they are the children of God. Indeed it is the same Spirit who works in them that clear and cheerful confidence that their heart is upright toward God; that good assurance, that they now do, through his grace, the things which are acceptable in his sight; that they are now in the path which leadeth to life, and shall, by the mercy of God, endure therein to the end. It is He who giveth them a lively expectation of receiving all good things at God’s hand; a joyous prospect of that crown of glory, which is reserved in heaven for them. By this anchor a Christian is kept steady in the midst of the waves of this troublesome world, and preserved from striking upon either of those fatal rocks, --presumption or despair. He is neither discouraged by the misconceived severity of his Lord, nor does He despise the riches of his goodness.” He neither apprehends the difficulties of the race set before him to be greater than he has strength to conquer, nor expects there to be so little as to yield in the conquest, till he has put forth all strength. The experience he already has in the Christian warfare, as it assures him his “labor is not in vain,” if “whatever his findeth to do, he doeth it with his might;” so it forbids his entertaining so vain a thought, as that he can otherwise gain any advantage, as that any virtue can be shown, any praise attained, by faint hearts and feeble hands; or, indeed, by any but those who pursue the same course with the great Apostle of the Gentiles - “I,” says he, “so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

10. By the same discipline is every good soldier of Christ to inure himself to endure hardship.

Confirmed and strengthened by this, he will be able not only to renounce the works of darkness, but every appetite too, and every affection, which is no subject to the law of God. For “every one,” saith St. John, “who hath this hope, purifieth himself even as He is pure.” It is his daily care, by the grace of God in Christ, and through the blood of the covenant, to purge the inmost recesses of his soul from the lusts that before possessed and defiled it; from uncleanness, and envy, and malice, and wrath; from every passion and temper that is after the flesh, that either springs from or cherishes his native corruption; as well knowing, that he whose very body is the temple of God, ought to admit into it nothing common or unclean; and that holiness becometh that house for ever, where the Spirit of holiness vouchsafes to dwell.

11. Yet lackest thou one thing, whosoever thou art, that to a deep humility, and a steadfast faith, hast joined a lively hope, and thereby in a good measure cleansed thy heart from its inbred pollution.

If thou wilt be perfect, add to all these, charity; add love, and thou hast the circumcision of the heart “Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment.” Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. “Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable,” or honorable; “if there be any virtue, if there be any praise,” they are all comprised in this one word, -- love. In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”

12. Not that this forbids us to love anything besides God: It implies that we love our brother also.

Nor yet does it forbid us (as some have strangely imagined) to take pleasure in any thing but God.

To suppose this, is to suppose the Fountain of holiness is directly the author of sin; since he has inseparably annexed pleasure to the use of those creatures which are necessary to sustain the life he has given us. This, therefore, can never be the meaning of his command. What the real sense of it is, both our blessed Lord and his Apostles tell us too frequently, and too plainly, to be misunderstood. They all with one mouth bear witness, that the true meaning of those several declarations, “The Lord thy God is one Lord;” “Thou shalt have no other Gods but me;” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength” “Thou shalt cleave unto him;” “The desire of thy soul shall be to His name;” -- is no other than this: The one perfect Good shall be your one ultimate end.
One thing shall ye desire for its own sake, -- the fruition of Him that is All in All. One happiness shall ye propose to your souls, even an union with Him that made them; the having “fellowship with the Father and the Son;” the being joined to the Lord in one Spirit. One design you are to pursue to the end of time, -- the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things, so far as they tend to this. Love the creature as it leads to the Creator. But in every step you take, be this the glorious point that terminates your view. Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work, be subordinate to this. Whatever ye desire or fear, whatever ye seek or shun, whatever ye think, speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole End, us well as Source, of your being.

13. Have no end, to ultimate end, but God. Thus our Lord: “One thing is needful:” And if thine eye be singly fixed on this one thing, “thy whole body shall be full of light.” Thus St. Paul: “This one thing I do; I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.” Thus St. James: “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.” Thus St. John: “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” The seeking happiness in what gratifies either the desire of the flesh, by agreeably striking upon the outward senses; the desire of the eye, of the imagination, by its novelty, greatness, or beauty; or the pride of life, whether by pomp, grandeur, power, or, the usual consequence of them, applause and admiration; -- “is not of the Father,” cometh not from, neither is approved by, the Father of spirits; “but of the world:” It is the distinguishing mark of those who will not have Him to reign over them.

II.

1. Thus have I particularly inquired, what that circumcision of heart is, which will obtain the praise of God. I am, in the Second place, to mention some reflections that naturally arise from such an inquiry, as a plain rule whereby every man may judge of himself, whether he be of the world or of God. And, First, it is clear from what has been said, that no man has a title to the praise of God, unless his heart is circumcised by humility; unless he is little, and base, and vile in his own eyes; unless he is deeply convinced of that inbred “corruption of his nature,” “whereby be is very far gone from original righteousness,” being prone to all evil, averse to all good, corrupt and abominable; having a “carnal mind which is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be,” unless he continually feels in his inmost soul, that without the Spirit of God resting upon him, he can neither think, nor desire, nor speak, nor act anything good, or well-pleasing in his sight.

No man I say, has a title to the praise of God, till he feels his want of God; nor indeed, till he seeketh that “honor which cometh of God only;” and neither desires nor pursues that which cometh of man, unless so far only as it tends to this.

2. Another truth, which naturally follows from what has been said, is, that none shall obtain the honor that cometh of God, unless his heart be circumcised by faith; even a “faith of the operation of God;” Unless, refusing to be any longer led by his senses, appetites, or passions, or even by that blind leader of the blind, so idolized by the world, natural reason, he lives and walks by faith; directs every step, as “seeking Him that is invisible;” “looks not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal;” and governs all his desires, designs, and thoughts, all his actions and conversations, as one who is entered in within the veil, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God.

3. It were to be wished, that they were better acquainted with this faith, who employ much of their time and pains in laying another foundation; in grounding religion on the eternal fitness of things on the intrinsic excellence of virtue, and the beauty of actions flowing from it; on the reasons as they term them, of good and evil, and the relations of beings to each other. Either these accounts of the grounds of Christian duty coincide with the scriptural, or not. If they do, why are well meaning men perplexed, and drawn from the weightier matters of the law, by a cloud of terms, whereby the easiest truths are explained into obscurity? If they are not, then it behooves them to consider who is the author of this new doctrine; whether he is likely to be an angel from heaven, who preacheth another gospel than that of Christ Jesus; though, if he were, God, not we, hath pronounced his sentence: “Let him be accursed.”

4. Our gospel, as it knows no other foundation of good works than faith, or of faith than Christ, so it clearly informs us, we are not his disciples while we either deny him to be the Author, or his Spirit to be the Inspirer an
Perfecter, both of our faith and works. “If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” He alone can quicken those Who are dead unto God, can breathe into them the breath of Christian life. And so prevent, accompany, and follow them with his grace, as to bring their good desires to good effect. And, as many as are thus led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” This is God’s short and plain account of true religion and virtue; and “other foundation can no man lay.”

5. From what has been said, we may, Thirdly, learn, that it none is truly “led by the Spirit,” unless that “Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God;” unless he see the prize and the crown before him, and “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” So greatly have they erred who have taught that, in serving God, we ought not to have a view to own happiness! Nay, but we are often and expressly taught of God, to have “respect unto the recompense of reward;” to balance toil with the “joy set before us,” these “light afflictions” with that “exceeding weight of glory.” Yea, we are “aliens to the covenant of promise,” we are “without God in the world,” until God, “of his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

6. But if these things are so, it is high time for those persons to deal faithfully with their own souls who are so far from finding in themselves this joyful assurance that they fulfil the terms, and shall obtain the promises, of that covenant, as to quarrel with the covenant itself, and blaspheme the terms of it; to complain, they are too severe; and that no man ever did or shall live up to them. What is this but to reproach God, as if He were a hard Master, requiring of his servants more than he enables them to perform? -- as if he had mocked the helpless works of his hands, by binding them to impossibilities; by commanding them to overcome, where neither their own strength nor grace was sufficient for them.?

7. These blasphemers might almost persuade those to imagine themselves guiltless, who, in the contrary extreme, hope to fulfil the commands of God, without taking any pains at all. Vain hope! that a child of Adam should ever expect to see the kingdom of Christ and of God, without striving, without agonizing, first “to enter in at the strait gate;”--that one who v. as “conceived and born in sin,” and whose “inward parts are very wickedness,” should once entertain a thought of being “purified as his Lord is pure,” unless he tread in His steps, and “take up his cross daily;” unless he “cut off His right hand,” and “pluck out the right eye, and cast it from him;” --that he should ever dream of shaking off his old opinions, passions, tempers, of being “sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body,” without a constant and continued course of general self-denial!

8. What lees than this can we possibly infer from the above-cited words of St. Paul, who, living “in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses” for Christ’s sake; -who, being full of “signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds,” -- who, having been “caught up into the third heaven;” -- yet reckoned, as a late author strongly expresses it, that all his virtues would be insecure, and even his salvation in danger, without this constant self-denial? “So run I,” says he, “not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air which he plainly teaches us, that he who does not thus run, who does not thus deny himself daily, does run uncertainly, and fighteth to as little purpose as he that “beateth the air.”

9. To as little purpose does He talk of “fighting the fight of faith,” as vainly hope to attain the crown of incorruption, (as we may, Lastly, infer from the preceding observations,) whose heart is not circumcised by love. Love, cutting off both the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, --engaging the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, in the ardent pursuit of that one object,—is so essential to a child of God, that, without it, whosoever liveth is counted dead before him. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.” Nay, “though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and my body to be burned, and have not love, it profit me nothing.”

10. Here, then, is the sum of the perfect law; this is the true circumcision of the heart. Let the spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections. “Unto the place from whence all the rivers came thither let them flow again. Other sacrifices from us he would not; but the living sacrifice of the heart he hath chosen. Let it be continual offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy love. And let no creature be suffered to share with him: For he is a jealous God. His throne will he not divide with another: He will reign without a rival. Be no design, no desire admitted there, but what has Him for its ultimate object. This is the way where in those children
of God once walked, who, being dead, still speak to us:” Desire not to live, but to praise his name: Let all your
thoughts, words, and works, tend to his glory. Set your heart firm on him, and on other things only as they are in
and from him. Let your soul be filled with so entire a love of him, that you may love nothing but for his sake.”
“Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions.” “Fix your eye upon the blessed
hope of your calling, and make all the things of the world minister unto it.” For then, and not till then is that
“mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus;” when, in every motion of our heart, in every word of our tongue, in
every work of our hands, we “pursue nothing but in relation to him, and in subordination to his pleasure;” when
we, too, neither think, nor speak, nor act, to fulfil our “own will, but the will of him that sent us;” when, whether
we;’ eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God.”

John Wesley
SERMON 18
(text of the 1872 edition)

THE MARKS OF THE NEW BIRTH

“So is every one that is born of the Spirit.” John 3:8.

1. How is every one that is “born of the Spirit,” -- that is, born again, -- born of God? What is meant by the being
born again, the being born of God, or being born of the Spirit? What is implied in the being a son or a child of
God, or having the Spirit of adoption? That these privileges, by the free mercy of God, are ordinarily annexed to
baptism (which is thence termed by our Lord in a preceding verse, the being “born of water and of the Spirit”) we
know; but we would know what these privileges are: What is the new birth?

2. Perhaps it is not needful to give a definition of this, seeing the Scripture gives none. But as the question is of the
deepest concern to every child of man; since, “except a man be born again,” born of the Spirit, “he cannot see the
kingdom of God;” I propose to lay down the marks of it in the plainest manner, just as I find them laid down in
Scripture.

I.

1. The First of these, and the foundation of all the rest, is faith. So St. Paul, “Ye are all the children of God by faith
in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:26.) So St. John, “To them gave he power” (GZQWUKCP, right or privilege, it might
rather be translated) “to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born,” when
they believed, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh,” not by natural generation, “nor of the will of man,” like
those children adopted by men, in whom no inward change is thereby wrought, “but of God.” (John 1:12,13.)
And again in his General Epistle, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” (1 John 5:1.)

2. But it is not a barely notional or speculative faith that is here spoken of by the Apostles. It is not a bare assent to
this proposition, Jesus is the Christ; nor indeed to all the propositions contained in our creed, or in the Old and
New Testament. It is not merely an assent to any or all these credible things, as credible. To say this, were to say
(which who could hear?) that the devils were born of God; for they have this faith. They, trembling, believe, both
that Jesus is the Christ, and that all Scripture, having been given by inspiration of God, is true as God is true. It is
not only an assent to divine truth, upon the testimony of God, or upon the evidence of miracles; for they also
heard the words of his mouth, and knew him to be a faithful and true witness. They could not but receive the
testimony he gave, both of himself, and of the Father which sent him. They saw likewise the mighty works which
he did, and thence believed that he “came forth from God.” Yet, notwithstanding this faith, they are still
“reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day.”

3. For all this is no more than a dead faith. The true, living, Christian faith, which whosoever hath, is born of God,
is not only an assent, an act of the understanding; but a disposition, which God hath wrought in his heart; “a sure
trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the
favour of God.” This implies, that a man first renounce himself; that, in order to be “found in Christ,” to be
accepted through him, he totally rejects all “confidence in the flesh;” that, “having nothing to pay,” having no trust in his own works or righteousness of any kind, he comes to God as a lost, miserable, self-destroyed, self-condemned, undone, helpless sinner; as one whose mouth is utterly stopped, and who is altogether “guilty before God.” Such a sense of sin, (commonly called despair, by those who speak evil of the things they know not,) together with a full conviction, such as no words can express, that of Christ only cometh our salvation, and an earnest desire of that salvation, must precede a living faith, a trust in Him, who “for us paid our ransom by his death, and fulfilled the law of his life.” This faith then, whereby we are born of God, is “not only a belief of all the articles of our faith, but also a true confidence of the mercy of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. An immediate and constant fruit of this faith whereby we are born of God, a fruit which can in no wise be separated from it, no, not for an hour, is power over sin; -- power over outward sin of every kind; over every evil word and work; for wheresoever the blood of Christ is thus applied, it “purgeth the conscience from dead works;” -- and over inward sin; for it purifieth the heart from every unholy desire and temper. This fruit of faith St. Paul has largely described, in the sixth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. “How shall we,” saith he, “who” by faith “are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” “Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” -- “Likewise, reckon ye yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign” even “in your mortal body,” “but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.” “For sin shall not have dominion over you. -- God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, -- but being made free,” - the plain meaning is, God be thanked that though ye were, in time past, the servants of sin, yet now -- “being free from sin, ye are become the servants of righteousness.”

5. The same invaluable privilege of the sons of God is as strongly asserted by St. John; particularly with regard to the former branch of it, namely, power over outward sin. After he had been crying out, as one astonished at the depth of the riches of the goodness of God, -- “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! Beloved, now are we the sons of God: And it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is;” (1 John 3:1, &c.) - he soon adds, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” (1 John 3:9.) But some men will say, “True: Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin habitually.” Habitually! Whence is that? I read it not. It is not written in the Book. God plainly saith, “He doth not commit sin;” and thou addest, habitually! Who art thou that mendest the oracles of God? -- that “addest to the words of this book?” Beware, I beseech thee, lest God “add to thee all the plagues that are written therein!” especially when the comment thou addest is such as quite swallows up the text: So that by this OGVJQFGKCýRNCPGL, artful method of deceiving, the precious promise is utterly lost; by this MWDGKCýCPSTYRYP, tricking and shuffling of men, the word of God is made of none effect. O beware, thou that thus takest from the words of this book, that, taking away the whole meaning and spirit from them, leavest only what may indeed be termed a dead letter, lest God take away thy part out of the book of life!

6. Suffer we the Apostle to interpret his own words, by the whole tenor of his discourse. In the fifth verse of this chapter, he had said, “Ye know that he,” Christ, “was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” What is the inference he draws from this? “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.” (1 John 3:6.) To his enforcement of this important doctrine, he premises an highly necessary caution: “Little children, let no man deceive you;” (1 John 3:7;) for many will endeavor so to do; to persuade you that you may be unrighteous, that you may commit sin, and yet be children of God! “He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.” Then follows, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this,” adds the Apostle, “the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.” By this plain mark (the committing or not committing sin) are they distinguished from each other. To the same effect are those words in his fifth chapter, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” (1 John 3:18.)

7. Another fruit of this living faith is peace. For, “being justified by faith,” having all our sins blotted out, “we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1.) This indeed our Lord himself, the night before his
death, solemnly bequeathed to all his followers: “Peace,” saith he, “I leave with you;” (you who “believe in God,” and “believe also in me;”) “my peace I give unto you:” “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27.) And again, “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.” (John 16:33.) This is that “peace of God which passeth all understanding,” that serenity of soul which it hath not entered into the heart of a natural man to conceive, and which it is not possible for even the spiritual man to utter. And it is a peace which all the powers of earth and hell are unable to take from him. Waves and storms beat upon it, but they shake it not; for it is founded upon a rock.

It keepeth the hearts and minds of the children of God, at all times and in all places. Whether they are in ease or in pain, in sickness or health, in abundance or want, they are happy in God. In every state they have learned to be content, yea, to give thanks unto God through Christ Jesus; being well assured that “whatsoever is, is best,” because it is His will concerning them: So that in all the vicissitudes of life their “heart standeth fast, believing in the Lord.”

II.

1. A Second scriptural mark of those who are born of God, is hope. Thus St. Peter, speaking to all the children of God who were then scattered abroad, saith, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” (1 Peter 1:3.) a lively or living hope, saith the Apostle; because there is also a dead hope, as well as a dead faith; a hope which is not from God, but from the enemy of God and man; -- as evidently appears by its fruits; for, as it is the offspring of pride, so it is the parent of every evil word and work; whereas, every man that hath in him this living hope, is “holy as He that calleth him is holy:” Every man that can truly say to his brethren in Christ, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and we shall see him as he is,” “purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

2. This hope implies, First, the testimony of our own spirit or conscience, that we walk “in simplicity and godly sincerity;” Secondly, the testimony of the Spirit of God, “bearing witness with,” or to, “our spirit, that we are the children of God,” “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”

3. Let us well observe what is here taught us by God himself, touching this glorious privilege of his children. Who is it that is here said to bear witness? Not our spirit only, but another; even the Spirit of God: He it is who “beareth witness with our spirit.” What is it he beareth witness of? “That we are the children of God,” “and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;” (Rom. 8:16, 17;) “if so be that we suffer with him,” if we deny ourselves, if we take up our cross daily, if we cheerfully endure persecution or reproach for his sake, “that we may also be glorified together.” And in whom doth the Spirit of God bear this witness? In all who are the children of God.

By this very argument does the Apostle prove, in the preceding verses, that they are so: “As many,” saith he, “as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!” It follows, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” (8:14-16.)

4. The variation of the phrase in the fifteenth verse is worthy our observation: “Ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!” Ye, as many as are the sons of God, have, in virtue of your sonship, received that selfsame Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father: We, the Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, (for so the word may not improperly be understood,) we, through whom you have believed, the “ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” As we and you have one Lord, so we have one Spirit: As we have one faith, so we have one hope also. We and you are sealed with one “Spirit of promise,” the earnest of your and of our inheritance: The same Spirit bearing witness with your and with our spirit, “that we are the children of God.” (Rom. 8:14-16).

5. And thus is the Scripture fulfilled, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” For it is easy to believe, that though sorrow may precede this witness of God’s Spirit with our spirit; (indeed must, in some degree, while we groan under fear, and a sense of the wrath of God abiding on us;) yet, as soon as any man feeleth it in himself, his “sorrow is turned into joy.” Whatsoever his pain may have been before; yet, as soon as that “hour is come, he remembereth the anguish no more, for joy” that he is born of God. It may be, many of you have now sorrow, because you are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel;” because you are conscious to
yourselves that you have not this Spirit; that you are “without hope and without God in the world.” But when the Comforter is come, “then your heart shall rejoice;” yea, “your joy shall be full,” and “that joy no man taketh from you.” (John 16:22.) “We joy in God,” will ye say, “through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement;” “by whom we have access into this grace,” this state of grace, of favour, or reconciliation with God, “wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2.) “Ye,” saith St. Peter, whom God hath “begotten again unto a lively hope, are kept by the power of God unto salvation: Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ: In whom, though now ye see him not, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” (1 Peter 1:5, &c.) Unspeakable indeed! It is not for the tongue of man to describe this joy in the Holy Ghost. It is “the hidden manna, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it.” But this we know, it not only remains, but overflows, in the depth of affliction. “Are the consolations of God small” with his children, when all earthly comforts fail? Not so. But when sufferings most abound, the consolations of his Spirit do much more abound; insomuch that the sons of God “laugh at destruction when it cometh;” at want, pain, hell, and the grave; as knowing Him who “hath the keys of death and hell,” and will shortly “cast them into the bottomless pit;” as hearing even now the great voice out of heaven, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:3, 4.)

III.

1. A Third scriptural mark of those who are born of God, and the greatest of all, is love; even “the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them.” (Rom. 5:5.) “Because they are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son in their hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4:6.) By this Spirit, continually looking up to God as their reconciled and loving Father, they cry to him for their daily bread, for all things needful, whether for their souls or bodies.

They continually pour out their hearts before him, knowing “they have the petitions which they ask of him.” (1 John 5:15.) Their delight is in him. He is the joy of their heart; their “shield,” and their “exceeding great reward.” The desire of their soul is toward him; it is their “meat and drink to do his will;” and they are “satisfied as with marrow and fatness, while their mouth praiseth him with joyful lips.” (Psalm 63:5.)

2. And, in this sense also, “every one who loveth him that begat, loveth him that is begotten of him.” (1 John 5:1.) His spirit rejoiceth in God his Saviour. He “loveth the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” He is so “joined unto the Lord,” as to be one spirit. His soul hangeth upon Him, and chooseth Him as altogether lovely, “the chiefest among ten thousand.” He knoweth, he feeleth what that means, “My Beloved is mine, and I am his.” (Song 2:16.) “Thou art fairer than the children of men; full of grace are thy lips, because God hath anointed thee for ever!” (Psalm 45:2.)

3. The necessary fruit of this love of God is the love of our neighbour; of every soul which God hath made; not excepting our enemies; not excepting those who are now “despitefully using and persecuting us;” -- a love whereby we love every man as ourselves; as we love our own souls. Nay, our Lord has expressed it still more strongly, teaching us to “love one another even as He hath loved us.” Accordingly, the commandment written in the hearts of all those that love God, is no other than this, “As I have loved you, so love ye one another.” Now, “herein perceive we the love of God, in that he laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16.) “We ought,” then, as the Apostle justly infers, “to lay down our lives for the brethren.” If we feel ourselves ready to do this, then do we truly love our neighbour. Then “we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we” thus “love the brethren.” (1 John 3:14.) “Hereby know we” that we are born of God, that we “dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his” loving “Spirit.” (1 John 4:13.) For “love is of God; and every one that” thus “loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” (1 John 4:7.)

4. But some may possibly ask, “Does not the Apostle say, ‘This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments?’” (1 John 5:3.) Yea, and this is the love of our neighbour also, in the same sense as it is the love of God. But what would you infer from hence? That the keeping the outward commandments is all that is implied in loving God with all your heart, with all your mind, and soul, and strength, and in loving your
neighbour as yourself? That the love of God is not an affection of the soul, but merely an outward service? And that the love of our neighbour is not a disposition of heart, but barely a course of outward works? To mention so wild an interpretation of the Apostle’s words, is sufficiently to confute it. The plain indisputable meaning of that text is, -- this is the sign or proof of the love of God, of our keeping the first and great commandment, to keep the rest of his commandments. For true love, if it be once shed abroad in our heart, will constrain us so to do; since, whosoever loves God with all his heart, cannot but serve him with all his strength.

5. A Second fruit then of the love of God (so far as it can be distinguished from it) is universal obedience to him we love, and conformity to his will; obedience to all the commands of God, internal and external; obedience of the heart and of the life; in every temper, and in all manner of conversation. And one of the tempers most obviously implied herein, is, the being “zealous of good works;” the hungering and thirsting to do good, in every possible kind, unto all men; the rejoicing to “spend and be spent for them,” for every child of man; not looking for any recompence in this world, but only in the resurrection of the just.

IV.

1. Thus have I plainly laid down those marks of the new birth which I find laid down in Scripture. Thus doth God himself answer that weighty question, What is it to be born of God? Such, if the appeal be made to the oracles of God, is “every one that is born of the Spirit.” This it is, in the judgment of the Spirit of God, to be a son or a child of God: It is, so to believe in God, through Christ, as “not to commit sin,” and to enjoy at all times, and in all places, that “peace of God which passeth all understanding.” It is, so to hope in God through the Son of his love, as to have not only the “testimony of a good conscience,” but also the Spirit of God “bearing witness with your spirits, that ye are the children of God;” whence cannot but spring the rejoicing in Him, through whom ye “have received the atonement.” It is, so to love God, who hath thus loved you, as you never did love any creature: So that ye are constrained to love all men as yourselves; with a love not only ever burning in your hearts, but flaming out in all your actions and conversations, and making your whole life one “labour of love,” one continued obedience to those commands, “Be ye merciful, as God is merciful;” “Be ye holy, as I the Lord am holy:” “Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

2. Who then are ye that are thus born of God? Ye “know the things which are given to you of God.” Ye well know that ye are the children of God, and “can assure your hearts before him.” And every one of you who has observed these words cannot but feel, and know of a truth, whether at this hour, (answer to God, and not to man!) you are thus a child of God or no. The question is not, what you was made in baptism; (do not evade;) but, What are you now? Is the Spirit of adoption now in your heart? To your own heart let the appeal be made. I ask not, whether you was born of water and of the Spirit; but are you now the temple of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in you? I allow you was “circumcised with the circumcision of Christ;” (as St. Paul emphatically terms baptism;) but does the Spirit of Christ and of glory now rest upon you? Else “your circumcision is become uncircumcision.”

3. Say not then in your heart, “I was once baptized, therefore I am now a child of God.” Alas, that consequence will by no means hold. How many are the baptized gluttons and drunkards, the baptized liars and common swearers, the baptized railers and evil-speakers, the baptized whoremongers, thieves, extortioners? What think you? Are these now the children of God? Verily, I say unto you, whosoever you are, unto whom any one of the preceding characters belongs, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye do.” Unto you I call, in the name of Him whom you crucify afresh, and in his words to your circumcised predecessors, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

4. How, indeed, except ye be born again! For ye are now dead in trespasses and sins. To say, then, that ye cannot be born again, that there is no new birth but in baptism, is to seal you all under damnation, to consign you to hell, without help, without hope. And perhaps some may think this just and right. In their zeal for the Lord of hosts, they may say, “Yea, cut off the sinners, the Amalekites! Let these Gibeonites be utterly destroyed! They deserve no less.” No; nor I, nor you. Mine and your desert, as well as theirs, is hell; and it is mere mercy, free, undeserved mercy, that we are not now in unquenchable fire. You will say, “But we are washed;” we were born again “of water and of the Spirit.” So were they: This, therefore, hinders not at all, but that ye may now be even as they. Know ye not, that “what is highly esteemed of men is an abomination in the sight of God?” Come forth, ye “saints of the world,” ye that are honoured of men, and see who will cast the first stone at them, at these wretches not fit to live upon the earth, these common harlots, adulterers, murderers. Only learn ye first what that
meaneth, “He that hateth his brother is a murderer.” (1 John 3:15.) “He that looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” (Matt. 5:28.) “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4.)

5. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye” also “must be born again.” “Except ye” also “be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God.” Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye were born again in baptism. Who denies that ye were then made children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven? But, notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil. Therefore ye must be born again.

And let not Satan put it into your heart to cavil at a word, when the thing is clear. Ye have heard what are the marks of the children of God: All ye who have them not on your souls, baptized or unbaptized, must needs receive them, or without doubt ye will perish everlastingly. And if ye have been baptized, your only hope is this, -- that those who were made the children of God by baptism, but are now the children of the devil, may yet again receive “power to become the sons of God;” that they may receive again what they have lost, even the “Spirit of adoption, crying in their hearts, Abba, Father!”

Amen, Lord Jesus! May every one who prepareth his heart yet again to seek thy face, receive again that Spirit of adoption, and cry out, “Abba, Father!” Let him now again have power so to believe in thy name as to become a child of God; as to know and feel he hath “redemption in thy blood, even the forgiveness of sins;” and that he “cannot commit sin, because he is born of God.” Let him be now “begotten again unto a living hope,” so as to “purify himself as thou art pure;” and “because he is a son,” let the Spirit of love and of glory rest upon him, cleansing him “from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” and teaching him to “perfect holiness in the fear of God!”

John Wesley
SERMON 20

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Preached at THE CHAPEL IN WEST-STREET, SEVEN DIALS, on Sunday, Nov. 24, 1765

“This is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.” Jer. 23:6.

1. How dreadful and how innumerable are the contests which have arisen about religion! And not only among the children of this world, among those who knew not what true religion was, but even among the children of God; those who had experienced “the kingdom of God within them;” who had tasted of “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” How many of these, in all ages, instead of joining together against the common enemy, have turned their weapons against each other, and so not only wasted their precious time, but hurt one another’s spirits, weakened each other’s hands, and so hindered the great work of their common Master! How many of the weak have hereby been offended! -- How many of the lame turned out of the way! How many sinners confirmed in their disregard of all religion, and their contempt of those that profess it! And how many of “the excellent ones upon earth” have been constrained to “weep in secret places!”

2. What would not every lover of God and his neighbour do, what would he not suffer, to remedy this sore evil; to remove contention from the children of God; to restore or preserve peace among them? What but a good conscience would he think too dear to part with, in order to promote this valuable end? And suppose we cannot “make” these “wars to cease in all the world,” suppose we cannot reconcile all the children of God to each other, however, let each do what he can, let him contribute, if it be but two mites, toward it. Happy are they who are able, in any degree, to promote “peace and good-will among men” especially among good men; among those that are all listed under the banner of “the Prince of Peace;” and are, therefore, peculiarly engaged, “as much as lies in them,” to “live peaceably with all men.”

3. It would be a considerable step toward this glorious end, if we could bring good men to understand one another. Abundance of disputes arise purely from the want of this; from mere misapprehension. Frequently neither of the contending parties understands what his opponent means; whence it follows, that each violently attacks the other,
while there is no real difference between them. And yet it is not always an easy matter to convince them of this; particularly when their passions are moved: It is then attended with the utmost difficulty. However, it is not impossible; especially when we attempt it, not trusting in ourselves, but having all our dependence upon Him with whom all things are possible. How soon is he able to disperse the cloud, to shine upon their hearts, and to enable them both to understand each other, and “the truth as it is in Jesus!”

4. One very considerable article of this truth is contained in the words above recited, “This is his name whereby he shall be called, the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS;” a truth this, which enters deep into the nature of Christianity, and, in a manner, supports the whole frame of it. Of this, undoubtedly, may be affirmed, what Luther affirms of a truth closely connected with it: it is articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae: The Christian church stands or falls with it. It is certainly the pillar and ground of that faith, of which alone cometh salvation; of that Catholic or universal faith which is found in all the children of God, and which “unless a man keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.”

5. Might not one, therefore, reasonably expect, that, however they differed in others, all those who name the name of Christ should agree in this point? But how far is this from being the case! There is scarce any wherein they are so little agreed; wherein those who all profess to follow Christ, seem so widely and irreconcilably to differ. I say seem; because I am throughly convinced, that many of them only seem to differ. The disagreement is more in words than in sentiments: They are much nearer in judgment than in language. And a wide difference in language there certainly is, not only between Protestants and Papists, but between Protestant and Protestant; yea, even between those who all believe justification by faith; who agree, as well in this, as every other fundamental doctrine of the gospel.

6. But if the difference be more in opinion, than real experience, and more in expression than in opinion, how can it be, that even the children of God should so vehemently contend with each other on the point? Several reasons may be assigned for this: The chief is, their not understanding one another; joined with too keen an attachment to their opinions, and particular modes of expression.

In order to remove this, at least in some measure; in order to our understanding one another on this head; I shall, by the help of God, endeavour to show,

I. What is the righteousness of Christ?
II. When, and in what sense, it is imputed to us:
And conclude with a short and plain application.

I. What is the righteousness of Christ? It is twofold, either his divine or his human righteousness.

1. His divine righteousness belongs to his divine nature, as he is JyýQP, He that existeth; “over all, God blessed for ever;” the Supreme; the Eternal; “equal with the Father, as touching his Godhead, though inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” Now this is his eternal, essential, immutable holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth; in all which, he and the Father are One.

But I do not apprehend that the divine righteousness of Christ is immediately concerned in the present question. I believe few, if any, do now contend for the imputation of this righteousness to us. Whoever believes the doctrine of imputation, understands it chiefly, if not solely, of his human righteousness.

2. The human righteousness of Christ belongs to him in his human nature; as he is the “Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus.” This is either internal or external. His internal righteousness is the image of God, stamped on every power and faculty of his soul. It is a copy of his divine righteousness, as far as it can be imparted to a human spirit. It is a transcript of the divine purity, the divine justice, mercy, and truth. It includes love, reverence, resignation to his Father; humility, meekness, gentleness; love to lost mankind, and every other holy and heavenly temper; and all these in the highest degree, without any defect, or mixture of unholiness.

3. It was the least part of his external righteousness, that he did nothing amiss; that he knew no outward sin of any kind, neither was “guile found in his mouth;” that he never spoke one improper word, nor did one improper action. Thus far it is only a negative righteousness, though such an one as never did, nor ever can, belong to anyone that is born of a woman, save himself alone. But even his outward righteousness was positive too: He did
all things well: In every word of his tongue, in every work of his hands, he did precisely the “will of Him that sent him.” In the whole course of his life, he did the will of God on earth, as the angels do it in heaven. All he acted and spoke was exactly right in every circumstance. The whole and every part of his obedience was complete. “He fulfilled all righteousness.”

4. But his obedience implied more than all this: It implied not only doing, but suffering; suffering the whole will of God, from the time he came into the world, till “he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree;” yea, till having made a full atonement for them, “he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.” This is usually termed the passive righteousness of Christ; the former, his active righteousness. But as the active and passive righteousness of Christ were never, in fact, separated from each other, so we never need separate them at all, either in speaking or even in thinking. And it is with regard to both these conjointly that Jesus is called “the Lord our righteousness.”

II. But when is it that any of us may truly say, “the Lord our righteousness?” In other words, when is it that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and in what sense is it imputed?

1. Look through all the world, and all the men therein are either believers or unbelievers. The first thing, then, which admits of no dispute among reasonable men is this: To all believers the righteousness of Christ is imputed; to unbelievers it is not.

But when is it imputed? When they believe. In that very hour the righteousness of Christ is theirs.

It is imputed to every one that believes, as soon as he believes: Faith and the righteousness of Christ are inseparable. For if he believes according to Scripture, he believes in the righteousness of Christ.

There is no true faith, that is, justifying faith, which hath not the righteousness of Christ for its object.

2. It is true believers may not all speak alike; they may not all use the same language. It is not to be expected that they should: we cannot reasonably require it of them. A thousand circumstances may cause them to vary from each other, in the manner of expressing themselves: But a difference of expression does not necessarily imply a difference of sentiment. Different persons may use different expressions, and yet mean the same thing. Nothing is more common than this, although we seldom make sufficient allowance for it. Nay, it is not easy for the same persons, when they speak of the same thing at a considerable distance of time, to use exactly the same expressions, even though they retain the same sentiments: How then can we be rigorous in requiring others to use just the same expressions with us?

3. We may go a step farther yet: Men may differ from us in their opinions, as well as their expressions, and nevertheless be partakers with us of the same precious faith. It is possible they may not have a distinct apprehension of the very blessing which they enjoy: Their ideas may not be so clear, and yet their experience may be as sound, as ours. There is a wide difference between the natural faculties of men, their understandings in particular; And that difference is exceedingly increased by the manner of their education. Indeed, this alone may occasion an inconceivable difference in their opinions of various kinds; and why not upon this head, as well as on any other? But still, though their opinions, as well as expressions, may be confused and inaccurate, their hearts may cleave to God through the Son of his love, and be truly interested in his righteousness.

4. Let us then make all that allowance to others, which, were we in their place, we would desire for ourselves. Who is ignorant (to touch again on that circumstance only) of the amazing power of education? And who that knows it, can expect, suppose, a member of the Church of Rome, either to think or speak clearly on this subject? And yet, if we had heard even dying Bellarmine cry out,— when he was asked, “Unto which of the saints wilt thou turn?” — Fidere meritis Christi tutissimum; “It is safest to trust in the merits of Christ;” would we have affirmed that, notwithstanding his wrong opinions, he had no share in his righteousness?

5. But in what sense is this righteousness imputed to believers? In this: all believers are forgiven and accepted, not for the sake of anything in them, or of anything that ever was, that is, or ever can be done by them, but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for them.

I say again, not for the sake of anything in them, or done by them, of their own righteousness or works: “Not for works of righteousness which we have done, but of his own mercy he saved us.” “By grace ye are saved through faith, -- not of works, lest any man should boast;” but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done
and suffered for us. We are “justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.” And
this is not only the means of our obtaining the favour of God, but of our continuing therein. It is thus we come to
God at first; it is by the same we come unto him ever after. We walk in one and the same new and living way, till
our spirit returns to God.

6. And this is the doctrine which I have constantly believed and taught, for near eight and twenty years. This I
published to all the world in the year 1738, and ten or twelve times since, in those words, and many others to the
same effect, extracted from the Homilies of our Church: -- “These things must necessarily go together in our
justification; upon God’s part, his great mercy and grace; upon Christ’s part, the satisfaction of God’s justice;
and on our part, faith in the merits of Christ. So that the grace of God doth not shut out the righteousness of God
in our justification, but only shutteth out the righteousness of man, as to deserving our justification.” “That we
are justified by faith alone, is spoken to take away clearly all merit of our works, and wholly to ascribe the merit
and deserving of our justification to Christ only. Our justification comes freely of the mere mercy of God. For
whereas all the world was not able to pay any part toward our ransom, it pleased Him, without any of our
deserving, to prepare for us Christ’s body and blood, whereby our ransom might be paid, and his justice satisfied.
Christ, therefore, is now the righteousness of all them that truly believe in him.”

7. The Hymns published a year or two after this, and since republished several times, (a clear testimony that my
judgment was still the same,) speak full to the same purpose. To cite all the passages to this effect, would be to
transcribe a great part of the volumes. Take one for all, which was reprinted seven years ago, five years ago, two
years ago, and some months since: -- Jesu, thy blood and righteousness

My beauty are, my glorious dress:
‘Midst flaming worlds in these array’d,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

The whole hymn expresses the same sentiment, from the beginning to the end.

8. In the Sermon on Justification, published nineteen, and again seven or eight, years ago, I express the same thing
in these words: (P. 55) “In consideration of this, -- that the Son of God hath `tasted death for every man,’ God
hath now `reconciled the world unto himself, not imputing to them their’ former `trespasses.’ So that for the sake
of his well-beloved Son, of what he hath done and suffered for us, God now vouchsafes, on one only condition,
(which himself also enables us to perform,) both to remit the punishment due to our sins, to re-instate us in his
favour, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, as the earnest of life eternal.”

9. This is more largely and particularly expressed in the Treatise on Justification, which I published last year: “If we
take the phrase of imputing Christ’s righteousness, for the bestowing (as it were) the righteousness of Christ,
including his obedience, as well passive as active, in the return of it, that is, in the privileges, blessings, and
benefits purchased it; so a believer may be said to be justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed. The
meaning is, God justifies the believer for the sake of Christ’s righteousness, and not for any righteousness of his
own. So Calvin: (Institut. 1.2, c.17) ‘Christ by his obedience, procured and merited for us grace or favour with
God the Father.’

Again: ‘Christ, by his obedience, procured or purchased righteousness for us.’ And yet again: ‘All such
expressions as these, -- that we are justified by the grace of God, that Christ is our righteousness, that
righteousness was procured for us by the death and resurrection of Christ, import the same thing; namely, that
the righteousness of Christ, both his active and passive righteousness, is the meritorious cause of our
justification, and has procured for us at God’s hand, that, upon our believing, we should be accounted righteous
by him.’”

10. But perhaps some will object, “Nay, but you affirm that faith is imputed to us for righteousness. St. Paul affirms
this over and over; therefore I affirm it too. Faith is imputed for righteousness to every believer; namely, faith in
the righteousness of Christ; but this is exactly the same thing which has been said before; For by that expression I
mean neither more nor less, than that we are justified by faith, not by works; or that every believer is forgiven
and accepted, merely for the sake of what Christ has done and suffered.

11. But is not a believer invested or clothed with the righteousness of Christ? Undoubtedly he is. And accordingly
the words above-recited are the language of every believing heart: Jesu, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.

That is, “For the sake of thy active and passive righteousness, I am forgiven and accepted of God.”

But must not we put off the filthy rags of our own righteousness, before we can put on the spotless righteousness of Christ? Certainly we must; that is, in plain terms, we must repent, before we can believe the gospel. We must be cut off from dependence upon ourselves, before we can truly depend upon Christ. We must cast away all confidence in our own righteousness, or we cannot have a true confidence in his. Till we are delivered from trusting in anything that we do, we cannot throughputly trust in what he has done and suffered. First, we receive the sentence of death in ourselves: Then, we trust in Him that lived and died for us.

12. But do not you believe inherent righteousness? Yes, in its proper place; not as the ground of our acceptance with God, but as the fruit of it; not in the place of imputed righteousness, but as consequent upon it. That is, I believe God implants righteousness in every one to whom he has imputed it. I believe “Jesus Christ is made of God unto us sanctification,” as well as “righteousness;” or, that God sanctifies, as well as justifies, all them that believe in him. They to whom the righteousness of Christ is imputed, are made righteous by the spirit of Christ, are renewed in the image of God, “after the likeness wherein they were created, in righteousness and true holiness.”

13. But do not you put faith in the room of Christ, or of his righteousness? By no means: I take particular care to put each of these in its proper place. The righteousness of Christ is the whole and sole foundation of all our hope. It is by faith that the Holy Ghost enables us to build upon this foundation. God gives this faith; in that moment we are accepted of God; and yet, not for the sake of that faith, but of what Christ has done and suffered for us. You see, each of these has its proper place, and neither clashes with the other: we believe, we love, we endeavour to walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless; yet,--

While thus we bestow
Our moments below,
Ourselves we forsake,
And refuge in Jesus’s righteousness take.
His passion alone,
The foundation we own;
And pardon we claim,
And eternal redemption in Jesus’s name.

14. I therefore no more deny the righteousness of Christ, than I deny the Godhead of Christ; and a man may full as justly charge me with denying the one as the other. Neither do I deny imputed righteousness: This is another unkind and unjust accusation. I always did, and do still continually affirm, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to every believer. But who deny it? Why, all Infidels, whether baptized or unbaptized; all who affirm the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to be a cunningly devised fable; all Socinians and Arians; all who deny the supreme Godhead of the Lord that bought them; they, of consequence, deny his divine righteousness, as they suppose him to be a mere creature; and they deny his human righteousness, as imputed to any man, seeing they believe everyone is accepted for his own righteousness.

15. The human righteousness of Christ, at least the imputation of it, as the whole and sole meritorious cause of the justification of a sinner before God, is likewise denied by the members of the Church of Rome; by all of them who are true to the principles of their own church. But undoubtedly there are many among them whose experience goes beyond their principles; who, though they are far from expressing themselves justly, yet feel what they know not how to express.

Yea, although their conceptions of this great truth be as crude as their expressions, yet with their heart they Is believe: They rest on Christ alone, both unto present and eternal salvation

16. With these we may rank those even in the Reformed Churches, who are usually termed Mystics. One of the chief of these, in the present century, (at least in England,) was Mr. Law. It is well known that he absolutely and zealously denied the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, as zealously as Robert Barclay, who scruples not to say, “Imputed righteousness! -- imputed nonsense!” The body of the people known by the name of Quakers espouse the same sentiment. Nay, the generality of those who profess themselves members of the Church of England are either totally ignorant of the matter, and know nothing about imputed righteousness, or deny this and
justification by faith together, as destructive of good works. To these we may add a considerable number of the people vulgarly styled Anabaptists, together with thousands of Presbyterians and Independents, lately enlightened by the writings of Dr. Taylor. On the last I am not called to pass any sentence: I leave them to Him that made them. But will anyone dare to affirm that all Mystics, (such as was Mr. Law in particular,) all Quakers, all Presbyterians or Independents, and all members of the Church of England who are not clear in their opinions or expressions, are void of all Christian experience? - that, consequently, they are all in a state of damnation, “without hope, without God in the world?” However confused their ideas may be, however improper their language, may there not be many of them whose heart is right toward God, and who effectually know “the Lord our righteousness?”

17. But, blessed be God, we are not among those who are so dark in their conceptions and expressions. We no more deny the phrase than the thing; but we are unwilling to obtrude it on other men. Let them use either this or such other expressions as they judge to be more exactly scriptural, provided their heart rests only on what Christ hath done and suffered, for pardon, grace, and glory.

I cannot express this better than in Mr. Hervey’s words, worthy to be wrote in letters of gold: “We are not solicitous as to any particular set of phrases. Only let men be humbled as repenting criminals at Christ’s feet, let them rely as devoted pensioners on his merits and they are undoubtedly in the way to a blessed immortality.”

18. Is there any need, is there any possibility, of saying more? Let us only abide by this declaration, and all the contention about this or that “particular phrase” is torn up by the roots. Keep to this, -- “All who are humbled as repenting criminals at Christ’s feet, and rely as devoted pensioners on his merits, are in the way to a blessed immortality;” And what room for dispute? Who denies this?

Do we not all meet on this ground? What then shall we wrangle about? A man of peace here proposes terms of accommodation to all the contending parties. We desire no better: We accept of the terms: We subscribe to them with heart and hand. Whoever refuses so to do, set a mark upon that man! He is an enemy of peace, and a trouble of Israel, a disturber of the Church of God.

19. In the meantime what we are afraid of is this: -- lest any should use the phrase, “The righteousness of Christ,” or, “The righteousness of Christ is imputed to me,” as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have known this done a thousand times. A man has been reproved, suppose for drunkenness: “O”, said he, “I pretend to no righteousness of my own; Christ is my righteousness.” Another has been told, that “the extortioner, the unjust, shall not inherit the kingdom of God;” He replies, with all assurance, “I am unjust in myself, but I have a spotless righteousness in Christ.” And thus, though a man be as far from the practice as from the tempers of a Christian; though he neither has the mind which was in Christ, nor in any respect walks as he walked; yet he has armour of proof against all conviction, in what he calls the “righteousness of Christ.”

20. It is the seeing so many deplorable instances of this kind, which makes us sparing in the use of these expressions. And I cannot but call upon all of you who use them frequently, and beseech you in the name of God, our Saviour, whose you are, and whom you serve, earnestly to guard all that hear you against this accursed abuse of them. O warn them (it may be they will hear your voice) against “continuing in sin that grace may abound!” Warn them against making “Christ the minister of sin;” against making void that solemn decree of God, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord,” by a vain imagination of being holy in Christ! O warn them that if they remain unrighteous, the righteousness of Christ will profit them nothing! Cry aloud, (is there not a cause?) that for this very end the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, that “the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us;” and that we may “live soberly, religiously, and godly, in this present world.” It remains only to make a short and plain application. And, First, I would address myself to you who violently oppose these expressions, and are ready to condemn all that use them as Antinomians.

But is not this bending the bow too much the other way? Why should you condemn all who do not speak just as you do? Why should you quarrel with them, for using the phrases they like, any more than they with you for taking the same liberty? Or, if they do quarrel with you upon that account, do not imitate the bigotry which you blame. At least, allow them the liberty which they ought to allow you. And why should you be angry at an expression? “O, it has been abused!” And what expression has not? However, the abuse may be removed, and, at the same time, the use remain. Above all, be sure to retain the important sense which is couched under that
expression: “All the blessings I enjoy, all I hope for in time and in eternity, are given wholly and solely for the
sake of what Christ has done and suffered for me.”

I would, Secondly, add a few words to you who are fond of these expressions. And permit me to ask, Do not I
allow enough? What can any reasonable man desire more? I allow the whole sense which you contend for; that
we have every blessing through the righteousness of God our Saviour.

I allow you to use whatever expressions you choose, and that a thousand times over; only guarding them against
that dreadful abuse, which you are as deeply concerned to prevent as I am. I myself frequently use the expression
in question, -- imputed righteousness; and often put this and the like expressions into the mouth of a whole
congregation. But allow me liberty of conscience herein:

Allow me the right of private judgment. Allow me to use it just as often as I judge it preferable to any other
expression; and be not angry with me if I cannot judge it proper to use any one expression every two minutes.
You may, if you please; but do not condemn me because I do not. Do not, for this, represent me as a Papist, or
“an enemy to the righteousness of Christ.” Bear with me, as I do with you; else how shall we “fulfil the law of
Christ?” Do not make tragic outcries, as though I were “subverting the very foundations of Christianity.”

Whoever does this, does me much wrong: the Lord lay it not to his charge! I lay, and have done for many years,
the very same foundation with you. And, indeed, “other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, even
Jesus Christ.” I build inward and outward holiness thereon, as you do, even by faith. Do not, therefore, suffer any
distaste, or unkindness, no, nor any shyness or coldness in your heart. If there were a difference of opinion,
where is our religion, if we cannot think and let think? What hinders but you may forgive me as easily as I may
forgive you? How much more, when there is only a difference of expression? Nay, hardly so much as that? All
the dispute being only, whether a particular mode of expression shall be used more or less frequently? Surely we
must earnestly desire to contend with one another, before we can make this a bone of contention! O let us not
any more, for such very trifles as these, give our common enemies room to blaspheme! Rather let us at length cut
off occasion for them that seek occasion! Let us at length (O why was it not done before?) join hearts and hands
in the service of our great Master. As we have “one Lord, one faith, one hope of our calling,” let us all strengthen
each other’s hands in God, and with one heart and one mouth declare to all mankind, “THE LORD OUR
RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

John Wesley
SERMON 40

(text of the 1872 edition)

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Phil. 3:12.

1. There is scarce any expression in Holy Writ which has given more offence than this. The word perfect is what
many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them. And whosoever preaches perfection (as the
phrase is,) that is, asserts that it is attainable in this life, runs great hazard of being accounted by them worse than
a heathen man or a publican.

2. And hence some have advised, wholly to lay aside the use of those expressions, “because they have given so
great offence.” But are they not found in the oracles of God? If so, by what authority can any Messenger of God
lay them aside, even though all men should be offended? We have not so learned Christ; neither may we thus
give place to the devil. Whatsoever God hath Spoken that will we speak, whether men will hear or whether they
will forbear; knowing that then alone can any Minister of Christ be “pure from the blood of all men,” when he
hath “not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God.” [Acts 20:26, 27]

3. We may not, therefore, lay these expressions aside, seeing they are the words of God, and not of man. But we
may and ought to explain the meaning of them, that those who are sincere of heart may not err to the right hand
or to the left, from the mark of the prize of their high calling. And this is the more needful to be done because in the verse already repeated the Apostle speaks of himself as not perfect: “Not,” saith he, “as though I were already perfect.” And yet immediately after, in the fifteenth verse, he speaks of himself, yea and many others, as perfect. “Let us,” saith he, “as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” [Phil. 3:15]

4. In order, therefore, to remove the difficulty arising from this seeming contradiction, as well as to give light to them who are pressing forward to the mark, and that those who are lame be not turned out of the way, I shall endeavor to show,

First, in what sense Christians are not; and,
Secondly, in what sense they are, perfect.

I.

1. In the first place I shall endeavor to show in what sense Christians are not perfect. And both from experience and Scripture it appears, First, that they are not perfect in knowledge: they are not so perfect in this life as to be free from ignorance. They know, it may be, in common with other men, many things relating to the present world; and they know, with regard to the world to come, the general truths which God hath revealed. They know, likewise, (what the natural man receiveth not, for these things are spiritually discerned,) “what manner of love” it is wherewith “the Father” hath loved them, “that they should be called the sons of God.” [1 John 3:1] They know the mighty working of his Spirit in their hearts; [Eph. 3:16] and the wisdom of his providence, directing all their paths, [Prov. 3:6] and causing all things to work together for their good. [Rom. 8:28] Yea, they know in every circumstance of life what the Lord requireth of them, and how to keep a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man. [Acts 24:16]

2. But innumerable are the things which they know not. Touching the Almighty himself, they cannot search him out to perfection. “Lo, these are but a part of his ways; but the thunder of his power who can understand?” [Job 26:14] They cannot understand, I will not say, how “there are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one;” [1 John 5:7] or how the eternal Son of God “took upon himself the form of a servant;” [Phil. 2:7] – but not any one attribute, not any one circumstance of the divine nature. [2 Pet. 1:4] Neither is it for them to know the times and seasons [Acts 1:7] when God will work his great works upon the earth; no, not even those which he hath in part revealed by his servants and Prophets since the world began.

[see Amos 3:7] Much less do they know when God, having “accomplished the number of his elect, will hasten his kingdom;” when “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” [2 Pet. 3:10]

3. They know not the reasons even of many of his present dispensations with the sons of men; but are constrained to rest here, -- Though “clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat.” [Ps. 97:2] Yea, often with regard to his dealings with themselves, doth their Lord say unto them, “What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” [John 13:7] And how little do they know of what is ever before them, of even the visible works of his hands! -- How “he spreadeth the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing?” [Job 26:7] how he unites all the parts of this vast machine by a secret chain which cannot be broken? So great is the ignorance, so very little the knowledge, of even the best of men!

4. No one, then, is so perfect in this life, as to be free from ignorance. Nor, Secondly, from mistake; which indeed is almost an unavoidable consequence of it; seeing those who “know but in part” [1 Cor. 13:12] are ever liable to err touching the things which they know not. It is true, the children of God do not mistake as to the things essential to salvation: They do not “put darkness for light, or light for darkness;” [Isa. 5:20] neither “seek death in the error of their life.” [Wisdom 1:12] For they are “taught of God,” and the way which he teaches them, the way of holiness, is so plain, that “the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.” [Isa. 35:8] But in things unessential to salvation they do err, and that frequently. The best and wisest of men are frequently mistaken even with regard to facts; believing those things not to have been which really were, or those to have been done which were not. Or, suppose they are not mistaken as to the fact itself, they may be with regard to its circumstances; believing them, or many of them, to have been quite different from what in truth, they were. And
hence cannot but arise many farther mistakes. Hence they may believe either past or present actions which were or are evil, to be good; and such as were or are good, to be evil.

Hence also they may judge not according to truth with regard to the characters of men; and that, not only by supposing good men to be better, or wicked men to be worse, than they are, but by believing them to have been or to be good men who were or are very wicked; or perhaps those to have been or to be wicked men, who were or are holy and unreprovable.

5. Nay, with regard to the Holy Scriptures themselves, as careful as they are to avoid it, the best of men are liable to mistake, and do mistake day by day; especially with respect to those parts thereof which less immediately relate to practice. Hence even the children of God are not agreed as to the interpretation of many places in holy writ: Nor is their difference of opinion any proof that they are not the children of God on either side; but it is a proof that we are no more to expect any living man to be infallible than to be omniscient.

6. If it be objected to what has been observed under this and the preceding head, that St. John, speaking to his brethren in the faith says, “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things:” (1 John 2:20;) The answer is plain: “Ye know all things that are needful for your souls’ health.” [cf. 3 John 2] That the Apostle never designed to extend this farther, that he could not speak it in an absolute sense, is clear, First from hence; -- that otherwise he would describe the disciple as “above his Master;” seeing Christ himself, as man, knew not all things: “Of that hour,” saith he, “knoweth no man: no, not the Son, but the Father only.” [Mark 13:32] It is clear, Secondly, from the Apostle’s own words that follow: “These things have I written unto you concerning them that deceive you;” [cf. 1 John 3:7] as well as from his frequently repeated caution, “Let no man deceive you;” [see Mark 13:5; Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3] which had been altogether needless, had not those very persons who had that unction from the Holy One [1 John 2:20] been liable, not to ignorance only, but to mistake also.

7. Even Christians, therefore, are not so perfect as to be free either from ignorance or error: We may, Thirdly, add, nor from infirmities. -- Only let us take care to understand this word aright: Only let us not give that soft title to known sins, as the manner of some is. So, one man tells us, “Every man has his infirmity, and mine is drunkenness;” Another has the infirmity of uncleanness; another of taking God’s holy name in vain; and yet another has the infirmity of calling his brother, “Thou fool,” [Matt. 5:22] or returning “railing for railing.” [1 Pet. 3:9] It is plain that all you who thus speak, if ye repent not, shall, with your infirmities, go quick into hell! But I mean hereby, not only those which are properly termed bodily infirmities, but all those inward or outward imperfections which are not of a moral nature. Such are the weakness or slowness of understanding, dulness or confusedness of apprehension, incoherency of thought, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Such (to mention no more of this kind) is the want of a ready or of a retentive memory.

Such in another kind, are those which are commonly, in some measure, consequent upon these; namely, slowness of speech, impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behaviour. These are the infirmities which are found in the best of men, in a larger or smaller proportion. And from these none can hope to be perfectly freed till the spirit returns to God that gave it. [Eccles. 12:7]

8. Nor can we expect, till then, to be wholly free from temptation. Such perfection belongeth not to this life. It is true, there are those who, being given up to work all uncleanness with greediness, [Eph. 4:19] scarce perceive the temptations which they resist not, and so seem to be without temptation. There are also many whom the wise enemy of souls, seeing to be fast asleep in the dead form of godliness, will not tempt to gross sin, lest they should awake before they drop into everlasting burnings. I know there are also children of God who, being now justified freely, [Rom. 5:1] having found redemption in the blood of Christ, [Eph. 1:7] for the present feel no temptation.

God hath said to their enemies, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my children no harm.” [see 1 Chron. 16:22] And for this season, it may be for weeks or months, he causeth them to “ride on high places;” [Deut. 32:13] he beareth them as on eagles’ wings, [Exod. 19:4] above all the fiery darts of the wicked one. [Eph. 6:16] But this state will not last always; as we may learn from that single consideration, -- that the Son of God himself, in the days of his flesh, was tempted even to the end of his life. [Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 6:7] Therefore, so let his servant expect to be; for “it is enough that he be as his Master.” [Luke 6:40]

9. Christian perfection, therefore, does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from
ignorance or mistake, or infirmities or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus every one that is perfect is holy, and every one that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe, that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man hath attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to “grow in grace,” [2 Pet. 3:18] and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour. [see Phil. 1:9]

II.

1. In what sense, then, are Christians perfect? This is what I shall endeavor, in the Second place, to show. But it should be premised, that there are several stages in Christian life, as in natural; some of the children of God being but new-born babes; others having attained to more maturity. And accordingly St. John, in his first Epistle, (1 John 2:12, &c.,) applies himself severally to those he terms little children, those he styles young men, and those whom he entitles fathers. “I write unto you, little children,” saith the Apostle, “because your sins are forgiven you:” Because thus far you have attained, -- being “justified freely,” you “have peace with God, through Jesus Christ.” [Rom. 5:1] “I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one;” or (as he afterwards addeth,) “because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you.” [1 John 2:13, 14] Ye have quenched the fiery darts of the wicked one, [Eph. 6:16] the doubts and fears wherewith he disturbed your first peace; and the witness of God, that your sins are forgiven, now abideth in your heart. “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.” [1 John 2:13] Ye have known both the Father and the Son and the Spirit of Christ, in your inmost soul. Ye are “perfect men, being grown up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” [Eph. 4:13]

2. It is of these chiefly I speak in the latter part of this discourse: For these only are properly Christians. But even babes in Christ are in such a sense perfect, or born of God, (an expression taken also in divers senses,) as, First, not to commit sin. If any doubt of this privilege of the sons of God, the question is not to be decided by abstract reasonings, which may be drawn out into an endless length, and leave the point just as it was before. Neither is it to be determined by the experience of this or that particular person. Many may suppose they do not commit sin, when they do; but this proves nothing either way. To the law and to the testimony we appeal. “Let God be true, and every man a liar.” [Rom. 3:4] By His Word will we abide, and that alone. Hereby we ought to be judged.

3. Now the Word of God plainly declares, that even those who are justified, who are born again in the lowest sense, “do not continue in sin;” that they cannot “live any longer therein;” (Rom. 6:1, 2;) that they are “planted together in the likeness of the death” of Christ; (Rom. 6:5;) that their “old man is crucified with him,” the body of sin being destroyed, so that henceforth they do not serve sin; that being dead with Christ, they are free from sin; (Rom. 6:6, 7;) that they are “dead unto sin, and alive unto God;” (Rom. 6:11;) that “sin hath no more dominion over them,” who are “not under the law, but under grace;” but that these, “being free from sin, are become the servants of righteousness.” (Rom. 6:14, 18)

4. The very least which can be implied in these words, is, that the persons spoken of therein, namely, all real Christians, or believers in Christ, are made free from outward sin. And the same freedom, which St. Paul here expresses in such variety of phrases, St. Peter expresses in that one: (1 Pet. 4:1, 2;) “He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, -- that he no longer should live to the desires of men, but to the will of God.” For this ceasing from sin, if it be interpreted in the lowest sense, as regarding only the outward behaviour, must denote the ceasing from the outward act, from any outward transgression of the law.

5. But most express are the well-known words of St. John, in the third chapter of his First Epistle, verse 8, &c.: “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot sin because he is born of God.” [1 John 3:8, 9] And those in the fifth: (1 John 5:18;) “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”

Indeed it is said this means only, He sinneth not wilfully; or he doth not commit sin habitually; or, not as other men do; or, not as he did before. But by whom is this said? By St.John? No. There is no such word in the text; nor in the whole chapter; nor in all his Epistle; nor in any part of his writings whatsoever. Why then, the best way
to answer a bold assertion is simply to deny it. And if any man can prove it from the Word of God, let him bring forth his strong reasons.

7. And a sort of reason there is, which has been frequently brought to support these strange assertions, drawn from the examples recorded in the Word of God: “What!” say they, “did not Abraham himself commit sin, -- prevaricating, and denying his wife? Did not Moses commit sin, when he provoked God at the waters of strife? Nay, to produce one for all, did not even David, ‘the man after God’s own heart,’ commit sin, in the matter of Uriah the Hittite; even murder and adultery?” It is most sure he did. All this is true. But what is it you would infer from hence? It may be granted, First, that David, in the general course of his life, was one of the holiest men among the Jews; and, Secondly, that the holiest men among the Jews did sometimes commit sin. But if you would hence infer, that all Christians do and must commit sin as long as they live; this consequence we utterly deny: It will never follow from those premises.

8. Those who argue thus, seem never to have considered that declaration of our Lord: (Matt. 11:11:) “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” I fear, indeed, there are some who have imagined “the kingdom of heaven,” here, to mean the kingdom of glory; as if the Son of God had just discovered to us, that the least glorified saint in heaven is greater than any man upon earth! To mention this is sufficiently to refute it. There can, therefore, no doubt be made, but “the kingdom of heaven,” here, (as in the following verse, where it is said to be taken by force.) [Matt. 11:12] or, “the kingdom of God,” as St. Luke expresses it, - is that kingdom of God on earth whereunto all true believers in Christ, all real Christians, belong.

In these words, then, our Lord declares two things: First, that before his coming in the flesh, among all the children of men there had not been one greater than John the Baptist; whence it evidently follows, that neither Abraham, David, nor any Jew was greater than John. Our Lord, Secondly, declares that he which is least in the kingdom of God (in that kingdom which he came to set up on earth, and which the violent now began to take by force) is greater than he: -- Not a greater Prophet as some have interpreted the word; for this is palpably false in fact; but greater in the grace of God, and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we cannot measure the privileges of real Christians by those formerly given to the Jews. Their “ministration,” (or dispensation,) we allow “was glorious;” but ours “exceeds in glory.” [2 Cor. 3:7-9] So that whosoever would bring down the Christian dispensation to the Jewish standard, whosoever gleans up the examples of weakness, recorded in the Law and the Prophets, and thence infers that they who have “put on Christ” [Gal. 3:27] are endued with no greater strength, doth greatly err, neither “knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” [Matt. 22:29]

9. “But are there not assertions in Scripture which prove the same thing, if it cannot be inferred from those examples? Does not the Scripture say expressly, “Even a just man sinneth seven times a day?”’ I answer, No. The Scripture says no such thing. There is no such text in all the Bible. That which seems to be intended is the sixteenth verse of the twenty-fourth chapter of the Proverbs the words of which are these: “A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.” [Prov. 24:16] But this is quite another thing. For, First, the words “a day” are not in the text. So that if a just man falls seven times in his life, it is as much as is affirmed here. Secondly, here is no mention of falling into sin at all; what is here mentioned is falling into temporal affliction. This plainly appears from the verse before, the words of which are these: “Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place.” [Prov. 24:15] It follows, “For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again; but the wicked shall fall into mischief.” As if he had said, “God will deliver him out of his trouble; but when thou fallest, there shall be none to deliver thee.”

10. ”But, however, in other places,” continue the objectors, “Solomon does assert plainly, ‘There is no man that sinneth not;’ (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chron. 6:36;) yea, ‘There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not.’ (Eccles. 7:20;)” I answer, Without doubt, thus it was in the days of Solomon. Yea, thus it was from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Solomon, and from Solomon to Christ. There was then no man that sinned not. Even from the day that sin entered into the world, there was not a just man upon earth that did good and sinned not, until the Son of God was manifested to take away our sins. It is unquestionably true, that “the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant.” [Gal. 4:1] And that even so they (all the holy men of old, who were under the Jewish dispensation) were, during that infant state of the Church, “in bondage under the elements of the world.” [Gal. 4:3] “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made under the law,
to redeem them that were under the law, that they might receive the adoption of sons;” [Gal. 4:4] – that they might receive that “grace which is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” (2 Tim. 1:10.) Now, therefore, they “are no more servants, but sons.” [see Gal. 4:7] So that, whatsoever was the case of those under the law, we may safely affirm with St. John, that, since the gospel was given, “he that is born of God sinneth not.” [1 John 5:18]

11. It is of great importance to observe, and that more carefully than is commonly done, the wide difference there is between the Jewish and the Christian dispensation; and that ground of it which the same Apostle assigns in the seventh chapter of his Gospel. (John 7:38, &c) After he had there related, those words of our blessed Lord, “He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,” he immediately subjoins, “This spake he of the Spirit,” QwýGOGNNQPýNCODCPGKPýJQKýRKUVGWQPVLýGKLýCWVQP, --which they who should believe on him were afterwards to receive. For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.” [John 7:39] Now, the Apostle cannot mean here, (as some have taught,) that the miracle-working power of the Holy Ghost was not yet given. For this was given; our Lord had given it to all the Apostles, when he first sent them forth to preach the gospel. He then gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out; power to heal the sick; yea, to raise the dead. [Mark 10:8] But the Holy Ghost was not yet given in his sanctifying graces, as he was after Jesus was glorified. It was then when “he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive,” that he “received” those “gifts for men, yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” [Ps. 68:18; cf. Eph. 4:8] And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, [Acts 2:1] then first it was, that they who “waited for the promise of the Father” [Acts 1:4] were made more than conquerors [Rom. 8:37] over sin by the Holy Ghost given unto them.

12. That this great salvation from sin was not given till Jesus was glorified, St. Peter also plainly testifies; where, speaking of his brethren in the flesh, as now “receiving the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls,” he adds, (1 Peter 1:9, 10, &c.,) “Of which salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace” that is, the gracious dispensation, “that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ. And the glory,” the glorious salvation, “that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;” [1 Pet. 1:12] viz., at the day of Pentecost, and so unto all generations, into the hearts of all true believers. On this ground, even “the grace which was brought unto them by the revelation of Jesus Christ,” [1 Pet. 1:13] the Apostle might well build that strong exhortation, “Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, -- as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.” [1 Pet. 1:13]

13. Those who have duly considered these things must allow, that the privileges of Christians are in no wise to be measured by what the Old Testament records concerning those who were under the Jewish dispensation; seeing the fulness of times is now come; the Holy Ghost is now given; the great salvation of God is brought unto men, by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is now set up on earth; concerning which the Spirit of God declared of old, (so far is David from being the pattern or standard of Christian perfection,) “He that is feeble among them at that day, shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.” (Zech. 12:8.)

14. If, therefore, you would prove that the Apostle’s words, “He that is born of God sinneth not,” [1 John 5:18] are not to be understood according to their plain, natural, obvious meaning, it is from the New Testament you are to bring your proofs, else you will fight as one that beateth the air. [1 Cor. 9:26] And the first of these which is usually brought is taken from the examples recorded in the New Testament. “The Apostles themselves,” it is said, “committed sin; nay, the greatest of them, Peter and Paul: St. Paul, by his sharp contention with Barnabas; [Acts 15:39] and St. Peter, by his dissimulation at Antioch.” [Gal. 2:11] Well: Suppose both Peter and Paul did then commit sin; what is it you would infer from hence? That all the other Apostles committed sin sometimes? There is no shadow of proof in this. Or would you thence infer, that all the other Christians of the apostolic age committed sin? Worse and worse: This is such an inference as, one would imagine, a man in his senses could
never have thought of. Or will you argue thus: “If two of the Apostles did once commit sin, then all other Christians, in all ages, do and will commit sin as long as they live?” Alas, my brother! A child of common understanding would be ashamed of such reasoning as this. Least of all can you with any colour of argument infer, that any man must commit sin at all. No: God forbid we should thus speak! No necessity of sinning was laid upon them. The grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it is sufficient for us at this day. With the temptation which fell on them, there was a way to escape; as there is to every soul of man in every temptation. So that whosoever is tempted to any sin, need not yield; for no man is tempted above that he is able to bear. [1 Cor. 10:13]

15. "But St. Paul besought the Lord thrice, and yet he could not escape from his temptation.” Let us consider his own words literally translated: “There was given to me a thorn to the flesh, an angel” (or messenger) “of Satan, to buffet me. Touching this, I besought the Lord thrice, that it” (or he) “might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in” these “my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses; -- for when I am weak, then am I strong.” [2 Cor. 12:7-10]

16. As this scripture is one of the strong-holds of the patrons of sin, it may be proper to weigh it thoroughly. Let it be observed then, First, it does by no means appear that this thorn, whatsoever it was, occasioned St. Paul to commit sin; much less laid him under any necessity of doing so.

Therefore, from hence it can never be proved that any Christian must commit sin. Secondly, the ancient Fathers inform us, it was bodily pain: “a violent headache, saith Tertullian; (De Pudic.;) to which both Chrysostom and St. Jerome agree. St. Cyprian [De Mortalitate] expresses it, a little more generally, in those terms: “Many and grievous torments of the flesh and of the body.” [Carnis et corporis multa ac gravia tormenta.] Thirdly, to this exactly agree the Apostle’s own words, “A thorn to the flesh to smite, beat, or buffet me.” “My strength is made perfect in weakness:” -- Which same word occurs no less than four times in these two verses only. But, Fourthly, whatsoever it was, it could not be either inward or outward sin. It could no more be inward stirrings, than outward expressions, of pride, anger, or lust. This is manifest, beyond all possible exception from the words that immediately follow: “Most gladly will I glory in” these “my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me.” [2 Cor. 12:9] What! Did he glory in pride, in anger, in lust? Was it through these weaknesses, that the strength of Christ rested upon him? He goes on: “Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses; for when I am weak, then am I strong;” [2 Cor. 12:10] that is, when I am weak in body, then am I strong in spirit. But will any man dare to say, “When I am weak by pride or lust, then am I strong in spirit?” I call you all to record this day, who find the strength of Christ resting upon you, can you glory in anger, or pride, or lust? Can you take pleasure in these infirmities? Do these weaknesses make you strong? Would you not leap into hell, were it possible, to escape them? Even by yourselves, then, judge, whether the Apostle could glory and take pleasure in them!

Let it be, Lastly, observed, that this thorn was given to St. Paul above fourteen years before he wrote this Epistle; [2 Cor. 12:2] which itself was wrote several years before he finished his course. [see Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7] So that he had after this, a long course to run, many battles to fight, many victories to gain, and great increase to receive in all the gifts of God, and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Therefore from any spiritual weakness (if such it had been) which he at that time felt, we could by no means infer that he was never made strong; that Paul the aged, the father in Christ, still labored under the same weaknesses; that he was in no higher state till the day of his death. From all which it appears that this instance of St. Paul is quite foreign to the question, and does in no wise clash with the assertion of St. John, “He that is born of God sinneth not.” [1 John 5:18]

17. "But does not St. James directly contradict this? His words are, ‘In many things we offend all,’ (Jas. 3:2:) And is not offending the same as committing sin?” In this place, I allow it is: I allow the persons here spoken of did commit sin; yea, that they all committed many sins. But who are the persons here spoken of? Why, those many masters or teachers whom God had not sent; (probably the same vain men who taught that faith without works, which is so sharply reproved in the preceding chapter;) [Jas. 2] not the Apostle himself, nor any real Christian. That in the word we (used by a figure of speech common in all other, as well as the inspired, writings) the Apostle could not possibly include himself or any other true believer, appears evidently, First, from the same word in the ninth verse: -- “Therewith,” saith he, “bless we God and therewith curse we men. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.” [Jas. 3:9] True; but not out of the mouth of the Apostle, nor of anyone
who is in Christ a new creature. [2 Cor. 5:17] Secondly, from the verse immediately preceding the text, and manifestly connected with it: “My brethren, be not many masters,” (or teachers,) “knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” “For in many things we offend all.” [Jas. 3:1] We! Who? Not the Apostles, not true believers; but they who know they should receive the greater condemnation, because of those many offences. But this could not be spoke of the Apostle himself, or of any who trod in his steps, seeing “there is no condemnation to them who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” [Rom. 8:2] Nay, Thirdly, the very verse itself proves, that “we offend all,” cannot be spoken either of all men, or of all Christians: For in it there immediately follows the mention of a man who offends not, as the we first mentioned did; from whom, therefore, he is professedly contradistinguished, and pronounced a perfect man.

18. So clearly does St. James explain himself, and fix the meaning of his own words. Yet, lest any one should still remain in doubt, St. John, writing many years after St. James, puts the matter entirely out of dispute, by the express declarations above recited. But here a fresh difficulty may arise: How shall we reconcile St. John with himself? In one place he declares, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;” [1 John 3:9] and again, -- “We know that he which is born of God sinneth not;” [1 John 5:18] And yet in another he saith, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;” [1 John 1:8] and again, -- “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” [1 John 1:10]

19. As great a difficulty as this may at first appear, it vanishes away, if we observe, First, that the tenth verse fixes the sense of the eighth: “If we say we have no sin,” in the former, being explained by, “If we say we have not sinned,” in the latter verse. [1 John 1:10, 8] Secondly, that the point under present consideration is not whether we have or have not sinned heretofore; and neither of these verses asserts that we do sin, or commit sin now. Thirdly, that the ninth verse explains both the eighth and tenth. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness:” As if he had said, “I have before affirmed, `The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin; but let no man say, I need it not; I have no sin to be cleansed from. If we say that we have no sin, that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and make God a liar: But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just,’ not only `to forgive our sins,’ but also `to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;’ [1 John 1:8-10] that we may `go and sin no more.’” [John 8:11]

20. St. John, therefore, is well consistent with himself, as well as with the other holy writers; as will yet more evidently appear if we place all his assertions touching this matter in one view: He declares, First, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin. Secondly, no man can say, I have not sinned, I have no sin to be cleansed from. Thirdly, but God is ready both to forgive our past sins and to save us from them for the time to come. [1 John 1:7-10] Fourthly, “These things I write unto you,” saith the Apostle, “that ye may not sin. But if any man” should “sin,” or have sinned, (as the word might be rendered,) he need not continue in sin; seeing “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” [1 John 2:1-2] Thus far all is clear. But lest any doubt should remain in a point of so vast importance, the Apostle resumes this subject in the third chapter, and largely explains his own meaning. “Little children,” saith he, “let no man deceive you:” (As though I had given any encouragement to those that continue in sin:) “He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: For his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.” (1 John 3:7-10.) Here the point, which till then might possibly have admitted of some doubt in weak minds, is purposely settled by the last of the inspired writers, and decided in the clearest manner. In conformity, therefore, both to the doctrine of St. John, and to the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion --A Christian is so far perfect, as not to commit sin.

21. This is the glorious privilege of every Christian; yea, though he be but a babe in Christ. But it is only of those who are strong in the Lord, “and “have overcome the wicked one,” or rather of those who “have known him that is from the beginning,” [1 John 2:13, 14] that it can be affirmed they are in such a sense perfect, as, Secondly, to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers. First, from evil or sinful thoughts. But here let it be observed, that thoughts concerning evil are not always evil thoughts; that a thought concerning sin, and a sinful thought, are widely different. A man, for instance, may think of a murder which another has committed; and yet this is no evil or sinful thought. So our blessed Lord himself doubtless thought of, or understood the thing spoken by the devil,
when he said, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” [Matt. 4:9] Yet had he no evil or sinful thought; nor indeed was capable of having any. And even hence it follows, that neither have real Christians: for “every one that is perfect is as his Master.” (Luke 6:40) Therefore, if He was free from evil or sinful thoughts, so are they likewise.

22. And, indeed, whence should evil thoughts proceed, in the servant who is as his Master? “Out of the heart of man” (if at all) “proceed evil thoughts.” (Mark 7:21) If, therefore, his heart be no longer evil, then evil thoughts can no longer proceed out of it. If the tree were corrupt, so would be the fruit: But the tree is good; The fruit, therefore is good also; (Matt. 22:33) our Lord himself bearing witness, “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit,” as “a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.” (Matt 7:17, 18)

23. The same happy privilege of real Christians, St. Paul asserts from his own experience. “The weapons of our warfare,” saith he, “are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations” (or reasonings rather, for so the word NQIKIQWL signifies; all the reasonings of pride and unbelief against the declarations, promises, or gifts of God) “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Cor. 10:4, &c.)

24. And as Christians indeed are freed from evil thoughts, so are they, Secondly, from evil tempers. This is evident from the above-mentioned declaration of our Lord himself: “The disciple is not above his Master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his Master.” [Luke 6:40] He had been delivering, just before, some of the sublimest doctrines of Christianity, and some of the most grievous to flesh and blood. “I say unto you, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you; -- and unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other.” [Luke 6:29] Now these he well knew the world would not receive; and, therefore, immediately adds, “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?” [Luke 6:39] As if he had said, “Do not confer with flesh and blood touching these things, -- with men void of spiritual discernment, the eyes of whose understanding God hath not opened, -- lest they and you perish together.” In the next verse he removes the two grand objections with which these wise fools meet us at every turn: “These things are too grievous to be borne,” or, “They are too high to be attained,” [Matt. 23:4] saying, “The disciple is not above his Master;’ therefore, if I have suffered, be content to tread in my steps. And doubt ye not then, but I will fulfill my word: ‘For every one that is perfect shall be as his Master.”’ [Luke 6:40] But his Master was free from all sinful tempers. So, therefore, is his disciple, even every real Christian.

25. Every one of these can say, with St. Paul, “I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:” [Gal 2:20] – Words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin. This is expressed both negatively, I live not; (my evil nature, the body of sin, is destroyed;) and positively, Christ liveth in me; and, therefore, all that is holy, and just, and good. Indeed, both these, Christ liveth in me, and I live not, are inseparably connected; for “what communion hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial?” [2 Cor. 6:15]

26. He, therefore, who liveth in true believers, hath “purified their hearts by faith;” [Acts 15:9] insomuch that every one that hath Christ in him the hope of glory, [Col. 1:27] “purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3.) He is purified from pride; for Christ was lowly of heart. [Matt. 11:29] He is pure from self-will or desire; for Christ desired only to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work. [John 4:34; 5:30] And he is pure from anger, in the common sense of the word; for Christ was meek and gentle, patient and long-suffering. I say, in the common sense of the word; for all anger is not evil. We read of our Lord himself, (Mark 3:5,) that he once “looked round with anger.” But with what kind of anger? The next word shows, UWNNWRQWOQPQL, being, at the same time “grieved for the hardness of their hearts.” [Mark 3:6] So then he was angry at the sin, and in the same moment grieved for the sinners; angry or displeased at the offence, but sorry for the offenders. With anger, yea, hatred, he looked upon the thing; with grief and love upon the persons. Go, thou that art perfect, and do likewise. Be thus angry, and thou sinnest not; [see Eph. 4:26] feeling a displacency at every offence against God, but only love and tender compassion to the offender.

27. Thus doth Jesus “save his people from their sins:” [Matt. 1:21] And not only from outward sins, but also from the sins of their hearts; from evil thoughts and from evil tempers. -- “True,” say some, “we shall thus be saved from our sins; but not till death; not in this world.” But how are we to reconcile this with the express words of St. John? -- “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. Because as he is,
so are we in this world.” The Apostle here, beyond all contradiction, speaks of himself and other living Christians, of whom (as though he had foreseen this very evasion, and set himself to overturn it from the foundation) he flatly affirms, that not only at or after death but in this world they are as their Master. (1 John 4:17.)

28. Exactly agreeable to this are his words in the first chapter of this Epistle, (1 John 5:1, &c.,) “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, -- we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” And again, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” [1 John 1:9] Now it is evident, the Apostle here also speaks of a deliverance wrought in this world.

For he saith not, the blood of Christ will cleanse at the hour of death, or in the day of judgment, but, it “cleanseth,” at the time present, “us,” living Christians, “from all sin.” And it is equally evident, that if any sin remain, we are not cleansed from all sin: If any unrighteousness remain in the soul, it is not cleansed from all unrighteousness. Neither let any sinner against his own soul say, that this relates to justification only, or the cleansing us from the guilt of sin. First, because this is confounding together what the Apostle clearly distinguishes, who mentions first, to forgive us our sins, and then to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Secondly, because this is asserting justification by works, in the strongest sense possible; it is making all inward as well as outward holiness necessarily previous to justification. For if the cleansing here spoken of is no other than the cleansing us from the guilt of sin, then we are not cleansed from guilt; that is, are not justified, unless on condition of “walking in the light, as he is in the light.” [1 John 7:7] It remains, then, that Christians are saved in this world from all sin, from all unrighteousness; that they are now in such a sense perfect, as not to commit sin, and to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers.”

29. Thus hath the Lord fulfilled the things he spake by his holy prophets, which have been since the world began; -- by Moses in particular, saying, (Deut. 30:6.) I “will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul;” by David, crying out, “Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me;” [Ps. 51:10] -- and most remarkably by Ezekiel, in those words: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; -- and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. -- Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses. -- Thus saith the Lord your God, In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, -- the Heathen shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places; -- I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.” (Ezek. 36:25, &c.)

30. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved,” both in the Law and in the Prophets, and having the prophetic word confirmed unto us in the Gospel, by our blessed Lord and his Apostles; “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” [2 Cor. 7:1] “Let us fear, lest” so many “promises being made us of entering into his rest,” which he that hath entered into, has ceased from his own works, “any of us should come short of it.” [Heb. 4:1] “This one thing let us do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, let us press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;” [Phil. 3:13, 14] crying unto him day and night, till we also are “delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God!” [Rom. 8:21]

**THE PROMISE OF SANCTIFICATION**

(Ezekiel 36:25, &c.)

BY THE REV. CHARLES WESLEY.

1
God of all power, and truth, and grace,
Which shall from age to age endure;
Whose word, when heaven and earth shall pass,
Remains, and stands for ever sure:

2
Calmly to thee my soul looks up,
And waits thy promises to prove;
The object of my steadfast hope,
The seal of thine eternal love.

3
That I thy mercy may proclaim,
That all mankind thy truth may see,
Hallow thy great and glorious name,
And perfect holiness in me.

4
Chose from the world, if now I stand
Adorn’d in righteousness divine;
If, brought unto the promised land,
I justly call the Saviour mine;

5
Perform the work thou hast begun,
My inmost soul to thee convert:
Love me, for ever love thine own,
And sprinkle with thy blood my heart.

6
Thy sanctifying Spirit pour,
To quench my thirst, and wash me clean;
Now, Father, let the gracious shower
Descend, and make me pure from sin.

7
Purge me from every sinful blot;
My idols all be cast aside:
Cleanse me from every evil thought,
From all the filth of self and pride.

8
Give me a new, a perfect heart,
From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free;
The mind which was in Christ impart,
And let my spirit cleave to thee.

9
O take this heart of stone away,
(Thy rule it doth not, cannot own;)
In me no longer let it stay:
O take away this heart of stone.

10
The hatred of my carnal mind
Out of my flesh at once remove;
Give me a tender heart, resign’d,
And pure, and fill’d with faith and love.

11
Within me thy good Spirit place,
Spirit of health, and love and power;
Plant in me thy victorious grace,
And sin shall never enter more.

12
Cause me to walk in Christ my Way,
And I thy statutes shall fulfill;
In every point thy law obey.
And perfectly perform thy will.
13
Hast thou not said, who canst not lie,
That I thy law shall keep and do?
Lord, I believe, though men deny;
They all are false, but thou art true.
14
O that I now, from sin released,
Thy word might to the utmost prove!
Enter into the promised rest,
The Canaan of thy perfect love!
15
There let me ever, ever dwell;
By thou my God, and I will be
Thy servant: O set to thy seal!
Give me eternal life in thee.
16
From all remaining filth within
Let me in Thee salvation have:
From actual, and from inbred sin
My ransom’d soul persist to save.
17
Wash out my old original stain:
Tell me no more It cannot be,
Demons or men! The Lamb was slain
His blood was all poured out for me!
18
Sprinkle it, Jesu, on my heart:
One drop of thy all-cleansing blood
Shall make my sinfulness depart,
And fill me with the life of God.
19
Father, supply my every need:
Sustain the life thyself hast given;
Call for the corn, the living bread,
The manna that comes down from heaven.
20
The gracious fruits of righteousness,
Thy blessings’ unexhausted store,
In me abundantly increase;
Nor let me ever hunger more.
21
Let me no more in deep complaint
“My leanness, O my leanness!” cry;
Alone consumed with pining want,
Of all my Father’s children I!
22
The painful thirst, the fond desire,
Thy joyous presence shall remove;
While my full soul doth still require
Thy whole eternity of love.
23
Holy, and true, and righteous Lord,
I wait to prove thy perfect will;
Be mindful of thy gracious word,
And stamp me with thy Spirit’s seal!

24
Thy faithful mercies let me find,
In which thou causest me to trust;
Give me the meek and lowly mind,
And lay my spirit in the dust.

25
Show me how foul my heart hath been,
When all renew’d by grace I am:
When thou hast emptied me of sin,
Show me the fulness of my shame.

26
Open my faith’s interior eye,
Display thy glory from above;
And all I am shall sink and die,
Lost in astonishment and love.

27
Confound, o’erpower me with thy grace:
I would be by myself abhor’d;
(All might, all majesty, all praise,
All glory be to Christ my Lord!)

28
Now let me gain perfection’s height!
Now let me into nothing fall!
Be less than nothing in thy sight,
And feel that Christ is all in all!

John Wesley
SERMON 43
(text of the 1872 edition; Sugden’s Sermon 50)

THE SCRIPTURE WAY OF SALVATION

“Ye are saved through faith.” -- Ephesians 2:8.

1. Nothing can be more intricate, complex, and hard to be understood, than religion, as it has been often described. And this is not only true concerning the religion of the Heathens, even many of the wisest of them, but concerning the religion of those also who were, in some sense, Christians; yea, and men of great name in the Christian world; men who seemed to be pillars thereof. Yet how easy to be understood, how plain and simple a thing, is the genuine religion of Jesus Christ; provided only that we take it in its native form, just as it is described in the oracles of God! It is exactly suited, by the wise Creator and Governor of the world, to the weak understanding and narrow capacity of man in his present state. How observable is this, both with regard to the end it proposes, and the means to attain that end! The end is, in one word, salvation; the means to attain it, faith.

2. It is easily discerned, that these two little words, I mean faith and salvation, include the substance of all the Bible, the marrow, as it were, of the whole Scripture. So much the more should we take all possible care to avoid all mistake concerning them, and to form a true and accurate judgment concerning both the one and the other.
3. Let us then seriously inquire,

I. What is Salvation?
II. What is that faith whereby we are saved? And,
III. How are we saved by it?

I.

1. And, first, let us inquire, What is salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. It is not the soul’s going to paradise, termed by our Lord, “Abraham’s bosom.” It is not a blessing which lies on the other side death; or, as we usually speak, in the other world. The very words of the text itself put this beyond all question: “Ye are saved.” It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing; a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of. Nay, the words may be rendered, and that with equal propriety, “Ye have been saved”: so that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory.

2. If we take this in its utmost extent, it will include all that is wrought in the soul by what is frequently termed “natural conscience,” but more properly, “preventing grace”; --all the drawings of the Father; the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; --all that light wherewith the Son of God “enlighteneth every one that cometh into the world;” showing every man “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God”; --all the convictions which His Spirit, from time to time, works in every child of man--although it is true, the generality of men stifle them as soon as possible, and after a while forget, or at least deny, that they ever had them at all.

3. But we are at present concerned only with that salvation which the Apostle is directly speaking of. And this consists of two general parts, justification and sanctification.

Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins; and, what is necessarily implied therein, our acceptance with God. The price whereby this hath been procured for us (commonly termed “the meritorious cause of our justification”), is the blood and righteousness of Christ; or, to express it a little more clearly, all that Christ hath done and suffered for us, till He “poured out His soul for the transgressors.” The immediate effects of justification are, the peace of God, a “peace that passeth all understanding,” and a “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God” “with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

4. And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit: there is a real as well as a relative change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel “the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”; producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money, together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper; in a word, changing the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.”

5. How naturally do those who experience such a change imagine that all sin is gone; that it is utterly rooted out of their heart, and has no more any place therein! How easily do they draw that inference, “I feel no sin; therefore, I have none: it does not stir; therefore it does not exist: it has no motion; therefore, it has no being!”

6. But it is seldom long before they are undeceived, finding sin was only suspended, not destroyed. Temptations return, and sin revives; showing it was but stunned before, not dead. They now feel two principles in themselves, plainly contrary to each other; “the flesh lusting against the Spirit”; nature opposing the grace of God. They cannot deny, that although they still feel power to believe in Christ, and to love God; and although His “Spirit” still “witnesses with their spirits, that they are children of God”; yet they feel in themselves sometimes pride or self-will, sometimes anger or unbelief. They find one or more of these frequently stirring in their heart, though not conquering; yea, perhaps, “thrusting sore at them that they may fall”; but the Lord is their help.

7. How exactly did Macarius, fourteen hundred years ago, describe the present experience of the children of God:
“The unskilful,” or unexperienced, “when grace operates, presently imagine they have no more sin. Whereas they that have discretion cannot deny, that even we who have the grace of God may be molested again. For we have often had instances of some among the brethren, who have experienced such grace as to affirm that they had no sin in them; and yet, after all, when they thought themselves entirely freed from it, the corruption that lurked within was stirred up anew, and they were wellnigh burned up.”

8. From the time of our being born again, the gradual work of sanctification takes place. We are enabled “by the Spirit” to “mortify the deeds of the body,” of our evil nature; and as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We so on from grace to grace, while we are careful to “abstain from all appearance of evil,” and are “zealous of good works,” as we have opportunity, doing good to all men; while we walk in all His ordinances blameless, therein worshipping Him in spirit and in truth; while we take up our cross, and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead us to God.

9. It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification; for a full salvation from all our sins, --from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief; or, as the Apostle expresses it, “go unto perfection.” But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love “rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks.”

II. But what is faith through which we are saved? This is the second point to be considered.

1. Faith, in general, is defined by the Apostle, YRTIOCVPY³GNIGEJQLýQWÝDNGRQOGPYP. An evidence, a divine evidence and conviction (the word means both) of things not seen; not visible, not perceivable either by sight, or by any other of the external senses. It implies both a supernatural evidence of God, and of the things of God; a kind of spiritual light exhibited to the soul, and a supernatural sight or perception thereof. Accordingly, the Scripture speaks of God’s giving sometimes light, sometimes a power of discerning it. So St. Paul: “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” And elsewhere the same Apostle speaks of “the eyes of” our “understanding being opened.” By this two-fold operation of the Holy Spirit, having the eyes of our soul both opened and enlightened, we see the things which the natural “eye hath not seen, neither the ear heard.” We have a prospect of the invisible things of God; we see the spiritual world, which is all round about us, and yet no more discerned by our natural faculties than if it had no being. And we see the eternal world; piercing through the veil which hangs between time and eternity. Clouds and darkness then rest upon it no more, but we already see the glory which shall be revealed.

2. Taking the word in a more particular sense, faith is a divine evidence and conviction not only that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,” but also that Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me. It is by this faith (whether we term it the essence, or rather a property thereof) that we receive Christ; that we receive Him in all His offices, as our Prophet, Priest, and King. It is by this that He is “made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

3. “But is this the faith of assurance, or faith of adherence?” The Scripture mentions no such distinction. The Apostle says, “There is one faith, and one hope of our calling”; one Christian, saving faith; “as there is one Lord,” in whom we believe, and “one God and Father of us all.” And it is certain, this faith necessarily implies an assurance (which is here only another word for evidence, it being hard to tell the difference between them) that Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me. For “he that believeth” with the true living faith “hath the witness in himself”; “the Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.” “Because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into his heart, crying, Abba, Father”; giving him an assurance that he is so, and a childlike confidence in Him. But let it be observed, that, in the very nature of the thing, the assurance goes before the confidence. For a man cannot have a childlike confidence in God till he knows he is a child of God.

Therefore, confidence, trust, reliance, adherence, or whatever else it be called, is not the first, as some have supposed, but the second, branch or act of faith.

4. It is by this faith we are saved, justified, and sanctified; taking that word in its highest sense.
But how are we justified and sanctified by faith? This is our third head of inquiry. And this being the main point in question, and a point of no ordinary importance, it will not be improper to give it a more distinct and particular consideration.

III.

1. And, first, how are we justified by faith? In what sense is this to be understood? I answer, Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of justification. It is the condition: none is justified but he that believes: without faith no man is justified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for justification. Every one that believes is justified, whatever else he has or has not. In other words: no man is justified till he believes; every man when he believes is justified.

2. "But does not God command us to repent also? Yea, and to `bring forth fruits meet for repentance’--to cease, for instance, from doing evil, and learn to do well? And is not both the one and the other of the utmost necessity, insomuch that if we willingly neglect either, we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all? But if this be so, how can it be said that faith is the only condition of justification?" God does undoubtedly command us both to repent, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; which if we willingly neglect, we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all: therefore both repentance, and fruits meet for repentance, are, in some sense, necessary to justification. But they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for those fruits are only necessary conditionally; if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be justified without them, as was the thief upon the cross (if we may call him so; for a late writer has discovered that he was no thief, but a very honest and respectable person!); but he cannot be justified without faith; this is impossible. Likewise, let a man have ever so much repentance, or ever so many of the fruits meet for repentance, yet all this does not at all avail; he is not justified till he believes. But the moment he believes, with or without those fruits, yea, with more or less repentance, he is justified. --Not in the same sense; for repentance and its fruits are only remotely necessary; necessary in order to faith; whereas faith is immediately necessary to justification. It remains, that faith is the only condition, which is immediately and proximately necessary to justification.

3. "But do you believe we are sanctified by faith? We know you believe that we are justified by faith; but do not you believe, and accordingly teach, that we are sanctified by our works?" So it has been roundly and vehemently affirmed for these five-and-twenty years: but I have constantly declared just the contrary; and that in all manner of ways. I have continually testified in private and in public, that we are sanctified as well as justified by faith. And indeed the one of those great truths does exceedingly illustrate the other. Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification.

It is the condition: none is sanctified but he that believes; with out faith no man is sanctified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for sanctification. Every one that believes is sanctified, whatever else he has or has not. In other words, no man is sanctified till he believes: every man when he believes is sanctified.

4. "But is there not a repentance consequent upon, as well as a repentance previous to, justification? And is it not incumbent on all that are justified to be `zealous of good works’? Yea, are not these so necessary, that if a man willingly neglect them he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified in the full sense; that is, perfected in love? Nay, can he grow at all in grace, in the loving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? Yea, can he retain the grace which God has already given him? Can he continue in the faith which he has received, or in the favour of God. Do not you yourself allow all this, and continually assert it? But, if this be so, how can it be said that faith is the only condition of sanctification?"

5. I do allow all this, and continually maintain it as the truth of God. I allow there is a repentance consequent upon, as well as a repentance previous to, justification. It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous of good works. And there are so necessary, that if a man willingly neglect them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified; he cannot grow in grace, in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received; he cannot continue in faith, or in the favour of God. What is the inference we must draw herefrom? Why, that both repentance, rightly understood, and the practice of all good works, --works of piety, as well as works of mercy (now properly so called, since they spring from faith), are, in
6. I say, “repentance rightly understood”; for this must not be confounded with the former repentance. The repentance consequent upon justification is widely different from that which is antecedent to it. This implies no guilt, no sense of condemnation, no consciousness of the wrath of God. It does not suppose any doubt of the favour of God, or any “fear that hath torment.” It is properly a conviction, wrought by the Holy Ghost, of the sin which still remains in our heart; of the carnal mind, which “does still remain” (as our Church speaks) “even in them that are regenerate”; although it does no longer reign; it has not now dominion over them. It is a conviction of our proneness to evil, of an heart bent to backsliding, of the still continuing tendency of the flesh to lust against the spirit. Sometimes, unless we continually watch and pray, it lusteth to pride, sometimes to anger, sometimes to love of the world, love of ease, love of honour, or love of pleasure more than of God. It is a conviction of the tendency of our heart to self-will, to Atheism, or idolatry; and above all, to unbelief; whereby, in a thousand ways, and under a thousand pretenses, we are ever departing, more or less, from the living God.

7. With this conviction of the sin remaining in our hearts, there is joined a clear conviction of the sin remaining in our lives; still cleaving to all our words and actions. In the best of these we now discern a mixture of evil, either in the spirit, the matter, or the manner of them; something that could not endure the righteous judgment of God, were He extreme to mark what is done amiss. Where we least suspected it, we find a taint of pride or self-will, of unbelief or idolatry; so that we are now more ashamed of our best duties than formerly of our worst sins: and hence we cannot but feel that these are so far from having anything meritorious in them, yea, so far from being able to stand in sight of the divine justice, that for those also we should be guilty before God, were it not for the blood of the covenant.

8. Experience shows that, together with this conviction of sin remaining in our hearts, and cleaving to all our words and actions; as well as the guilt which on account thereof we should incur, were we not continually sprinkled with the atoning blood; one thing more is implied in this repentance; namely, a conviction of our helplessness, of our utter inability to think one good thought, or to form one good desire; and much more to speak one word aright, or to perform one good action, but through His free, almighty grace, first preventing us, and then accompanying us every moment.

9. “But what good works are those, the practice of which you affirm to be necessary to sanctification?” First, all works of piety; such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows.

10. Secondly, all works of mercy; whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these the “fruits meet for repentance,” which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed His children to wait for complete salvation.

11. Hence may appear the extreme mischievousness of that seemingly innocent opinion, that there is no sin in a believer; that all sin is destroyed, root and branch, the moment a man is justified. By totally preventing that repentance, it quite blocks up the way to sanctification. There is no place for repentance in him who believes there is no sin either in his life or heart: consequently, there is no place for his being perfected in love, to which that repentance is indispensably necessary.

12. Hence it may likewise appear, that there is no possible danger in thus expecting full salvation. For suppose we were mistaken, suppose no such blessing ever was or can be attained, yet we lose nothing: nay, that very expectation quickens us in using all the talents which God has given us; yea, in improving them all; so that when our Lord cometh, He will receive His own with increase.

13. But to return. Though it be allowed, that both this repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation; yet they are not necessary either in the same sense with faith, or in the same degree: --Not in the same degree; for
these fruits are only necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them; otherwise a man may be sanctified without them. But he cannot be sanctified without faith.

Likewise, let a man have ever so much of this repentance, or ever so many good works, yet all this does not at all avail: he is not sanctified till he believes. But the moment he believes, with or without those fruits, yea, with more or less of this repentance, he is sanctified. --Not in the same sense; for this repentance and these fruits are only remotely necessary, --necessary in order to the continuance of his faith, as well as the increase of it; whereas faith is immediately and directly necessary to sanctification. It remains, that faith is the only condition which is immediately and proximately necessary to sanctification.

14. "But what is that faith whereby we are sanctified, --saved from sin, and perfected in love?" It is a divine evidence and conviction, first, that God hath promised it in the holy Scripture. Till we are thoroughly satisfied of this, there in no moving one step further. And one would imagine there needed not one word more to satisfy a reasonable man of this, than the ancient promise, “Then will I circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord they God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” How clearly does this express the being perfected in love! --how strongly imply the being saved from all sin! For as long as love takes up the whole heart, what room is there for sin therein?

15. It is a divine evidence and conviction, secondly, that what God hath promised He is able to perform. Admitting, therefore, that “with men it is impossible” to “bring a clean thing out of an unclean,” to purify the heart from all sin, and to till it with all holiness; yet this creates no difficulty in the case, seeing “with God all things are possible.” And surely no one ever imagined it was possible to any power less than that of the Almighty! But if God speaks, it shall be done. God saith, “Let there be light; and there” is “light”!

16. It is, thirdly, a divine evidence and conviction that He is able and willing to do it now. And why not? Is not a moment to Him the same as a thousand years? He cannot want more time to accomplish whatever is His will. And He cannot want or stay for any more worthiness or fitness in the persons He is pleased to honour. We may therefore boldly say, at any point of time, “Now is the day of salvation!” “To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts!” “Behold, all things are now ready; come unto the marriage!”

17. To this confidence, that God is both able and willing to sanctify us now, there needs to be added one thing more, --a divine evidence and conviction that He doeth it. In that hour it is done: God says to the inmost soul, “According to thy faith be it unto thee!” Then the soul is pure from every spot of sin; it is clean “from all unrighteousness.” The believer then experiences the deep meaning of those solemn words, “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

18. "But does God work this great work in the soul gradually or instantaneously?" Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some; I mean in this sense, --they do not advert to the particular moment wherein sin ceases to be. But it us infinitely desirable, were it the will of God, that it should be done instantaneously; that the Lord should destroy sin “by the breath of His mouth,” in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And so He generally does; a plain fact, of which there is evidence enough to satisfy any unprejudiced person. Thou therefore look for it every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token you may surely know whether you seek it by faith or by works. If by works, you want something to be done first, before you are sanctified. You think, I must first be or do thus or thus. Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are; and expect it now. It is of importance to observe, that there is an inseparable connexion between these three points, --expect it by faith; expect it as you are; and expect it now! To deny one of them, is to deny them all; to allow one, is to allow them all. Do you believe we are sanctified by faith? Be true then to your principle; and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse; as a poor sinner that has still nothing to pay, nothing to plead, but “Christ died.” And if you look for it as you are, then expect it now. Stay for nothing: why should you? Christ is ready; and He is all you want. He is waiting for you: He is at the door! Let your inmost soul cry out,
Come in, come in, thou heavenly Guest!
Nor hence again remove;
But sup with me, and let the feast
Be everlasting love.

John Wesley
SERMON 44
(text from the 1872 edition)

ORIGINAL SIN

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Gen. 6:5.

1. How widely different is this from the fair pictures of human nature which men have drawn in all ages! The writings of many of the ancients abound with gay descriptions of the dignity of man; whom some of them paint as having all virtue and happiness in his composition, or, at least, entirely in his power, without being beholden to any other being; yea, as self-sufficient, able to live on his own stock, and little inferior to God himself.

2. Nor have Heathens alone, men who are guided in their researches by little more than the dim light of reason, but many likewise of them that bear the name of Christ, and to whom are entrusted the oracles of God, spoken as magnificently concerning the nature of man, as if it were all innocence and perfection. Accounts of this kind have particularly abounded in the present (17th) century; and perhaps in no part of the world more than in our own country. Here not a few persons of strong understanding, as well as extensive learning, have employed their utmost abilities to show, what they termed, “the fair side of human nature.” And it must he acknowledged, that, if their accounts of him be just, man is still but “a little lower than the angels;” or, as the words may be more literally rendered, “a little less than God.”

3. Is it any wonder, that these accounts are very readily received by the generality of men? For who is not easily persuaded to think favourably of himself? Accordingly, writers of this kind are most universally read, admired, applauded. And innumerable are the converts they have made, not only in the gay, but the learned world. So that it is now quite unfashionable to talk otherwise, to say any thing to the disparagement of human nature; which is generally allowed, notwithstanding a few infirmities, to be very innocent, and wise, and virtuous!

4. But, in the mean time, what must we do with our Bibles? -- for they will never agree with this.

These accounts, however pleasing to flesh and blood, are utterly irreconcilable with the scriptural. The Scripture avers, that “by one man’s disobedience all men were constituted sinners;” that “in Adam all died,” spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God; that fallen, sinful Adam then “begat a son in his own likeness;” -- nor was it possible he should beget him in any other; for “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” -- that consequently we, as well as other men, were by nature “dead in trespasses and sins,” “without hope, without God in the world,” and therefore “children of wrath;” that every man may say, “I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me;” that “there is no difference,” in that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” of that glorious image of God wherein man was originally created. And hence, when “the Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, he saw they were all gone out of the way; they were altogether become abominable, there was none righteous, no, not one,” none that truly sought after God: Just agreeable this, to what is declared by the Holy Ghost in the words above recited, “God saw,” when he looked down from heaven before, “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth;” so great, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

This is God’s account of man: From which I shall take occasion, First, to show what men were before the flood:
Secondly, to inquire, whether they are not the same now: And, Thirdly, to add some inferences.

I.

1. I am, First, by opening the words of the text, to show what men were before the flood. And we may fully depend on the account here given: For God saw it, and he cannot be deceived. He “saw that the wickedness of man was great;” -- Not of this or that man; not of a few men only; not barely of the greater part, but of man in general; of men universally. The word includes the whole human race, every partaker of human nature. And it is not easy for us to compute their numbers, to tell how many thousands and millions they were. The earth then retained much of its primeval beauty and original fruitfulness. The face of the globe was not rent and torn as it is now; and spring and summer went hand in hand. It is therefore probable, it afforded sustenance for far more inhabitants than it is now capable of sustaining; and these must be immensely multiplied, while men begat sons and daughters for seven or eight hundred years together. Yet, among all this inconceivable number, only “Noah found favour with God.” He alone (perhaps including part of his household) was an exception from the universal wickedness, which, by the just judgment of God, in a short time after brought on universal destruction. All the rest were partakers in the same guilt, as they were in the same punishment.

2. "God saw all the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart;” -- of his soul, his inward man, the spirit within him, the principle of all his inward and outward motions. He “saw all the imaginations;” It is not possible to find a word of a more extensive signification. It includes whatever is formed, made, fabricated within; all that is or passes in the soul; every inclination, affection, passion, appetite; every temper, design, thought. It must of consequence include every word and action, as naturally flowing from these fountains, and being either good or evil according to the fountain from which they severally flow.

3. Now God saw that all this, the whole thereof, was evil; -- contrary to moral rectitude; contrary to the nature of God, which necessarily includes all good; contrary to the divine will, the eternal standard of good and evil; contrary to the pure, holy image of God, wherein man was originally created, and wherein he stood when God, surveying the works of his hands, saw them all to be very good; contrary to justice, mercy, and truth, and to the essential relations which each man bore to his Creator and his fellow-creatures.

4. But was there not good mingled with the evil? Was there not light intermixed with the darkness? No; none at all: “God saw that the whole imagination of the heart of man was only evil.” It cannot indeed be denied, but many of them, perhaps all, had good motions put into their hearts; for the Spirit of God did then also “strive with man,” if haply he might repent, more especially during that gracious reprieve, the hundred and twenty years, while the ark was preparing. But still “in his flesh dwelt no good thing;” all his nature was purely evil: It was wholly consistent with itself, and unixed with anything of an opposite nature.

5. However, it may still be matter of inquiry, “Was there no intermission of this evil? Were there no lucid intervals, wherein something good might be found in the heart of man?” We are not here to consider, what the grace of God might occasionally work in his soul; and, abstracted from this, we have no reason to believe, there was any intermission of that evil. For God, who “saw the whole imagination of the thoughts of his heart to be only evil,” saw likewise, that it was always the same, that it “was only evil continually;” every year, every day, every hour, every moment. He never deviated into good.

II. Such is the authentic account of the whole race of mankind which He who knoweth what is in man, who searcheth the heart and trieth the reins, hath left upon record for our instruction. Such were all men before God brought the flood upon the earth. We are, Secondly, to inquire, whether they are the same now.

1. And this is certain, the Scripture gives us no reason to think any otherwise of them. On the contrary, all the above cited passages of Scripture refer to those who lived after the flood. It was above a thousand years after, that God declared by David concerning the children of men, “They are all gone out of the way, of truth and holiness; there is none righteous, no, not one.” And to this bear all the Prophets witness, in their several generations. So Isaiah, concerning God’s peculiar people, (and certainly the Heathens were in no better condition,) “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.” The same account is given by all the Apostles, yea, by the whole tenor of the oracles of God. From all these we learn, concerning man in his natural state, unassisted by the grace of God, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is” still “evil, only evil,” and that “continually.”
2. And this account of the present state of man is confirmed by daily experience. It is true, the natural man discerns it not: And this is not to be wondered at. So long as a man born blind continues so, he is scarce sensible of his want: Much less, could we suppose a place where all were born without sight, would they be sensible of the want of it. In like manner, so long as men remain in their natural blindness of understanding, they are not sensible of their spiritual wants, and of this in particular. But as soon as God opens the eyes of their understanding, they see the state they were in before; they are then deeply convinced, that “every man living,” themselves especially, are, by nature, “altogether vanity;” that is, folly and ignorance, sin and wickedness.

3. We see, when God opens our eyes, that we were before–without God, or, rather, Atheists, in the world. We had, by nature, no knowledge of God, no acquaintance with him. It is true, as soon as we came to the use of reason, we learned “the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, from the things that are made.” From the things that are seen we inferred the existence of an eternal, powerful Being, that is not seen. But still, although we acknowledged his being we had no acquaintance with him. As we know there is an Emperor of China, whom yet we do not know; so we knew there was a King of all the earth, yet we knew him not. Indeed we could not by any of our natural faculties. By none of these could we attain the knowledge of God. We could no more perceive him by our natural understanding, than we could see him with our eyes. For “no one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal him. And no one knoweth the Son but the Father, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal him.”

4. We read of an ancient king, who, being desirous to know what was the natural language of men, in order to bring the matter to a certain issue, made the following experiment: He ordered two infants, as soon as they were born, to be conveyed to a place prepared for them, where they were brought up without any instruction at all, and without ever hearing a human voice. And what was the event? Why that when they were at length brought out of their confinement, they spoke no language at all; they uttered only inarticulate sounds, like those of other animals. Were two infants in like manner to be brought up from the womb without being instructed in any religion, there is little room to doubt but (unless the grace of God interposed) the event would be just the same. They would have no religion at all: They would have no more knowledge of God than the beasts of the field, than the wild ass’s colt. Such is natural religion, abstracted from traditional, and from the influences of God’s Spirit!

5. And having no knowledge, we can have no love of God: We cannot love him we know not. Most men talk indeed of loving God, and perhaps imagine they do; at least, few will acknowledge they do not love him: But the fact is too plain to be denied. No man loves God by nature, any more than he does a stone, or the earth he treads upon. What we love we delight in: But no man has naturally any delight in God. In our natural state we cannot conceive how any one should delight in him. We take no pleasure in him at all; he is utterly tasteless to us. To love God! It is far above, out of our sight. We cannot, naturally, attain unto it.

6. We have by nature, not only no love, but no fear of God. It is allowed, indeed, that most men have, sooner or later, a kind of senseless, irrational fear, properly called superstition; though the blundering Epicureans gave it the name of religion. Yet even this is not natural, but acquired; chiefly by conversation or from example. By nature “God is not in all our thoughts:” We leave him to manage his own affairs, to sit quietly, as we imagine, in heaven, and leave us on earth to manage ours; so that we have no more of the fear of God before our eyes, than of the love of God in our hearts.

7. Thus are all men “Atheists in the world.” But Atheism itself does not screen us from idolatry. In his natural state, every man born into the world is a rank idolater. Perhaps, indeed, we may not be such in the vulgar sense of the word. We do no, like the idolatrous Heathens, worship molten or graven images. We do not bow down to the stock of a tree, to the work of our own hands. We do not pray to the angels or saints in heaven, any more than to the saints that are upon the earth. But what then? We have set up our idols in our hearts; and to these we bow down and worship them: We worship ourselves, when we pay that honour to ourselves which is due to God only. Therefore all pride is idolatry; it is ascribing to ourselves what is due to God alone. And although pride was not made for man, yet where is the man that is born without it? But hereby we rob god of his unalienable right, and idolatrously usurp his glory.

8. But pride is not the only sort of idolatry which we are all by nature guilty of. Satan has stamped his own image.
on our heart in self-will also. “I will,” said he, before he was cast out of heaven, “I will sit upon the sides of the north;” I will do my own will and pleasure, independently on that of my Creator. The same does every man born into the world say, and that in a thousand instances; nay, and avow it too, without ever blushing upon the account, without either fear or shame. Ask the man, “Why did you do this?” He answers, “Because I had a mind to it.” What is this but, “Because it was my will;” that is, in effect, because the devil and I agreed; because Satan and I govern our actions by one and the same principle. The will of God, mean time, is not in his thoughts, is not considered in the least degree; although it be the supreme rule of every intelligent creature, whether in heaven or earth, resulting from the essential, unalterable relation which all creature bear to their Creator.

9. So far we bear the image of the devil, and tread in his steps. But at the next step we leave Satan behind; we run into an idolatry whereof he is not guilty: I mean love of the world; which is now as natural to every man, as to love his own will. What is more natural to us than to seek happiness in the creature, instead of the Creator? -- to seek that satisfaction in the works of his hands, which can be found in God only? What more natural than “the desire of the flesh?” that is, of the pleasure of sense in every kind? Men indeed talk magnificently of despising these low pleasures, particularly men of learning and education. They affect to sit loose to the gratification of these appetites wherein they stand on a level with the beasts that perish. But it is mere affectation; for every man is conscious to himself, that in this respect he is, by nature, a very beast. Sensual appetites, even those of the lowest kind, have, more or less, the dominion over him. They lead him captive; they drag him to and fro, in spite of his boasted reason. The man, with all his good breeding, and other accomplishments, has no pre-eminence over the goat: Nay, it is much to be doubted, whether the beast has not the pre-eminence over him. Certainly he has, if we may hearken to one of their modern oracles, who very decently tells us,

   Once in a season beasts too taste of love;
   Only the beast of reason is its slave,
   And in that folly drudges all the year.

A considerable difference indeed, it must be allowed, there is between man and man, arising (beside that wrought by preventing grace) from difference of constitution and of education. But, notwithstanding this, who, that is not utterly ignorant of himself, can here cast the first stone at another? Who can abide the test of our blessed Lord’s comment on the Seventh Commandment: “He that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart?” So that one knows not which to wonder at most, the ignorance or the insolence of those men who speak with such disdain of them that are overcome by desires which every man has felt in his own breast; the desire of every pleasure of sense, innocent or not, being natural to every child of man.

10. And so is “the desire of the eye;” the desire of the pleasures of the imagination. These arise either from great, or beautiful, or uncommon objects; -- if the two former do not coincide with the latter; for perhaps it would appear, upon a diligent inquiry, that neither grand nor beautiful objects please any longer than they are new; that when the novelty of them is over, the greatest, at least, of the pleasure they give is over; and in the same proportion as they become familiar, they become flat and insipid. But let us experience this ever so often, the same desire will remain still. The inbred thirst continues fixed in the soul; nay, the more it is indulged, the more it increases, and incites us to follow after another, and yet another object; although we leave every one with an abortive hope, and a deluded expectation. Yea,

   The hoary fool, who many days
   Has struggled with continued sorrow,
   Renews his hope, and fondly lays
   The desperate bet upon tomorrow!
   To-morrow comes! ‘Tis noon! ‘Tis night!
   This day, like all the former, flies:
   Yet on he goes, to seek delight
   To-morrow, till to-night he dies!

11. A third symptom of this fatal disease, the love of the world, which is so deeply rooted in our nature, is “the pride of life;” the desire of praise, of the honour that cometh of men. This the greatest admirers of human nature allow to be strictly natural; as natural as the sight, or hearing, or any other of the external senses. And are they ashamed
of it, even men of letters, men of refined and improved understanding? So far from it that they glory therein! They applaud themselves for their love of applause! Yea, eminent Christians, so called, make no difficulty of adopting the saying of the old, vain Heathen, Animi dissoluti est et nequam negligere quid de se homines sentiant: “Not to regard what men think of us is the mark of a wicked and abandoned mind.” So that to go calm and unmoved through honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report, is with them a sign of one that is, indeed, not fit to live: “Away with such a flow from the earth!” But would one imagine that these men had ever heard of Jesus Christ or his Apostles; or that they knew who it was that said, “How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?” But if this is really so, if it be impossible to believe, and consequently to please God, so long as we receive or seek honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only; then in what a condition are all mankind! The Christians as well as Heathens! Since they all seek honour one of another! Since it is as natural for them so to do, themselves being the judges, as it is to see the light which strikes upon their eye, or to hear the sound which enters their ear; yea, since they account it a sign of a virtuous mind, to seek the praise of men, and of a vicious one, to be content with the honour that cometh of God only!

III.

1. I proceed to draw a few inferences from what has been said. And, First, from hence we may learn one grand fundamental difference between Christianity, considered as a system of doctrines, and the most refined Heathenism. Many of the ancient Heathens have largely described the vices of particular men. They have spoken much against their covetousness, or cruelty; their luxury, or prodigality. Some have dared to say that “no man is born without vices of one kind or another.” But still as none of them were apprized of the fall of man, so none of them knew of his total corruption. They knew not that all men were empty of all good, and filled with all manner of evil. They were wholly ignorant of the entire depravation of the whole human nature, of every man born into the world, in every faculty of his soul, not so much by those particular vices which reign in particular persons, as by the general flood of Atheism and idolatry, of pride, self-will, and love of the world.

This, therefore, is the first grand distinguishing point between Heathenism and Christianity. The one acknowledges that many men are infected with many vices; and even born with a proneness to them; but supposes withal, that in some the natural good much over-balances the evil: The other declares that all men are conceived in sin, and shapen in wickedness; that hence there is in every man a “carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not, cannot be, subject to” his “law;” and which so infects the whole soul, that “there dwelleth in” him, “in his flesh,” “in his natural state,” “no good thing;” but “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil,” only evil, and that “continually.”

2. Hence we may, Secondly, learn, that all who deny this, call it original sin, or by any other title, are put Heathens still, in the fundamental point which differences Heathenism from Christianity. They may, indeed, allow, that men have many vices; that some are born with us; and that, consequently, we are not born altogether so wise or so virtuous as we should be; there being few that will roundly affirm, “We are born with as much propensity to good as to evil, and that every man is, by nature, as virtuous and wise as Adam was at his creation.” But here is the shibboleth: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart only evil continually?” Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but an Heathen still.

3. We may learn from hence, in the Third place, what is the proper nature of religion, of the religion of Jesus Christ. It is SGTCRGKCyJWEJGL, God’s method of healing a soul which is thus diseased. Hereby the great Physician of souls applies medicines to heal this sickness; to restore human nature, totally corrupted in all its faculties. God heals all our Atheism by the knowledge of Himself, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; by giving us faith, a divine evidence and conviction of God, and of the things of God, -- in particular, of this important truth, “Christ loved me” -- and gave himself for me.” By repentance and lowliness of heart, the deadly disease of pride is healed; that of self-will by resignation, a meek and thankful submission to the will of God; and for the love of the world in all its branches, the love of God is the sovereign remedy. Now, this is properly religion, “faith” thus
“working by love;” working the genuine meek humility, entire deadness to the world, with a loving, thankful acquiescence in, and conformity to, the whole will and word of God.

4. Indeed, if man were not thus fallen, there would be no need of all this. There would be no occasion for this work in the heart, this renewal in the spirit of our mind. The superfluity of godliness would then be a more proper expression than the “superfluity of naughtiness.” For an outside religion, without any godliness at all, would suffice to all rational intents and purposes. It does, accordingly, suffice, in the judgment of those who deny this corruption of our nature. They make very little more of religion than the famous Mr. Hobbes did of reason. According to him, reason is only “a well-ordered train of words:” According to them, religion is only a well-ordered train of words and actions. And they speak consistently with themselves; for if the inside be not full of wickedness, if this be clean already, what remains, but to “cleanse the outside of the cup?” Outward reformation, if their supposition be just, is indeed the one thing needful.

5. But ye have not so learned the oracles of God. Ye know, that He who seeth what is in man gives a far different account both of nature and grace, of our fall and our recovery. Ye know that the great end of religion is, to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total loss of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent. Ye know that all religion which does not answer this end, all that stops short of this, the renewal of our soul in the image of God, after the likeness of Him that created it, is no other than a poor farce, and a mere mockery of God, to the destruction of our own soul. O beware of all those teachers of lies, who would palm this upon you for Christianity! Regard them not, although they should come unto you with all the deceivableness of unrighteousness; with all smoothness of language, all decency, yea, beauty and elegance of expression, all professions of earnest good will to you, and reverence for the Holy Scriptures. Keep to the plain, old faith, “once delivered to the saints,” and delivered by the Spirit of God to our hearts. Know your disease! Know your cure! Ye were born in sin: Therefore, “ye must be born again,” born of God. By nature ye are wholly corrupted. By grace ye shall be wholly renewed. In Adam ye all died: In the second Adam, in Christ, ye all are made alive. “You that were dead in sins hath he quickened:” He hath already given you a principle of life, even faith in him who loved you and gave himself for you! Now, “go on from faith to faith,” until your whole sickness be healed; and all that “mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus!”

John Wesley
SERMON 46
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE WILDERNESS STATE

“Ye now have sorrow: But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”
John 16:22.

1. After God had wrought a great deliverance for Israel, by bringing them out of the house of bondage, they did not immediately enter into the land which he had promised to their fathers; but “wandered out of the way in the wilderness,” and were variously tempted and distressed. In like manner, after God has delivered them that fear him from the bondage of sin and Satan; after they are “justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus,” yet not many of them immediately enter into “the rest which remaineth for the people of God.” The greater part of them wander, more or less, out of the good way into which he hath brought them. They come, as it were, into a “waste and howling desert,” where they are variously tempted and tormented: And this, some, in allusion to the case of the Israelites, have termed “a wilderness state.”

2. Certain it is, that the condition wherein these are has a right the tenderest compassion. They labour under an evil and sore disease; though one that is not commonly understood; and for this very reason it is the more difficult for them to find a remedy. Being in darkness themselves, they cannot be supposed to understand the nature of their
own disorder; and few of their brethren, nay, perhaps, of their teachers, know either what their sickness is, or how to heal it. So much the more need there is to inquire, First, What is the nature of this disease? Secondly, What is the cause? And, Thirdly, What is the cure of it?

I.

1. And, First, what is the nature of this disease, into which so many fall after they have believed? Wherein does it properly consist; and what are the genuine symptoms of it? It properly consists in the loss of that faith which God once wrought in their heart. They that are in the wilderness, have not now that divine “evidence,” that satisfactory conviction “of things not seen,” which they once enjoyed. They have not now that inward demonstration of the Spirit which before enabled each of them to say, “The life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” The light of heaven does not now “shine in their hearts,” neither do they “see him that is invisible;” but darkness is again on the face of their souls, and blindness on the eyes of their understanding. The Spirit no longer “witnesses with their spirits, that they are the children of God;” neither does he continue as the Spirit of adoption, “crying” in their hearts, “Abba, Father.” They have not now a sure trust in his love, and a liberty of approaching him with holy boldness.

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him,” is no more the language of their heart; but they are shorn of their strength, and become weak and feeble-minded, even as other men.

2. Hence, Secondly, proceeds the loss of love; which cannot but rise or fall, at the same time, and in the same proportion, with true, living faith. Accordingly, they that are deprived of their faith, are deprived of the love of God also. They cannot now say, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.” They are not now happy in God, as everyone is that truly loves him. They do not delight in him as in time past, and “smell the odour of his ointments.” Once, all their “desire was unto him, and to the remembrance of his name;” but now even their desires are cold and dead, if not utterly extinguished. And as their love of God is waxed cold, so is also their love of their neighbour.

They have not now that zeal for the souls of men, that longing after their welfare, that fervent, restless, active desire of their being reconciled to God. They do not feel those “bowels of mercies” for the sheep that are lost, -- that tender “compassion for the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.” Once they were “gentle toward all men,” meekly instructing such as opposed the truth; and, “if any was overtaken in a fault, restoring such an one in the spirit of meekness:” But, after a suspense, perhaps of many days, anger begins to regain its power; yea, peevishness and impatience thrust sore at them that they may fall; and it is well if they are not sometimes driven, even to “render evil for evil and railing for railing.”

3. In consequence of the loss of faith and love, follows, Thirdly, loss of joy in the Holy Ghost. For if the loving consciousness of pardon be no more, the joy resulting therefrom cannot remain. If the Spirit does not witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, the joy that flowed from that inward witness must also be at an end. And, in like manner, they who once “rejoiced with joy unspeakable,” “in hope of the glory of God,” now they are deprived of that “hope full of immortality,” are deprived of the joy it occasioned; as also of that which resulted from a consciousness of “the love of God,” then “shed abroad in their hearts.” For the cause being removed, so is the effect: The fountain being dammed up, those living waters spring no more to refresh the thirsty soul.

4. With loss of faith, and love, and joy there is also joined, Fourthly, the loss of that peace which once passed all understanding. That sweet tranquillity of mind, that composure of spirit, is gone.

Painful doubt returns; doubt, whether we ever did, and perhaps whether we ever shall, believe. We begin to doubt, whether we ever did find in our hearts the real testimony of the Spirit; whether we did not rather deceive our own souls, and mistake the voice of nature for the voice of God. Nay, and perhaps, whether we shall ever hear his voice, and find favour in his sight. And these doubts are again joined with servile fear, with that fear which hath torment. We fear the wrath of God, even as before we believed: We fear, lest we should be cast out of his presence; and thence sink again into that fear of death, from which we were before wholly delivered.

5. But even this is not all; for loss of peace is accompanied with loss of power. We know everyone who has peace with God, through Jesus Christ, has power over all sin. But whenever he loses the peace of God, he loses also the
power over sin. While that peace remained, power also remained, even over the besetting sin, whether it were the sin of his nature, his constitution, of his education, or that of his profession; yea, and over those evil tempers and desires which, till then, he could not conquer Sin had then no more dominion over him; but he hath now no more dominion over sin. He may struggle, indeed, but he cannot overcome; the crown is fallen from his head. His enemies again prevail over him, and, more or less, bring him into bondage. The glory is departed from him, even the kingdom of God which was in his heart. He is dispossessed of righteousness, as well as of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

II.

1. Such is the nature of what many have termed, and not improperly, “The wilderness state.” But the nature of it may be more fully understood by inquiring, Secondly, What are the causes of it? These indeed are various. But I dare not rank among these the bare, arbitrary, sovereign will of God.

He “rejoiceth in the prosperity of his servants: He delighteth not to afflict or grieve the children of men.” His invariable will is our sanctification, attended with “peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” These are his own free gifts; and we are assured “the gifts of God are,” on his part, “without repentance.” He never repenteth of what he hath given, or desires to withdraw them from us.

Therefore he never deserts us, as some speak; it is we only that desert him.

(I.) 2. The most usual cause of inward darkness is sin, of one kind or another. This it is which generally occasions what is often a complication of sin and misery. And, First, sin of commission.

This may frequently be observed to darken the soul in a moment; especially if it be a known, a wilful, or presumptuous sin. If, for instance, a person, who is now walking in the clear light of God’s countenance, should be any way prevailed on to commit a single act of drunkenness, or uncleanness, it would be no wonder, if, in that very hour, he fell into utter darkness. It is true, there have been some very rare cases, wherein God has prevented this, by an extraordinary display of his pardoning mercy, almost in the very instant. But in general, such an abuse of the goodness of God, so gross an insult on his love, occasions an immediate estrangement from God, and a “darkness that may be felt.”

3. But it may be hoped this case is not very frequent; that there are not many who so despise the riches of his goodness as, while they walk in his light, so grossly and presumptuously to rebel against him. That light is much more frequently lost by giving way to sins of omission. This, indeed, does not immediately quench the Spirit, but gradually and slowly. The former may be compared to pouring water upon a fire; the latter to withdrawing the fuel from it. And many times will that loving Spirit reprove our neglect, before he departs from us. Many are the inward checks, the secret notices, he gives, before his influences are withdrawn. So that only a train of omissions, wilfully persisted in, can bring us into utter darkness.

4. Perhaps no sin of omission more frequently occasions this than the neglect of private prayer; the want whereof cannot be supplied by any other ordinance whatever. Nothing can be more plain, than that the life of God in the soul does not continue, much less increase, unless we use all opportunities of communing with God, and pouring out our hearts before him. If therefore we are negligent of this, if we suffer business, company, or any avocation whatever, to prevent these secret exercises of the soul, (or, which comes to the same thing, to make us hurry them over in a slight and careless manner,) that life will surely decay. And if we long or frequently intermit them, it will gradually die away.

5. Another sin of omission, which frequently brings the soul of a believer into darkness, is the neglect of what was so strongly enjoined, even under the Jewish dispensation: “Thou shalt, in anywise, rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him: Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart.” Now, if we do hate our brother in our heart, if we do not rebuke him when we see him in a fault, but suffer sin upon him, this will soon bring leanness to our own soul; seeing hereby we are partakers of his sin. By neglecting to reprove our neighbour, we make his sin our own: We become accountable for it to God: We saw his danger, and gave him no warning: So, “if he perish in his iniquity,” God may justly require “his blood at our hands.” No wonder then, if by thus grieving the Spirit, we lose the light of his countenance.

6. A Third cause of our losing this is, the giving way to some kind of inward sin. For example: We know, every one
that is “proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord;” and that, although this pride of heart should not appear in the outward conversation. Now, how easily may a soul filled with peace and joy fall into this snare of the devil! How natural is it for him to imagine that he has more grace, more wisdom or strength, than he really has to “think more highly of himself than he ought to think!” How natural to glory in something he has received, as if he had not received it! But seeing God continually “resisteth the proud, and giveth grace” only “to the humble,” this must certainly obscure, if not wholly destroy, the light which before shone on his heart.

7. The same effect may be produced by giving place to anger, whatever the provocation or occasion be; yea, though it were coloured over with the name of zeal for the truth, or for the glory of God. Indeed all zeal which is any other than the flame of love is “earthly, animal, devilish.” It is the flame of wrath: It is flat, sinful anger, neither better nor worse. And nothing is a greater enemy to the mild, gentle love of God than this: They never did, they never can, subsist together in one breast. In the same proportion as this prevails, love and joy in the Holy Ghost decrease. This is particularly observable in the case of offence; I mean, anger at any of our brethren, at any of those who are united with us either by civil or religious ties. If we give way to the spirit of offence but one hour, we lose the sweet influences of the Holy Spirit; so that, instead of amending them, we destroy ourselves, and become an easy prey to any enemy that assaults us.

8. But suppose we are aware of this snare of the devil, we may be attacked from another quarter. When fierceness and anger are asleep, and love alone is waking, we may be no less endangered by desire, which equally tends to darken the soul. This is the sure effect of any foolish desire, any vain or inordinate affection. If we set our affection on things of the earth, on any person or thing under the sun; if we desire anything but God, and what tends to God; if we seek happiness in any creature; the jealous God will surely contend with us, for he can admit of no rival. And if we will not hear his warning voice, and return to him with our whole soul, we continue to[grieve him with our idols, and running after other gods, we shall soon be cold, barren, and dry; and the god of this world will blind and darken our hearts.

9. But this he frequently does, even when we do not give way to any positive sin. It is enough, it gives him sufficient advantage, if we do not “stir up the gift of God which is in us;” if we do not agonize continually “to enter in at the strait gate;” if we do not earnestly “strive for the mastery,” and “take the kingdom of heaven by violence.” There needs no more than not to fight, and we are sure to be conquered. Let us only be careless or “faint in our mind,” let us be easy and indolent, and our natural darkness will soon return, and overspread our soul. It is enough, therefore, if we give way to spiritual sloth; this will effectually darken the soul: It will as surely destroy the light of God, if not so swiftly, as murder or adultery.

10. But it is well to be observed, that the cause of our darkness (whatsoever it be, whether omission or commission, whether inward or outward sin) is not always nigh at hand. Sometimes the sin which occasioned the present distress may lie at a considerable distance. It might be committed days, or weeks, or months before. And that God now withdraws his light and peace on account of what was done so long ago is not (as one might at first imagine) an instance of his severity, but rather a proof of his longsuffering and tender mercy. He waited all this time if haply we would see, acknowledge, and correct what was amiss. And in default of this he at length shows his displeasure, if thus, at last, he may bring us to repentance.

(II). 1. Another general cause of this darkness is ignorance; which is likewise of various kinds.

If men know not the Scriptures, if they imagine there are passages either in the Old or New Testament which assert, that all believers without exception, must sometimes be in darkness; this ignorance will naturally bring upon them the darkness which they expect. And how common a case has this been among us! How few are there that do not expect it! And no wonder, seeing they are taught to expect it; seeing their guides lead them into this way. Not only the mystic writers of the Romish Church, but many of the most spiritual and experimental in our own, (very few of the last century excepted,) lay it down with all assurance as a plain, unquestionable Scripture doctrine, and cite many texts to prove it.

2. Ignorance also of the work of God in the soul frequent occasions this darkness. Men imagine (because so they have been taught, particularly by writers of the Romish communion, whose plausible assertions too many Protestants have received without due examination) that they are not always to walk in luminous faith; that this is only a lower dispensation; that as they rise higher they are to leave those sensible comforts, and to live by naked
faith (naked indeed, if it be stripped both of love, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost!) that a state of light and joy is good, but a state of darkness and dryness is better; that it is by these alone we can be purified from pride, love of the world, and inordinate self-love; and that, therefore, we ought neither to expect nor desire to walk in the light always. Hence it is, (though other reasons may concur,) that the main body of pious men in the Romish Church generally walk in a dark uncomfortable way, and if ever they receive, soon lose the light of God.

(III). 1. A Third general cause of this darkness is temptation. When the candle of the Lord first shines on our head, temptation frequently flees away, and totally disappears. All is calm within; perhaps without too, while God makes our enemies to be at peace with us. It is then very natural to suppose that we shall not see war any more. And there are instances wherein this calm has continued, not only for weeks, but for months or years. But commonly it is otherwise: In a short time “the winds blow, the rains descend, and the floods arise” anew. They who know not either the Son or the Father, and consequently hate his children, when God slackens the bridle which is in their teeth, will show that hatred in various instances. As of old, “he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now;” the same cause still producing the same effect. The evil which yet remains in the heart will then also move afresh; anger, and many other roots of bitterness will endeavour to spring up. At the same time, Satan will not be wanting to cast in his fiery darts; and the soul will have to wrestle, not only with the world, not only “with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with wicked spirits in high places.” Now, when so various assaults are made at once, and perhaps with the utmost violence, it is not strange if it should occasion, not only heaviness, but even darkness in a weak believer; -- more especially if he was not watching; if these assaults are made in an hour when he looked not for them; if he expected nothing less, but had fondly told himself, -- the day of evil would return no more.

2. The force of those temptations which arise from within will be exceedingly heightened if we before thought too highly of ourselves, as if we had been cleansed from all sin. And how naturally do we imagine this during the warmth of our first love! How ready are we to believe that God has “fulfilled in us the” whole “work of faith with power!” that because we feel no sin, we have none in us; but the soul is all love! And well may a sharp attack from an enemy whom we supposed to be not only conquered but slain, throw us into much heaviness of soul; yea, sometimes, into utter darkness: Particularly when we reason with this enemy, instead of instantly calling upon God, and casting ourselves upon Him, by simple faith, who “alone knoweth how to deliver” his “out of temptation.”

III. These are the usual causes of this second darkness. Inquire we, Thirdly, What is the cure of it?

1. To suppose that this is one and the same in all cases is a and fatal mistake; and yet extremely common, even among many, who pass for experienced Christians, yea, perhaps take upon them to be teachers in Israel, to be the guides of other souls. Accordingly, they know and use but one medicine, whatever be the cause of the distemper. They begin immediately to apply the promises; to preach the gospel, as they call it. To give comfort is the single point at which they aim; in order to which they say many soft and tender things, concerning the love of God to poor helpless sinners, and the efficacy of the blood of Christ. Now this is quackery indeed, and that of the worse sort, as it tends, if not to kill men’s bodies, yet without the peculiar mercy of God, “to destroy both their bodies and souls in hell.” It is hard to speak of these “daubers with untempered mortar,” these promise-mongers, as they deserve. They well deserve the title, which has been ignorantly given to others: They are spiritual mountebanks. They do, in effect, make “the blood of the covenant an unholy thing.” They vilely prostitute the promises of God by thus applying them to all without distinction. Whereas, indeed, the cure of spiritual, as of bodily diseases, must be as various as are the causes of them. The first thing, therefore, is to find out the cause; and this will naturally point out the cure.

2. For instance: Is it sin which occasions darkness? What sin? Is it outward sin of any kind? Does your conscience accuse you of committing any sin, whereby you grieve the Holy Spirit of God? Is it on this account that he is departed from you, and that joy and peace are departed with him? And how can you expect they should return, till you put away the accursed thing? “Let the wicked forsake his way;” “cleanse your hands, ye sinners;” “put away the evil of your doings;” so shall your “light break out of obscurity;” the Lord will return and “abundantly pardon.”

3. If, upon the closest search, you can find no sin of commission which causes the cloud upon your soul, inquire
next, if there be not some sin of omission which separates between God and you.

Do you “not suffer sin upon your brother?” Do you reprove them that sin in your sight? Do you walk in all the ordinances of God? In public, family, private prayer? If not, if you habitually neglect any one of these known duties, how can you expect that the light of his countenance should continue to shine upon you? Make haste to “strengthen the things that remain;” then your soul shall live. “Today, if ye will hear his voice,” by his grace supply what is lacking. When you hear a voice behind you saying, “This is the way, walk thou in it,” harden not your heart; be no more “disobedient to the heavenly calling.” Till the sin, whether of omission or commission, be removed, all comfort is false and deceitful. It is only skinnings the wound over, which still fester and rankles beneath. Look for no peace within, till you are at peace with God; which cannot be without “fruits meet for repentance.”

4. But perhaps you are not conscious of even any sin of omission which impairs your peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Is there not then some inward sin, which as a root of bitterness, springs up in your heart to trouble you? Is not your dryness, and barrenness of soul, occasioned by your heart’s “departing from the living God?” Has not “the foot of pride come against” you? Have you not thought of yourself “more highly than you ought to think?” Have you not, in any respect, “sacrificed to your own net, and burned incense to your own drag?” Have you not ascribed your success in any undertaking to your own courage, or strength, or wisdom? Have you not boasted of something “you have received, as though you had not received it?” Have you not gloried in anything, “save the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Have you not sought after or desired the praise of men? Have you not taken pleasure in it? If so, you see the way you are to take. If you have fallen by pride, “humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, and he will exalt you in due time.” Have you not forced him to depart from you, by giving place to anger? Have you not “fretted yourself because of the ungodly” or “been envious against the evil-doers?” Have you not been offended at any of your brethren, looking at their (real or imagined) sin, so as to sin yourself against the great law of love, by estranging your heart from them? Then look unto the Lord, that you may return together, and you may be invariably kind to each other, and “tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Have not you given way to any foolish desire? To any kind or degree of inordinate affection? How then can the love of God have place in your heart, till you put away your idols? “Be not deceived: God is not mocked:” He will not dwell in a divided heart.

As long, therefore, as you cherish Delilah in your bosom he has no place there. It is vain to hope for a recovery of his light, till you pluck out the right eye, and cast it from you. O let there be no longer delay! Cry to Him, that he may enable you so to do! Bewail your own impotence and helplessness; and, the Lord being your helper, enter in at the strait gate; take the kingdom of heaven by violence! Cast out every idol from his sanctuary, and the glory of the Lord shall soon appear.

5. Perhaps it is this very thing, the want of striving, spiritual sloth, which keeps your soul in darkness. You dwell at ease in the land; there is no war in your coasts; and so you are quiet and unconcerned. You go on in the same even track of outward duties, and are content there to abide.

And do you wonder, meantime, that your soul is dead? O stir yourself up before the Lord! Arise, and shake yourself from the dust; wrestle with God for the mighty blessing; pour out your soul unto God in prayer, and continue therein with all perseverance! Watch! Awake out of sleep; and keep awake! Otherwise there is nothing to be expected, but that you will be alienated more and more from the light and life of God.

6. If, upon the fullest and most impartial examination of yourself, you cannot discern that you at present give way either to spiritual sloth, or any other inward or outward sin, then call to mind the time that is past. Consider your former tempers, words, and actions. Have these been right before the Lord? “Commune with him in your chamber, and be still;” and desire of him to try the ground of your heart, and bring to your remembrance whatever has at any time offended the eyes of his glory.

If the guilt of any unrepented sin remain on our soul, it cannot be but you will remain in darkness, till, having been renewed by repentance, you are again washed by faith in the “fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.”
7. Entirely different will be the manner of the cure, if the cause of the disease be not sin, but ignorance. It may be, ignorance of the meaning of Scripture; perhaps occasioned by ignorant commentators; ignorant, at least, in this respect, however knowing and learned they may be in other particulars. And, in this case that ignorance must be removed before we can remove the darkness arising from it. We must show the true meaning of those texts which have been misunderstood. My design does not permit me to consider all the passages of Scripture which have been pressed into this service. I shall just mention two or three, which are frequently brought to prove that all believers must, sooner or later, “walk in darkness.”

8. One of these is Isaiah 50:10: “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God.” But how does it appear, either from the text or context, that the person here spoken of ever had light? One who is convinced of sin, “feareth the Lord, and obeyeth voice of his servant.” And him we should advise, though he was still dark of soul, and had never seen the light of God’s countenance, yet to “trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” This text, therefore, proves nothing less than that believer in Christ “must sometimes walk in darkness.”

9. Another text which has been supposed to speak the same doctrine is Hosea 2:14: “I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.” Hence it has been inferred, that God will bring every believer into the wilderness, into a state of deadness and darkness. But it is certain the text speaks no such thing; for it does not appear that it speaks of particular believers at all: It manifestly refers to the Jewish nation; and, perhaps, to that only. But if it be applicable to particular persons, the plain meaning of it is this: -- I will draw him by love; I will next convince him of sin; and then comfort him by pardoning mercy.

10. A third Scripture from whence the same inference has been drawn is that above recited, “Ye now have sorrow: But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” This has been supposed to imply, that God would after a time withdraw himself from all believers; and that they could not, till after they had thus sorrowed, have the joy which no man could take from them. But the whole context shows that our Lord is here speaking personally to the Apostles, and no others; and that he is speaking concerning those particular events, his own death and resurrection. “A little while,” says he, “and ye shall not see me;” viz., whilst I am in the grave: “And again, a little while, and ye shall see me;” when I am risen from the dead. Ye will weep and lament, and the world will rejoice: But your sorrow shall be turned into joy.” -- “Ye now have sorrow,” because I am about to be taken from your head; “but I will see you again,” after my resurrection, “and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy,” which I will then give you, “no man taketh from you.” All this we know was literally fulfilled in the particular case of the Apostles. But no inference can be drawn from hence with regard to God’s dealings with believers in general.

11. A fourth text (to mention no more) which has been frequently cited in proof of the same doctrine, is 1 Peter 4:12: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.” But this is full as foreign to the point as the preceding. The text, literally rendered, runs thus:

“Beloved, wonder not at the burning which is among you, which is for your trial.” Now, however, this may be accommodated to inward trials, in a secondary sense; yet, primarily, it doubtless refers to martyrdom, and the sufferings connected with it. Neither, therefore, is this text anything at all to the purpose for which it is cited. And we may challenge all men to bring one text, either from the Old or New Testament, which is any more to the purpose than this.

12. “But is not darkness much more profitable for the soul than light? Is not the work of God in the heart most swiftly and effectually carried on during a state of inward suffering? Is not a believer more swiftly and thoroughly purified by sorrow, than by joy? -- by anguish, and pain, and distress, and spiritual martyrdoms, than by continual peace?” So the Mystics teach; so it is written in their books; but not in the oracles of God. The Scripture nowhere says, that the absence of God best perfects his work in the heart! Rather, his presence, and a clear communion with the Father and the Son: A strong consciousness of this will do more an hour, than his absence in an age. Joy in the Holy Ghost will far more effectually purify the soul than the want of that joy; and the peace of God is the best means of refining the soul from the dross of earthly affections. Away then with the idle conceit, that the kingdom of God is divided against itself; that the peace of God, and joy in the Holy Ghost, are obstructive of righteousness; and that we are saved, not by faith, but by unbelief; not by hope, but by despair!
13. So long as men dream thus, they may well “walk in darkness:” Nor can the effect cease, till the cause is removed. But yet we must not imagine it will immediately cease, even when the cause is no more. When either ignorance or sin has caused darkness, one or the other may be removed, and yet the light which was obstructed thereby may not immediately return. As it is the free gift of God, he may restore it, sooner or later, as it pleases him. In the case of sin, we cannot reasonably expect that it should immediately return. The sin began before the punishment, which may, therefore, justly remain after the sin is at an end. And even in the natural course of things, though a wound cannot be healed while the dart is sticking in the flesh; yet neither is it healed as soon as that is drawn out, but soreness and pain may remain long after.

14. Lastly. If darkness be occasioned by manifold and heavy and unexpected temptations, the best way of removing and preventing this is, to teach believers always to expect temptation, seeing they dwell in an evil world, among wicked, subtle, malicious spirits, and have an heart capable of all evil.

Convince them that the whole work of sanctification is not, as they imagined, wrought at once; that when they first believe they are but as new-born babes, who are gradually to grow up, and may expect many storms before they come to the full stature of Christ. Above all, let them be instructed, when the storm is upon them, not to reason with the devil, but to pray; to pour out their souls before God, and show him of their trouble. And these are the persons unto whom, chiefly, we are to apply the great and precious promises; not to the ignorant, till the ignorance is removed, much less to the impenitent sinner. To these we may largely and affectionately declare the loving kindness of God our Saviour, expatiate upon his tender mercies, which have been ever of old. Here we may dwell upon the faithfulness of God, whose “word is tried to the uttermost;” and upon the virtue of that blood which was shed for us, to “cleanse us from all sin:” And God will then bear witness to his word, and bring their souls out of trouble. He will say, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” Yea, and that light, if thou walk humbly and closely with God, will “shine more and more unto the perfect day.”

John Wesley
SERMON 47
(text from the 1872 edition)

HEAVINESS THROUGH MANIFOLD TEMPTATIONS

“Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” 1 Pet. 1:6.

1. In the preceding discourse I have particularly spoken of that darkness of mind into which those are often observed to fall who once walked in the light of God’s countenance. Nearly related to this is the heaviness of soul which is still more common, even among believers. Indeed, almost all the children of God experience this, in an higher or lower degree. And so great is the resemblance between one and the other, that they are frequently confounded together; and we are apt to say, indifferently, “Such an one is in darkness,” or “Such an one is in heaviness;” -- as if they were equivalent terms, one of which implied no more than the other. But they are far, very far from it.

Darkness is one thing; heaviness is another. There is a difference, yea, a wide an essential difference, between the former and the latter. And such a difference it is as all the children of God are deeply concerned to understand: Otherwise nothing will be more easy than for them to slide out of heaviness into darkness. In order to prevent this, I will endeavor to show,

I. What manner of persons those were to whom the Apostle says, “Ye are in heaviness.”
II. What kind of heaviness they were in:
III. What were the causes: and,
IV. What were the ends of it. I shall conclude with some inferences.

I.
1. I am, in the first place, to show what manner of persons those were to whom the Apostle says, “Ye are in heaviness.” And, first, it is beyond all dispute, that they were believers at the time the Apostle thus addressed them: For so he expressly says, (1 Pet. 1:5,) “Ye who are kept through the power of God by faith unto salvation.” Again, (1 Pet. 1:7,) he mentions “the trial of their faith, much more precious than that of gold which perisheth.” And yet again, (1 Pet. 1:9,) he speaks of their “receiving the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls.” At the same time, therefore, that they were “in heaviness,” they were possessed of living faith. Their heaviness did not destroy their faith: They still “endured, as seeing him that is invisible.”

2. Neither did their heaviness destroy their peace; the “peace that passeth all understanding;” which is inseparable from true, living faith. This we may easily gather from the second verse, wherein the Apostle prays, not that grace and peace may be given them, but only that it may “be multiplied unto them;” that the blessing which they already enjoyed might be more abundantly bestowed upon them.

3. The persons to whom the Apostle here speaks were also full of a living hope. For thus he speaks, (1 Pet. 1:3,) “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again,” -- me and you, all of us who are “sanctified by the Spirit,” and enjoy the “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” -- “unto a living hope, unto an inheritance,” -- that is, unto a living hope of an inheritance, “incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” So that, notwithstanding their heaviness, they still retained an hope full of immortality.

4. And they still “rejoiced in hope of the glory of God.” They were filled with joy in the Holy Ghost. So, (1 Pet. 1:8), the Apostle, having just mentioned the final “revelation of Jesus Christ” (namely, when he cometh to judge the world,) immediately adds, “In whom, though now ye see him not,” not with your bodily eyes, “yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Their heaviness, therefore, was not only consistent with living hope, but also with joy unspeakable: At the same time they were thus heavy, they nevertheless rejoiced with joy full of glory.

5. In the midst of their heaviness they likewise still enjoyed the love of God, which had been shed abroad in their hearts; -- “whom,” says the Apostle, “having not seen, ye love.” Though ye have not yet seen him face to face; yet, knowing him by faith, ye have obeyed his word, “My son, give me thy heart. “He is your God, and your love, the desire of your eyes, and your “exceeding great reward.” Ye have sought and found happiness in Him; ye “delight in the Lord,” and he hath given you your “hearts’ desire.”

6. Once more: Though they were heavy, yet were they holy; they retained the same power over sin. They were still “kept” from this, “by the power of God;” they were “obedient children, not fashioned according to their former desires;” but “as He that had called them is holy,” so were they “holy in all manner of conversation.” Knowing they were “redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without spot and without blemish,” they had, through the faith and hope which they had in God, “purified their souls by the Spirit.” So that, upon the whole, their heaviness well consisted with faith, with hope, with love of God and man, with the peace of God, with joy in the Holy Ghost, with inward and outward holiness. It did no way impair, much less destroy, any part of the work of God in their hearts. It did not at all interfere with that “sanctification of the Spirit” which is the root of all true obedience; neither with the happiness which must needs result from grace and peace reigning in the heart.

II.

1. Hence we may easily learn what kind of heaviness they were in; the Second thing which I shall endeavor to show. The word in the original, is NWRGSGPVGL, made sorry, grieved; from NWRG, grief or sorrow. This is the constant, literal meaning of the word: And, this being observed, there is no ambiguity in the expression, nor any difficulty in understanding it. The persons spoken of here were grieved: The heaviness they were in was neither more nor less than sorrow or grief; a passion which every child of man is well acquainted with.

2. It is probable our translators rendered it heaviness (though a less common word,) to denote two things: First, the degree, and next, the continuance, of it. It does indeed, seem that it is not a slight or inconsiderable degree of grief which is here spoken of; but such as makes a strong impression upon, and sinks deep into, the soul. Neither does this appear to be a transient sorrow, such as passes away in an hour; but rather, such as, having taken fast hold of the heart, is not presently shaken off, but continues for some time, as a settled temper, rather than a passion, -- even in them that have living faith in Christ, and the genuine love of God in their hearts.
3. Even in these, this heaviness may sometimes be so deep as to overshadow the whole soul; to give a colour, as it were, to all the affections; such as will appear in the whole behavior. It may likewise have an influence over the body; particularly in those that are either of a naturally weak constitution, or weakened by some accidental disorder, especially of the nervous kind. In many cases, we find “the corruptible body presses down the soul.” In this, the soul rather presses down the body, and weakens it more and more. Nay, I will not say that deep and lasting sorrow of heart may not sometimes weaken a strong constitution, and lay the foundation of such bodily disorders as are not easily removed: And yet, all this may consist with a measure of that faith which still worketh by love.

4. This may well be termed a “fiery trial:” And though it is not the same with that the Apostle speaks of in the fourth chapter [1 Pet. 4], yet many of the expressions there used concerning outward sufferings may be accommodated to this inward affliction. They cannot, indeed, with any propriety, be applied to them that are in darkness: These do not, cannot rejoice; neither is it true, that “the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon” them. But he frequently doth on those that are in heaviness; so that, though sorrowful, yet are they always rejoicing.

III.

1. But to proceed to the Third point: What are the causes of such sorrow or heaviness in a true believer? The Apostle tells us clearly: “Ye are in heaviness,” says he, “through manifold temptations,” manifold, not only many in number, but of many kinds. They may be varied and diversified a thousand ways, by the change or addition of numberless circumstances. And this very diversity and variety makes it more difficult to guard against them. Among these we may rank all bodily disorders; particularly acute diseases, and violent pain of every kind, whether affecting the whole body or the smallest part of it. It is true, some who have enjoyed uninterrupted health, and have felt none of these, may make light of them, and wonder that sickness, or pain of body, should bring heaviness upon the mind. And perhaps one in a thousand is of so peculiar a constitution as not to feel pain like other men. So hath it pleased God to show his almighty power by producing some of these prodigies of nature, who have seemed not to regard pain at all, though of the severest kind; if that contempt of pain was not owing partly to the force of education, partly to a preternatural cause, -- to the power either of good or evil spirits, who raised those men above the state of mere nature. But, abstracting from these particular cases, it is, in general, a just observation, that Pain is perfect misery, and in extreme Quite overturns all patience.

And even where this is prevented by the grace of God, where men do “possess their souls in patience,” it may, nevertheless, occasion much inward heaviness; the soul sympathizing with the body.

2. All diseases of long continuance, though less painful, are apt to produce the same effect. When God appoints over us consumption, or the chilling and burning ague, if it be not speedily removed it will not only “consume the eyes,” but “cause sorrow of heart.” This is eminently the case with regard to all those which are termed nervous disorders. And faith does not overturn the course of nature: Natural causes still produce natural effects. Faith no more hinders the sinking of the spirits (as it is called) in an hysteric illness than the rising of the pulse in a fever.

3. Again: When “calamity cometh as a whirlwind, and poverty as an armed man;” is this a little temptation? Is it strange if it occasion sorrow and heaviness? Although this also may appear but a small thing to those who stand at a distance, or who look, and “pass by on the other side;” yet it is otherwise to them who feel it. “Having food and raiment,” (indeed the latter word, implies lodging as well as apparel,) we may, if the love of God is in our hearts, “be therewith content.” But what shall they do who have none of these? Who, as it were, “embrace the rock for a shelter?” who have only the earth to lie upon, and only the sky to cover them? Who have not a dry, or warm, much less a clean, abode for themselves and their little ones: no, nor clothing to keep themselves, or those they love next themselves, from pinching cold, either by day or night? I laugh at the stupid Heathen, crying out,

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\text{Nil habet indelix paupertas durtus in se,}
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\[
\text{Quam quod ridiculos homines facit!}
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Has poverty nothing worse in it than this, that it makes men liable to be laughed at? It is a sign this idle poet talked by rote of the things which he knew not. Is not want of food something worse than this? God pronounced it as a curse upon man, that he should earn it “by the sweat of his brow.” But how many are there in this
Christian country, that toil, and labour, and sweat, and have it not at last, but struggle with weariness and hunger together? Is it not worse for one, after an hard day’s labour, to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength? You that live at ease in the earth, that want nothing but eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand how well God has dealt with you, -- is it not worse to seek bread day by day, and find none? Perhaps to find the comfort also of five or six children, crying for what he has not to give! Were it not that he is restrained by an unseen hand, would he not soon “curse God and die?” O want of bread! Want of bread! Who can tell what this means unless he hath felt it himself? I am astonished it occasions no more than heaviness even in them that believe!

4. Perhaps, next to this, we may place the death of those who were near and dear unto us; of a tender parent, and one not much declined into the vale of years; of a beloved child, just rising into life, and clasping about our heart; of a friend that was as our own soul, -- next the grace of God, the last, best gift of Heaven. And a thousand circumstances may enhance the distress. Perhaps the child, the friend, died in our embrace! -- perhaps, was snatched away when we looked not for it! Flourishing, cut down like a flower! In all these cases, we not only may, but ought to, be affected: It is the design of God that we should. He would not have us stocks and stones. He would have our affections regulated, not extinguished. Therefore, -- “Nature unreproved may drop a tear.” There may be sorrow without sin.

5. A still deeper sorrow we may feel for those who are dead while they live; on account of the unkindness, ingratitude, apostasy, of those who were united to us in the closest ties. Who can express what a lover of souls may feel for a friend, a brother, dead to God? For an husband, a wife, a parent, a child rushing into sin, as an horse into the battle; and, in spite of all arguments and persuasions, hasting to work out his own damnation? And this anguish of spirit may be heightened to an inconceivable degree, by the consideration, that he who is now posting to destruction once ran well in the way of life. Whatever he was in time past, serves now to no other purpose, than to make our reflections on what he is more piercing and afflictive.

6. In all these circumstances, we may be assured, our great adversary will not be wanting to improve his opportunity. He, who is always “walking about, seeking whom he may devour,” will then, especially, use all his power, all his skill, if haply he may gain any advantage over the soul that is already cast down. He will not be sparing of his fiery darts, such as are most likely to find an entrance, and to fix most deeply in the heart, by their suitableness to the temptation that assaults it.

He will labour to inject unbelieving, or blasphemous, or repining thoughts. He will suggest that God does not regard, does not govern, the earth; or, at least, that he does not govern it aright, not by the rules of justice and mercy. He will endeavor to stir up the heart against God, to renew our natural enmity against him. And if we attempt to fight him with his own weapons, if we begin to reason with him, more and more heaviness will undoubtedly ensue, if not utter darkness.

7. It has been frequently supposed, that there is another cause; if not of darkness, at least, of heaviness; namely, God’s withdrawing himself from the soul, because it is his sovereign will.

Certainly he will do this, if we grieve his Holy Spirit, either by outward or inward sin; either by doing evil, or neglecting to do good; by giving way either to pride or anger, to spiritual sloth, to foolish desire, or inordinate affection. But that he ever withdraws himself because he will, merely because it is his good pleasure, I absolutely deny. There is no text in all the Bible which gives any colour for such a supposition. Nay, it is a supposition contrary, not only to many particular texts, but to the whole tenor of Scripture. It is repugnant to the very nature of God: It is utterly beneath his majesty and wisdom, (as an eminent writer strongly expresses it,) “to play at bo-peep with his creatures.” It is inconsistent both with his justice and mercy, and with the sound experience of all his children.

8. One more cause of heaviness is mentioned by many of those who are termed Mystic authors.

And the notion has crept in, I know not how, even among plain people who have no acquaintance with them. I cannot better explain this, than in the words of a late writer, who relates this as her own experience: -- “I continued so happy in my Beloved, that, although I should have been forced to live a vagabond in a desert, I should have found no difficulty in it. This state had not lasted long, when, in effect, I found myself led into a desert. I found myself in a forlorn condition, altogether poor, wretched, and miserable. The proper source of this
grief is, the knowledge of ourselves; by which we find that there is an extreme unlikeness between God and us. We see ourselves most opposite to him; and that our inmost soul is entirely corrupted, depraved, and full of all kind of evil and malignity, of the world and the flesh, and all sorts of abominations.” -- From hence it has been inferred, that the knowledge of ourselves, without which we should perish everlasting, must, even after we have attained justifying faith, occasion the deepest heaviness.

9. But upon this I would observe, (1.) In the preceding paragraph, this writer says, “Hearing I had not a true faith in Christ, I offered myself up to God, and immediately felt his love.” It may be so; and yet it does not appear that this was justification. It is more probable, it was no more than what are usually termed, the “drawings of the Father.” And if so, the heaviness and darkness which followed was no other than conviction of sin; which in the nature of things, must precede that faith whereby we are justified. (2.) Suppose she was justified almost the same moment she was convinced of wanting faith, there was then no time for that gradually-increasing self-knowledge which uses to precede justification: In this case, therefore, it came after, and was probably the more severe, the less it was expected. (3.) It is allowed, there will be a far deeper, a far clearer and fuller knowledge of our inbred sin, of our total corruption by nature, after justification, than ever there was before it. But this need not occasion darkness of soul: I will not say, that it must bring us into heaviness. Were it so, the Apostle would not have used that expression, if need be for there would be an absolute, indispensable need of it, for all that would know themselves; that is, in effect, for all that would know the perfect love of God, and be thereby “made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” But this is by no means the case. On the contrary, God may increase the knowledge of ourselves to any degree, and increase in the same proportion, the knowledge of himself and the experience of his love. And in this case there would be no “desert, no misery, no forlorn condition;” but love, and peace, and joy, gradually springing up into everlasting life.

IV.

1. For what ends, then, (which was the Fourth thing to be considered,) does God permit heaviness to befall so many of his children? The Apostle gives us a plain and direct answer to this important question: “That the trial of their faith, which is much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”(1 Pet. 1:7.) There may be an allusion to this, in that well-known passage of the fourth chapter; (Although it primarily relates to quite another thing, as has been already observed:) “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you: But rejoice that ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may likewise rejoice with exceeding great joy.” (1 Pet. 4:12,&c.)

2. Hence we learn, that the first and great end of God’s permitting the temptations which bring heaviness on his children, Is the trial of their faith, which is tried by these, even as gold by the fire.

Now we know, gold tried in the fire is purified thereby; is separated from its dross. And so is faith in the fire of temptation; the more it is tried, the more it is purified; -- yea, and not only purified, but also strengthened, confirmed, increased abundantly, by so many more proofs of the wisdom and power, the love and faithfulness, of God. This, then, -- to increase our faith, -- is one gracious end of God’s permitting those manifold temptations.

3. They serve to try, to purify, to confirm, and increase that living hope also, where unto “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath begotten us again of his abundant mercy.” Indeed our hope cannot but increase in the same proportion with our faith. On this foundation it stands: Believing in his name, living by faith in the Son of God, we hope for, we have a confident expectation of, the glory which shall be revealed; And, consequently, whatever strengthens our faith, increases our hope also. At the same time it increases our joy in the Lord, which cannot but attend an hope full of immortality. In this view the Apostle exhorts believers in the other chapter: “Rejoice that ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ.” On this very account, “happy are you; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you;” And hereby ye are enabled, even in the midst of sufferings, to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

4. They rejoice the more, because the trials which increase their faith and hope increase their love also; both their gratitude to God for all his mercies, and their good-will to all mankind. Accordingly, the more deeply sensible they are of the loving-kindness of God their Saviour, the more is their heart inflamed with love to him who “first loved us.” The clearer and stronger evidence they have of the glory that shall be revealed, the more do they love
Him who hath purchased it for them, and “given them the earnest” thereof “in their hearts.” And this, the increase of their love, is another end of the temptations permitted to come upon them.

5. Yet another is, their advance in holiness: holiness of heart, and holiness of conversation; the latter naturally resulting from the former; for a good tree will bring forth good fruit. And all inward holiness is the immediate fruit of the faith that worketh by love. By this the blessed Spirit purifies the heart from pride, self-will, passion; from love of the world, from foolish and hurtful desires, from vile and vain affections. Beside that, sanctified afflictions have, through the grace of God, an immediate and direct tendency to holiness. Through the operation of his Spirit, they humble, more and more, and abase the soul before God. They calm and meeken our turbulent spirit, tame the fierceness of our nature, soften our obstinacy and self-will, crucify us to the world, and bring us to expect all our strength from, and to seek all our happiness in, God.

6. And all these terminate in that great end, that our faith, hope, love, and holiness “may be found,” if it doth not yet appear, “unto praise” from God himself, “and honour” from men and angels, “and glory,” assigned by the great Judge to all that have endured unto the end. And this will be assigned in that awful day to every man, “according to his works;” according to the work which God had wrought in his heart, and the outward works which he has wrought for God; and likewise according to what he had suffered; So that all these trials are unspeakable gain. So many ways do these “light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!”

7. Add to this the advantage which others may receive by seeing our behavior under affliction.

We find by experience, example frequently makes a deeper impression upon us than precept. And what examples have a stronger influence, not only on those who are partakers of like precious faith, but even on them who have not known God, than that of a soul calm and serene in the midst of storms; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; meekly accepting whatever is the will of God, however grievous it may be to nature; saying, in sickness and pain, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” -- in loss or want, “The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!”

V.

1. I am to conclude with some inferences. And, First, how wide is the difference between darkness of soul, and heaviness; which, nevertheless, are so generally confounded with each other, even by experienced Christians! Darkness, or the wilderness-state, implies a total loss of joy in the Holy Ghost: Heaviness does not; in the midst of this we may “rejoice with joy unspeakable.” They that are in darkness have lost the peace of God; They that are in heaviness have not; So far from it, that at the very time “peace,” as well as “grace,” may “be multiplied” unto them. In the former, the love of God is waxed cold, if it be not utterly extinguished; in the latter, it retains its full force, or, rather, increases daily. In these, faith itself, if not totally lost, is, however, grievously decayed: Their evidence and conviction of things not seen, particularly of the pardoning love of God, is not so clear or strong as in time past: and their trust in him is proportionably weakened: Those, though they see him not, yet have a clear, unshaken confidence in God, and an abiding evidence of that love whereby all their sins are blotted out. So that as long as we can distinguish faith from unbelief, hope from despair, peace from war, the love of God from the love of the world, we may infallibly distinguish heaviness from darkness!

2. We may learn from hence, Secondly, that there may be need of heaviness, but there can be no need of darkness. There may be need of our being in “heaviness for a season,” in order to the ends above recited: at least, in this sense, as it is a natural result of those “manifold temptations” which are needful to try and increase our faith, to confirm and enlarge our hope, to purify our heart from all unholy tempers, and to perfect us in love. And, by consequence, they are needful in order to brighten our crown, and add to our eternal weight of glory. But we cannot say, that darkness is needful in order to any of these ends. It is no way conducive to them: The loss of faith, hope, love, is surely neither conducive to holiness, nor to the increase of that reward in heaven which will be in proportion to our holiness on earth.

3. From the Apostle’s manner of speaking we may gather, Thirdly, that even heaviness is not always needful. “Now, for a season, if need be;” So it is not needful for all persons; nor for any person at all times. God is able, he has both power and wisdom, to work, when he pleases, the same work of grace in any soul, by other means. And in some instances he does so; he causes those whom it pleaseth him to go on from strength to strength, even
till they “perfect holiness in his fear,” with scarce any heaviness at all; as having an absolute power over the heart of man, and moving all the springs of it at his pleasure. But these cases are rare: God generally sees good to try “acceptable men in the furnace of affliction.” So that manifold temptations and heaviness, more or less, are usually the portion of his dearest children.

4. We ought, therefore, Lastly, to watch and pray, and use our utmost endeavours to avoid falling into darkness. But we need not be solicitous how to avoid so much as how to improve by heaviness.

Our great care should be, so to behave ourselves under it, so to wait upon the Lord therein, that it may fully answer all the design of his love, in permitting it to come upon us; that it may be a means of increasing our faith, of confirming our hope, of perfecting us in all holiness. Whenever it comes, let us have an eye to these gracious ends for which it is permitted, and use all diligence that we may not make void the counsel of God against ourselves. Let us earnestly work together with him, by the grace which he is continually giving us, in “purifying ourselves from all pollution, both of flesh and spirit,” and daily growing in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, till we are received into his everlasting kingdom!

John Wesley
SERMON 49

THE CURE OF EVIL-SPEAKING

“If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he will not hear them, tell it to the Church. But if he does not hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Matt. 18:15-17

1. "Speak evil of no man,” says the great Apostle: -- As plain a command as, “Thou shalt do no murder.” But who, even among Christians, regards this command? Yea, how few are there that so much as understand it? What is evil-speaking? It is not, as some suppose, the same with lying or slandering. All a man says may be as true as the Bible; and yet the saying of it is evil-speaking. For evil-speaking is neither more nor less than speaking evil of an absent person; relating something evil, which was really done or said by one that is not present when it is related. Suppose, having seen a man drunk, or heard him curse or swear, I tell this when he is absent; it is evil-speaking. In our language this is also, by an extremely proper name, termed backbiting. Nor is there any material difference between this and what we usually style tale-bearing. If the tale be delivered in a soft and quiet manner (perhaps with expressions of good-will to the person, and of hope that things may not be quite so bad,) then we call it whispering. But in whatever manner it be done, the thing is the same; -- the same in substance, if not in circumstance. Still it is evil-speaking; still this command, “Speak evil of no man,” is trampled under foot; if we relate to another the fault of a third person, when he is not present to answer for himself.

2. And how extremely common is this sin, among all orders and degrees of men! How do high and low, rich and poor, wise and foolish, learned and unlearned, run into it continually! Persons who differ from each other in all things else, nevertheless agree in this. How few are there that can testify before God, “I am clear in this matter; I have always set a watch before my mouth, and kept the door of my lips!” What conversation do you hear, of any considerable length, whereof evil-speaking is not one ingredient? And that even among persons who, in the general, have the fear of God before their eyes, and do really desire to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.

3. And the very commonness of this sin makes it difficult to be avoided. As we are encompassed with it on every side, so, if we are not deeply sensible of the danger, and continually guarding against it, we are liable to be carried away by the torrent. In this instance, almost the whole of mankind is, as it were, in a conspiracy against us. And their example steals upon us, we know not how; so that we insensibly slide into the imitation of it. Besides, it is recommended from within as well as from without. There is scarce any wrong temper in the mind
of man, which may not be occasionally gratified by it, and consequently incline us to it. It gratifies our pride, to relate those faults of others whereof we think ourselves not to be guilty. Anger, resentment, and all unkind tempers, are indulged by speaking against those with whom we are displeased; and, in many cases, by reciting the sins of their neighbors, men indulge their own foolish and hurtful desires.

4. Evil-speaking is the more difficult to be avoided, because it frequently attacks us in disguise.

We speak thus out of a noble, generous (it is well if we do not say,) holy indignation, against these vile creatures! We commit sin from mere hatred of sin! We serve the devil out of pure zeal for God! It is merely in order to punish the wicked that we run into this wickedness. “So do the passions” (as one speaks) “all justify themselves,” and palm sin upon us under the veil of holiness!

5. But is there no way to avoid the snare? Unquestionably there is. Our blessed Lord has marked out a plain way for His followers, in the words above recited. None, who warily and steadily walk in this path, will ever fall into evil-speaking. This rule is either an infallible preventive, or a certain cure of it. In the preceding verses, our Lord had said, “Woe to the world, because of offences,” - unspeakable misery will arise in the world from this baleful fountain: (Offences are all things whereby anyone is turned out of, or hindered in, the ways of God.): “For it must be that offenses come,” -- Such is the nature of things; such the wickedness, folly, and weakness of mankind: “But woe to that man,” -- miserable is that man, “by whom the offense cometh.” “Wherefore if thy hand, thy foot, thine eye, cause thee to offend,” -- if the most dear enjoyment, the most beloved and useful person, turn thee out of or hinder thee in the way, “pluck it out,” -- cut them off, and cast them from thee. But how can we avoid giving offense to some, and being offended at others? Especially, suppose they are quite in the wrong, and we see it with our own eyes? Our Lord here teaches us how: He lays down a sure method of avoiding offenses and evil-speaking together. “If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him of his fault, between thee and him alone: If he will hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he will not hear them, tell it to the church: But if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

I.

1. First, “If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him of his fault, between thee and him alone.” The most literal way of following this first rule, where it is practicable, is the best: Therefore, if thou seest with thine own eyes a brother, a fellow Christian, commit undeniable sin, or hearest it with thine own ears, so that it is impossible for thee to doubt the fact, then thy part is plain: Take the very first opportunity of going to him; and, if thou canst have access, “tell him of his fault between thee and him alone.” Indeed, great care is to be taken that this is done in a right spirit, and in a right manner. The success of a reproof greatly depends on the spirit wherein it is given. Be not, therefore, wanting in earnest prayer to God, that it may be given in a lowly spirit; with a deep, piercing conviction, that it is God alone who maketh thee to differ; and that if any good be done by what is now spoken, God doeth it himself. Pray that he would guard thy heart, enlighten thy mind, and direct thy tongue to such words as he may please to bless. See that thou speak in a meek as well as a lowly spirit; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” If he be “overtaken in a fault,” he can no otherwise be restored, than “in the spirit of meekness.” If he opposes the truth, yet he cannot be brought to the knowledge thereof, but by gentleness. Still speak in a spirit of tender love, “which many waters cannot quench.” If love is not conquered, it conquers all things. Who can tell the force of love?

   Love can bow down the stubborn neck,
   The stone to flesh convert;
   Soften, and melt, and pierce and break
   An adamantine heart.

Confirm, then, your love toward him, and you will thereby “heap coals of fire upon his head.”

2. But see that the manner also wherein you speak be according to the Gospel of Christ. Avoid everything in look, gesture, word, and tone of voice, that savors of pride or self-sufficiency.

   Studiously avoid everything magisterial or dogmatical, everything that looks like arrogance or assuming. Beware
of the most distant approach to disdain, overbearing, or contempt. With equal care avoid all appearance of anger; and though you use great plainness of speech, yet let there be no reproach, no railing accusation, no token of any warmth but that of love. Above all, let there be no shadow of hate or ill-will, no bitterness or sourness of expression; but use the air and language of sweetness, as well as gentleness, that all may appear to flow from love in the heart. And yet this sweetness need not hinder your speaking in the most serious and solemn manner; as far as may be, in the very words of the oracles of God (for there are none like them,) and as under the eye of Him who is coming to judge the quick and dead.

3. If you have not an opportunity of speaking to him in person, or cannot have access, you may do it by a messenger; by a common friend, in whose prudence, as well as uprightness, you can thoroughly confide. Such a person, speaking in your name, and in the spirit and manner above described, may answer the same end, and, in a good degree, supply your lack of service. Only beware you do not feign the want of opportunity, in order to shun the cross; neither take it for granted that you cannot have access, without ever making the trial. Whenever you can speak in your own person, it is far better. But you should rather do it by another, than not at all: This way is better than none.

4. But what, if you can neither speak yourself, nor find such a messenger as you can confide in? If this is really the case, it then only remains to write. And there may be some circumstances which make this the most advisable way of speaking. One of these circumstances is, when the person with whom we have to do is of so warm and impetuous a temper as does not easily bear reproof, especially from an equal or inferior. But it may be so introduced and softened in writing as to make it far more tolerable. Besides, many will read the very same words, which they could not bear to hear. It does not give so violent a shock to their pride, nor so sensibly touch their honor. And suppose it makes little impression at first, they will, perhaps, give it a second reading, and, upon farther consideration, lay to heart what before they disregarded. If you add your name, this is nearly the same thing as going to him, and speaking in person. And this should always be done, unless it be rendered improper by some very particular reason.

5. It should be well observed, not only that this is a step which our Lord absolutely commands us to take, but that he commands us to take this step first, before we attempt any other. No alternative is allowed, no choice of anything else: This is the way; walk thou in it. It is true, he enjoins us, if need require, to take two other steps; but they are to be taken successively after this step, and neither of them before it: Much less are we to take any other step, either before or beside this. To do anything else, or not to do this, is, therefore, equally inexcusable.

6. Do not think to excuse yourself for taking an entirely different step, by saying, “Why, I did not speak to anyone, till I was so burdened that I could not refrain.” You was burdened! It was no wonder you should, unless your conscience was seared; for you was under the guilt of sin, of disobeying a plain commandment of God! You ought immediately to have gone, and told “your brother of his fault between you and him alone.” If you did not, how should you be other than burdened (unless your heart was utterly hardened,) while you was trampling the command of God under foot, and “hating your brother in your heart?” And what a way have you found to unburden yourself? God reproves you for a sin of omission, for not telling your brother of his fault; and you comfort yourself under His reproof by a sin of commission, by telling your brother’s fault to another person! Ease bought by sin is a dear purchase! I trust in God, you will have no ease, but will be burdened so much the more, till you “go to your brother and tell him,” and no one else.

7. I know but of one exception to this rule: There may be a peculiar case, wherein it is necessary to accuse the guilty, though absent, in order to preserve the innocent. For instance: You are acquainted with the design which a man has against the property or life of his neighbor. Now, the case may be so circumstanced, that there is no other way of hindering that design from taking effect, but the making it known, without delay, to him against whom it is laid. In this case, therefore, this rule is set aside, as is that of the Apostle, “Speak evil of no man:” and it is lawful, yea, it is our bounden duty, to speak evil of an absent person, in order to prevent his doing evil to others and himself at the same time. But remember, meanwhile that all evil-speaking is, in its own nature, deadly poison. Therefore if you are sometimes constrained to use it as a medicine, yet use it with fear and trembling; seeing it is so dangerous a medicine, that nothing but absolute necessity can excuse your using it at all. Accordingly, use it as seldom as possible; never but when there is such a necessity: And even then use as little of it as is possible; only so much as is necessary for the end proposed. At all other times, “go and tell him of his
fault between thee and him alone."

II.

1. But what, “if he will not hear?” If he repay evil for good? If he be enraged rather than convinced? What, if he hear to no purpose, and go on still in the evil of his way? We must expect this will frequently be the case; the mildest and tenderest reproof will have no effect; but the blessing we wished for another will return into our own bosom. And what are we to do then? Our Lord has given us a clear and full direction. Then “take with thee one or two more:” This is the second step.

Take one or two whom you know to be of a loving spirit, lovers of God and of their neighbor. See, likewise, that they be of a lowly spirit, and “clothed with humility.” Let them also be such as are meek and gentle, patient and longsuffering; not apt to “return evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.” Let them be men of understanding, such as are endued with wisdom from above; and men unbiased, free from partiality, free from prejudice of any kind. Care should likewise be taken, that both the persons and their characters be well known to him: And let those that are acceptable to him be chosen preferable to any others.

2. Love will dictate the manner wherein they should proceed, according to the nature of the case.

Nor can any one particular manner be prescribed for all cases. But perhaps, in general, one might advise, before they enter upon the thing itself, let them mildly and affectionately declare that they have no anger or prejudice toward him, and that it is merely from a principle of goodwill that they now come, or at all concern themselves with his affairs. To make this the more apparent, they might then calmly attend to your repetition of your former conversation with him, and to what he said in his own defense, before they attempted to determine anything. After this they would be better able to judge in what manner to proceed, “that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word might be established;” that whatever you have said may have its full force by the additional weight of their authority.

3. In order to this, may they not, (1.) Briefly repeat what you spoke, and what he answered? (2.) Enlarge upon, open, and confirm the reasons which you had given? (3.) Give weight to your reproof, showing how just, how kind, and how seasonable it was? And, lastly, enforce the advices and persuasions which you had annexed to it? And these may likewise hereafter, if need should require, bear witness of what was spoken.

4. With regard to this, as well as the preceding rule, we may observe that our Lord gives us no choice, leaves us no alternative, but expressly commands us to do this, and nothing else in the place of it. He likewise directs us when to do this; neither sooner nor later; namely, after we have taken the first, and before we have taken the third step. It is then only that we are authorized to relate the evil another has done, to those whom we desire to bear a part with us in this great instance of brotherly love. But let us have a care how we relate it to any other person, till both these steps have been taken. If we neglect to take these, or if we take any others, what wonder if we are burdened still? For we are sinners against God, and against our neighbor; and how fairly soever we may color it, yet, if we have any conscience, our sin will find us out, and bring a burden upon our soul.

III.

1. That we may be thoroughly instructed in this weighty affair, our Lord has given us a still farther direction: “If he will not hear them,” then, and not till then, “tell it to the church.” This is the third step. All the question is, how this word, “the church,” is here to be understood. But the very nature of the thing will determine this beyond all reasonable doubt. You cannot tell it to the national Church, the whole body of men termed “the Church of England.” Neither would it answer any Christian end if you could; this, therefore, is not the meaning of the word. Neither can you tell it to that whole body of people in England with whom you have a more immediate connection. Nor, indeed, would this answer any good end: The word, therefore, is not to be understood thus. It would not answer any valuable end to tell the faults of every particular member to the church (if you would so term it,) the congregation or society, united together in London. It remains that you tell it to the elder or elders of the church, to those who are overseers of that flock of Christ to which you both belong, who watch over yours and his soul, “as they that must give account.” And this should be done, if it conveniently can, in the presence of the person concerned, and, though plainly, yet with all the tenderness and love which the nature of the thing will admit. It properly belongs to their office, to determine concerning the behavior of those under their care, and to
rebuke, according to the demerit of the offense, “with all authority.” When, therefore, you have done this, you have done all which the Word of God, or the law of love, requireth of you: You are not now partaker of his sin; but if he perish, his blood is on his own head.

2. Here, also, let it be observed, that this, and no other, is the third step which we are to take: and that we are to take it in its order after the other two; not before the second, much less the first, unless in some very particular circumstance. Indeed, in one case, the second step may coincide with this: They may be, in a manner, one and the same. The elder or elders of the church may be so connected with the offending brother, that they may set aside the necessity, and supply the place, of the one or two witnesses; so that it may suffice to tell it to them, after you have told it to your brother, “between you and him alone.”

3. When you have done this, you have delivered your own soul. “If he will not hear the church,” if he persist in his sin, “let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.” You are under no obligation to think of him any more; only when you commend him to God in prayer. You need not speak of him any more, but leave him to his own Master. Indeed, you still owe to him, as to all other heathens, earnest, tender goodwill. You owe him courtesy, and, as occasion offers, all the offices of humanity. But have no friendship, no familiarity with him; no other intercourse than with an open Heathen.

4. But if this be the rule by which Christians walk, which is the land where Christians live? A few you may possibly find scattered up and down, who make a conscience of observing it. But how very few! How thinly scattered upon the face of the earth! And where is there any body of men that universally walk thereby? Can we find them in Europe? Or, to go no farther, in Great Britain or Ireland? I fear not: I fear we may search these kingdoms throughout, and yet search in vain. Alas for the Christian world! Alas for Protestants, for Reformed Christians! O, “who will rise up with me against the wicked?” “Who will take God’s part” against the evil-speakers? Art thou the man? By the grace of God, wilt thou be one who art not carried away by the torrent? Art thou fully determined, God being thy helper, from this very hour to set a watch, a continual “watch, before thy mouth, and keep the door of thy lips”? From this hour wilt thou walk by this rule, “Speaking evil of no man?” If thou seest thy brother do evil, wilt thou “tell him of his fault between thee and him alone?” Afterwards, “take one or two witnesses,” and then only “tell it to the church?” If this be the full purpose of thy heart, then learn one lesson well, “Hear evil of no man.” If there were no hearers, there would be no speakers, of evil. And is not (according to the vulgar proverb) the receiver as bad as the thief? If, then, any begin to speak evil in thy hearing, check him immediately. Refuse to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so sweetly; let him use ever so soft a manner, so mild an accent, ever so many professions of goodwill for him whom he is stabbing in the dark, whom he smiteth under the fifth rib! Resolutely refuse to hear, though the whisperer complain of being “burdened till he speak.” Burdened! Thou fool! Dost thou travail with thy cursed secret, as a woman travaileth with child? Go, then, and be delivered of thy burden in the way the Lord hath ordained! First, “go and tell thy brother of his fault between thee and him alone;” next, “take with thee one or two” common friends, and tell him in their presence: If neither of these steps take effect, then “tell it to the church.” But, at the peril of thy soul, tell it to no one else, either before or after, unless in that one exempt case, when it is absolutely needful to preserve the innocent! Why shouldst thou burden another as well as thyself, by making him partaker of thy sin?

5. O that all you who bear the reproach of Christ, who are in derision called Methodists, would set an example to the Christian world, so called, at least in this one instance! Put ye away evil-speaking, talebearing, whispering: Let none of them proceed out of your mouth! See that you “speak evil of no man;” of the absent, nothing but good. If ye must be distinguished, whether ye will or no, let this be the distinguishing mark of a Methodist: “He censures no man behind his back: By this fruit ye may know him.” What a blessed effect of this self-denial should we quickly feel in our hearts! How would our “peace flow as a river;” when we thus “followed peace with all men?” How would the love of God abound in our own souls, while we thus confirmed our love to our brethren!

And what an effect would it have on all that were united together in the name of the Lord Jesus! How would brotherly love continually increase, when this grand hindrance of it was removed! All the members of Christ’s mystical body would then naturally care for each other. “If one member suffered, all would suffer with it; if one was honored, all would rejoice with it;” and everyone would love his brother “with a pure heart fervently.” Nor is this all: But what an effect might this have, even on the wild unthinking world! How soon would they descry
in us, what they could not find among all the thousands of their brethren, and cry (as Julian the Apostate to his heathen courtiers,) “See how these Christians love one another!” By this chiefly would God convince the world, and prepare them also for His kingdom; as we may easily learn from those remarkable words in our Lord’s last, solemn prayer: “I pray for them who will believe in me, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me!” [John 17:21] The Lord hasten the time! The Lord enable us thus to love one another, not only “in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth,” even as Christ hath loved us.

John Wesley
SERMON 50
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE USE OF MONEY

“I say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations.” Luke 16:9.

1. Our Lord, having finished the beautiful parable of the Prodigal Son, which he had particularly addressed to those who murmured at his receiving publicans and sinners, adds another relation of a different kind, addressed rather to the children of God. “He said unto his disciples,” not so much to the scribes and Pharisees to whom he had been speaking before, -- “There was a certain rich man, who had a steward, and he was accused to him of wasting his goods. And calling him, he said, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou canst be no longer steward.” (Luke 16:1, 2.) After reciting the method which the bad steward used to provide against the day of necessity, our Saviour adds, “His lord commended the unjust steward” namely, in this respect, that he used timely precaution; and subjoins this weighty reflection, “The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light;” (Luke 16:8:) Those who seek no other portion than this world “are wiser” (not absolutely; for they are one and all the veriest fools, the most egregious madmen under heaven; but, “in their generation,” in their own way; they are more consistent with themselves; they are truer to their acknowledged principles; they more steadily pursue their end) “than the children of light;” - than they who see “the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Then follow the words above recited: “And I,” -- the only-begotten Son of God, the Creator, Lord, and Possessor of heaven and earth and all that is therein; the Judge of all, to whom ye are to “give an account of your stewardship,” when ye “can be no longer stewards;” “I say unto you,” -- learn in this respect, even of the unjust steward, -- “make yourselves friends,” by wise, timely precaution, “of the mammon of unrighteousness.” “Mammon” means riches or money. It is termed “the mammon of unrighteousness,” because of the unrighteous manner wherein it frequently procured, and wherein even that which was honestly procured is generally employed. “Make yourselves friends” of this, by doing all possible good, particularly to the children of God; “that, when ye fail,” -- when ye return to dust, when ye have no more place under the sun, -- those of them who are gone before “may receive you,” may welcome you, into the “everlasting habitations.”

2. An excellent branch of Christian wisdom is here inculcated by our Lord on all his followers, namely, the right use of money – a subject largely spoken of, after their manner, by men of the world; but not sufficiently considered by those whom God hath chosen out of the world. These, generally, do not consider, as the importance of the subject requires, the use of this excellent talent.

Neither do they understand how to employ it to the greatest advantage; the introduction of which into the world is one admirable instance of the wise and gracious providence of God. It has, indeed, been the manner of poets, orators, and philosophers, in almost all ages and nations, to rail at this, as the grand corrupter of the world, the bane of virtue, the pest of human society. Hence nothing so commonly heard, as:

Nocens ferrum, ferroque nocentius aurum:
And gold, more mischievous than keenest steel.
Hence the lamentable complaint,
Effodiuntur opes, irritamenta malorum.
Wealth is dug up, incentive to all ill.
Nay, one celebrated writer gravely exhorts his countrymen, in order to banish all vice at once, to “throw all their money into the sea:”

... in mare proximum [...] Summi materiem mali!
But is not all this mere empty rant? Is there any solid reason therein? By no means. For, let the world be as corrupt as it will, is gold or silver to blame? “The love of money,” we know, “is the root of all evil;” but not the thing itself. The fault does not lie in the money, but in them that use it. It may be used ill: and what may not? But it may likewise be used well: It is full as applicable to the best, as to the worst uses. It is of unspeakable service to all civilized nations, in all the common affairs of life: It is a most compendious instrument of transacting all manner of business, and (if we use it according to Christian wisdom) of doing all manner of good. It is true, were man in a state of innocence, or were all men “filled with the Holy Ghost,” so that, like the infant Church at Jerusalem, “no man counted anything he had his own,” but “distribution was made to everyone as he had need,” the use of it would be superseded; as we cannot conceive there is anything of the kind among the inhabitants of heaven. But, in the present state of mankind, it is an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked: It gives to the traveller and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of an husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We maybe a defence for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death!

3. It is therefore of the highest concern that all who fear God know how to employ this valuable talent; that they be instructed how it may answer these glorious ends, and in the highest degree. And, perhaps, all the instructions which are necessary for this may be reduced to three plain rules, by the exact observance whereof we may approve ourselves faithful stewards of “the mammon of unrighteousness.”

I.
1. The first of these is (he that heareth, let him understand!) “Gain all you can.” Here we may speak like the children of the world: We meet them on their own ground. And it is our bounden duty to do this: We ought to gain all we can gain, without buying gold too dear, without paying more for it than it is worth. But this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor (which is in effect the same thing) at the expense of our health. Therefore, no gain whatsoever should induce us to enter into, or to continue in, any employ, which is of such a kind, or is attended with so hard or so long labour, as to impair our constitution. Neither should we begin or continue in any business which necessarily deprives us of proper seasons for food and sleep, in such a proportion as our nature requires. Indeed, there is a great difference here. Some employments are absolutely and totally unhealthy; as those which imply the dealing much with arsenic, or other equally hurtful minerals, or the breathing an air tainted with steams of melting lead, which must at length destroy the firmest constitution. Others may not be absolutely unhealthy, but only to persons of a weak constitution. Such are those which require many hours to be spent in writing; especially if a person write sitting, and lean upon his stomach, or remain long in an uneasy posture. But whatever it is which reason or experience shows to be destructive of health or strength, that we may not submit to; seeing “the life is more” valuable “than meat, and the body than raiment.” And if we are already engaged in such an employ, we should exchange it as soon as possible for some which, if it lessen our gain, will, however not lessen our health.

2. We are, Secondly, to gain all we can without hurting our mind any more than our body. For neither may we hurt this. We must preserve, at all events, the spirit of an healthful mind. Therefore we may not engage or continue in any sinful trade, any that is contrary to the law of God, or of our country. Such are all that necessarily imply our robbing or defrauding the king of his lawful customs.

For it is at least as sinful to defraud the king of his right, as to rob our fellow subjects. And the king has full as much right, to his customs as we have to our houses and apparel. Other businesses there are, which however innocent in themselves, cannot be followed with innocence now at least, not in England; such, for instance, as will not afford a competent maintenance without cheating or lying, or conformity to some custom which not
consistent with a good conscience: These, likewise, are sacredly to be avoided, whatever gain they may be attended with provided we follow the custom of the trade; for to gain money we must not lose our souls. There are yet others which many pursue with perfect innocence, without hurting either their body or mind; And yet perhaps you cannot: Either they may entangle you in that company which would destroy your soul; and by repeated experiments it may appear that you cannot separate the one from the other; or there may be an idiosyncrasy, -- a peculiarity in your constitution of soul, (as there is in the bodily constitution of many,) by reason whereof that employment is deadly to you, which another may safely follow. So I am convinced, from many experiments, I could not study, to any degree of perfection, either mathematics, arithmetic, or algebra, without being a Deist: if not an Atheist: And yet others may study them all their lives without sustaining any inconvenience. None therefore can here determine for another; but every man must judge for himself, and abstain from whatever he in particular finds to be hurtful to his soul.

3. We are. Thirdly, to gain all we can without hurting our neighbour. But this we may not, cannot do, if we love our neighbour as ourselves. We cannot, if we love everyone as ourselves, hurt anyone in his substance. We cannot devour the increase of his lands, and perhaps the lands and houses themselves, by gaming, by overgrown bills (whether on account of physic, or law, or anything else,) or by requiring or taking such interest as even the laws of our country forbid. Hereby all pawn-broking is excluded: Seeing, whatever good we might do thereby, all unprejudiced men see with grief to be abundantly overbalanced by the evil. And if it were otherwise, yet we are not allowed to “do evil that good may come.” We cannot, consistent with brotherly love, sell our goods below the market price; we cannot study to ruin our neighbour’s trade, in order to advance our own; much less can we entice away or receive any of his servants or workmen whom he has need of. None can gain by swallowing up his neighbour’s substance, without gaining the damnation of hell!

4. Neither may we gain by hurting our neighbour in his body. Therefore we may not sell anything which tends to impair health. Such is, eminently, all that liquid fire, commonly called drams or spirituous liquors. It is true, these may have a place in medicine; they may be of use in some bodily disorders; although there would rarely be occasion for them were it not for the unskillfulness of the practitioner. Therefore, such as prepare and sell them only for this end may keep their conscience clear. But who are they? Who prepare and sell them only for this end? Do you know ten such distillers in England? Then excuse these. But all who sell them in the common way, to any that will buy, are poisoners general. They murder His Majesty’s subjects by wholesale, neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive them to hell like sheep. And what is their gain? Is it not the blood of these men? Who then would envy their large estates and sumptuous palaces? A curse is in the midst of them: The curse of God cleaves to the stones, the timber, the furniture of them. The curse of God is in their gardens, their walks, their groves; a fire that burns to the nethermost hell! Blood, blood is there: The foundation, the floor, the walls, the roof are stained with blood! And canst thou hope, O thou man of blood, that thou art “clothed in scarlet and fine linen, and farest sumptuously every day;” canst thou hope to deliver down thy fields of blood to the third generation? Not so; for there is a God in heaven: Therefore, thy name shall soon be rooted out. Like as those whom thou hast destroyed, body and soul, “thy memorial shall perish with thee!”

5. And are not they partakers of the same guilt, though in a lower degree, whether Surgeons, Apothecaries, or Physicians, who play with the lives or health of men, to enlarge their own gain? Who purposely lengthen the pain or disease which they are able to remove speedily? Who protract the cure of their patient’s body in order to plunder his substance? Can any man be clear before God who does not shorten every disorder “as much as he can,” and remove all sickness and pain “as soon as he can?” He cannot: For nothing can be more clear than that he does not “love his neighbour as himself;” than that he does not “do unto others as he would they should do unto himself.”

6. This is dear-bought gain. And so is whatever is procured by hurting our neighbour in his soul; by ministering, suppose, either directly or indirectly, to his unchastity, or intemperance, which certainly none can do, who has any fear of God, or any real desire of pleasing Him. It nearly concerns all those to consider this, who have anything to do with taverns, victualling-houses, opera-houses, play-houses, or any other places of public, fashionable diversion. If these profit the souls of men, you are clear; your employment is good, and your gain innocent; but if they are either sinful in themselves, or natural inlets to sin of various kinds, then, it is to be feared, you have a sad account to make. O beware, lest God say in that day, “These have perished in their
iniquity, but their blood do I require at thy hands!"

7. These cautions and restrictions being observed, it is the bounden duty of all who are engaged in worldly business to observe that first and great rule of Christian wisdom with respect to money, “Gain all you can.” Gain all you can by honest industry. Use all possible diligence in your calling.

Lose no time. If you understand yourself and your relation to God and man, you know you have none to spare. If you understand your particular calling as you ought, you will have no time that hangs upon your hands. Every business will afford some employment sufficient for every day and every hour. That wherein you are placed, if you follow it in earnest, will leave you no leisure for silly, unprofitable diversions. You have always something better to do, something that will profit you, more or less. And “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” Do it as soon as possible: No delay! No putting off from day to day, or from hour to hour! Never leave anything till to-morrow, which you can do to-day. And do it as well as possible. Do not sleep or yawn over it: Put your whole strength to the work. Spare no pains. Let nothing be done by halves, or in a slight and careless manner. Let nothing in your business be left undone if it can be done by labour or patience.

8. Gain all you can, by common sense, by using in your business all the understanding which God has given you. It is amazing to observe, how few do this; how men run on in the same dull track with their forefathers. But whatever they do who know not God, this is no rule for you. It is a shame for a Christian not to improve upon them, in whatever he takes in hand. You should be continually learning, from the experience of others, or from your own experience, reading, and reflection, to do everything you have to do better to-day than you did yesterday. And see that you practise whatever you learn, that you may make the best of all that is in your hands.

II.

1. Having gained all you can, by honest wisdom and unwearied diligence, the second rule of Christian prudence is, “Save all you can.” Do not throw the precious talent into the sea: Leave that folly to heathen philosophers. Do not throw it away in idle expenses, which is just the same as throwing it into the sea. Expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life.

2. Do not waste any part of so precious a talent merely in gratifying the desires of the flesh; in procuring the pleasures of sense of whatever kind; particularly, in enlarging the pleasure of tasting.

I do not mean, avoid gluttony and drunkenness only: An honest heathen would condemn these. But there is a regular, reputable kind of sensuality, an elegant epicurism, which does not immediately disorder the stomach, nor (sensibly, at least) impair the understanding. And yet (to mention no other effects of it now) it cannot be maintained without considerable expense. Cut off all this expense! Despise delicacy and variety, and be content with what plain nature requires.

3. Do not waste any part of so precious a talent merely in gratifying the desire of the eye by superfluous or expensive apparel, or by needless ornaments. Waste no part of it in curiously adorning your houses; in superfluous or expensive furniture; in costly pictures, painting, gilding, books; in elegant rather than useful gardens. Let your neighbours, who know nothing better, do this: “Let the dead bury their dead.” But “what is that to thee?” says our Lord: “Follow thou me.” Are you willing? Then you are able so to do.

4. Lay out nothing to gratify the pride of life, to gain the admiration or praise of men. This motive of expense is frequently interwoven with one or both of the former. Men are expensive in diet, or apparel, or furniture, not barely to please their appetite, or to gratify their eye, their imagination, but their vanity too. “So long as thou dost well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee.” So long as thou art “clothed in purple and fine linen, and fairest sumptuously” every day, no doubt many will applaud thy elegance of taste, thy generosity and hospitality. But do not buy their applause so dear.

Rather be content with the honour that cometh from God.

5. Who would expend anything in gratifying these desires if he considered that to gratify them is to increase them? Nothing can be more certain than this: Daily experience shows, the more they are indulged, they increase the more. Whenever, therefore, you expend anything to please your taste or other senses, you pay so much for sensuality. When you lay out money to please your eye, you give so much for an increase of curiosity, -- for a
stronger attachment to these pleasures which perish in the using. While you are purchasing anything which men use to applaud, you are purchasing more vanity. Had you not then enough of vanity, sensuality, curiosity before? Was there need of any addition? And would you pay for it, too? What manner of wisdom is this? Would not the literally throwing your money into the sea be a less mischievous folly?

6. And why should you throw away money upon your children, any more than upon yourself, in delicate food, in gay or costly apparel, in superfluities of any kind? Why should you purchase for them more pride or lust, more vanity, or foolish and hurtful desires? They do not want any more; they have enough already; nature has made ample provision for them: Why should you be at farther expense to increase their temptations and snares, and to pierce them through with more sorrows?

7. Do not leave it to them to throw away. If you have good reason to believe that they would waste what is now in your possession in gratifying and thereby increasing the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life at the peril of theirs and your own soul, do not set these traps in their way. Do not offer your sons or your daughters unto Belial, any more than unto Moloch. Have pity upon them, and remove out of their way what you may easily foresee would increase their sins, and consequently plunge them deeper into everlasting perdition! How amazing then is the infatuation of those parents who think they can never leave their children enough! What! Cannot you leave them enough of arrows, firebrands, and death? Not enough of foolish and hurtful desires? Not enough of pride, lust, ambition vanity? Not enough of everlasting burnings? Poor wretch! Thou fearest where no fear is. Surely both you and they, when ye are lifting up your eyes in hell, will have enough both of the “worm that never dieth,” and of “the fire that never shall be quenched!”

8. "What then would you do, if you was in my case? If you had a considerable fortune to leave?" Whether I would do it or no, I know what I ought to do: This will admit of no reasonable question.

If I had one child, elder or younger, who knew the value of money; one who I believed, would put it to the true use, I should think it my absolute, indispensable duty to leave that child the bulk of my fortune; and to the rest just so much as would enable them to live in the manner they had been accustomed to do. “But what, if all your children were equally ignorant of the true use of money?” I ought then (hard saying! Who can hear it?) to give each what would keep him above want, and to bestow all the rest in such a manner as I judged would be most for the glory of God.

III.

1. But let not any man imagine that he has done anything, barely by going thus far, by “gaining and saving all he can,” if he were to stop here. All this is nothing, if a man go not forward, if he does not point all this at a farther end. Nor, indeed, can a man properly be said to save anything, if he only lays it up. You may as well throw your money into the sea, as bury it in the earth. And you may as well bury it in the earth, as in your chest, or in the Bank of England. Not to use, is effectually to throw it away. If, therefore, you would indeed “make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,” add the Third rule to the two preceding. Having, First, gained all you can, and, Secondly saved all you can, Then “give all you can.”

2. In order to see the ground and reason of this, consider, when the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being, and placed you in this world, he placed you here not as a proprietor, but a steward: As such he entrusted you, for a season, with goods of various kinds; but the sole property of these still rests in him, nor can be alienated from him. As you yourself are not your own, but his, such is, likewise, all that you enjoy. Such is your soul and your body, not your own, but God’s. And so is your substance in particular. And he has told you, in the most clear and express terms, how you are to employ it for him, in such a manner, that it may be an holy sacrifice, acceptable through Christ Jesus. And this light, easy service, he has promised to reward with an eternal weight of glory.

3. The directions which God has given us, touching the use of our worldly substance, may be comprised in the following particulars. If you desire to be a faithful and a wise steward, out of that portion of your Lord’s goods which he has for the present lodged in your hands, but with the right of resuming whenever it pleases him, First, provide things needful for yourself; food to eat, raiment to put on, whatever nature moderately requires for preserving the body in health and strength.
Secondly, provide these for your wife, your children, your servants, or any others who pertain to your household. If when this is done there be an overplus left, then “do good to them that are of the household of faith.” If there be an overplus still, “as you have opportunity, do good unto all men.” In so doing, you give all you can; nay, in a sound sense, all you have: For all that is laid out in this manner is really given to God. You “render unto God the things that are God’s,” not only by what you give to the poor, but also by that which you expend in providing things needful for yourself and your household.

4. If, then, a doubt should at any time arise in your mind concerning what you are going to expend, either on yourself or any part of your family, you have an easy way to remove it. Calmly and seriously inquire, “(1.) In expending this, am I acting according to my character? Am I acting herein, not as a proprietor, but as a steward of my Lord’s goods? (2.) Am I doing this in obedience to his Word? In what Scripture does he require me so to do? (3.) Can I offer up this action, this expense, as a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ? (4.) Have I reason to believe that for this very work I shall have a reward at the resurrection of the just?” You will seldom need anything more to remove any doubt which arises on this head; but by this four-fold consideration you will receive clear light as to the way wherein you should go.

5. If any doubt still remain, you may farther examine yourself by prayer according to those heads of inquiry. Try whether you can say to the Searcher of hearts, your conscience not condemning you, “Lord, thou seest I am going to expend this sum on that food, apparel, furniture. And thou knowest, I act herein with a single eye as a steward of thy goods, expending this portion of them thus in pursuance of the design thou hadst in entrusting me with them. Thou knowest I do this in obedience to the Lord, as thou commandest, and because thou commandest it. Let this, I beseech thee, be an holy sacrifice, acceptable through Jesus Christ! And give me a witness in myself that for this labour of love I shall have a recompense when thou rewardest every man according to his works.” Now if your conscience bear you witness in the Holy Ghost that this prayer is well-pleasing to God, then have you no reason to doubt but that expense is right and good, and such as will never make you ashamed.

6. You see then what it is to “make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,” and by what means you may procure, “that when ye fail they may receive you into the everlasting habitations.” You see the nature and extent of truly Christian prudence so far as it relates to the use of that great talent, money. Gain all you can, without hurting either yourself or your neighbour, in soul or body, by applying hereto with unintermitted diligence, and with all the understanding which God has given you; -- save all you can, by cutting off every expense which serves only to indulge foolish desire; to gratify either the desire of flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life; waste nothing, living or dying, on sin or folly, whether for yourself or your children; -- and then, give all you can, or, in other words, give all you have to God. Do not stint yourself, like a Jew rather than a Christian, to this or that proportion. “Render unto God,” not a tenth, not a third, not half, but all that is God’s, be it more or less; by employing all on yourself, your household, the household of faith, and all mankind, in such a manner, that you may give a good account of your stewardship when ye can be no longer stewards; in such a manner as the oracles of God direct, both by general and particular precepts; in such a manner, that whatever ye do may be “a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour to God,” and that every act may be rewarded in that day when the Lord cometh with all his saints.

7. Brethren, can we be either wise or faithful stewards unless we thus manage our Lord’s goods? We cannot, as not only the oracles of God, but our own conscience beareth witness. Then why should we delay? Why should we confer any longer with flesh and blood, or men of the world? Our kingdom, our wisdom is not of this world: Heathen custom is nothing to us. We follow no men any farther than they are followers of Christ. Hear ye him. Yea, to-day, while it is called to-day, hear and obey his voice! At this hour, and from this hour, do his will: Fulfil his word, in this and in all things! I entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, act up to the dignity of your calling! No more sloth! Whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might! No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand! No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all men! This is no small part of “the wisdom of the just.” Give all ye have, as well as all ye are, a spiritual sacrifice to Him who withheld not from you his Son, his only Son: So “laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that ye may attain eternal life!”
THE GOOD STEWARD

“Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.” Luke 16:2.

1. The relation which man bears to God, the creature to his Creator, is exhibited to us in the oracles of God under various representations. Considered as a sinner, a fallen creature, he is there represented as a debtor to his Creator. He is also frequently represented as a servant, which indeed is essential to him as a creature; insomuch that this appellation is given to the Son of God when, in His state of humiliation, he “took upon Him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”

2. But no character more exactly agrees with the present state of man, than that of a steward. Our blessed Lord frequently represents him as such; and there is a peculiar propriety in the representation.

It is only in one particular respect, namely, as he is a sinner, that he is styled a debtor; and when he is styled a servant, the appellation is general and indeterminate: But a steward is a servant of a particular kind; such a one as man is in all respects. This appellation is exactly expressive of his situation in the present world; specifying what kind of servant he is to God, and what kind of service his Divine Master expects from him.

It may be of use, then, to consider this point thoroughly, and to make our full improvement of it.

In order to this, let us, First, inquire, in what respects we are now God’s stewards. Let us, Secondly, observe, that when he requires our souls of us, we “can be no longer stewards.” It will then only remain, as we may, in the third place, observe, to “give an account of our stewardship.”

I.

1. And, first, we are to inquire, in what respects we are now God’s stewards. We are now indebted to Him for all we have; but although a debtor is obliged to return what he has received, yet until the time of payment comes, he is at liberty to use it as he pleases. It is not so with a steward; he is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his master pleases. He has no right to dispose of anything which is in his hands, but according to the will of his lord. For he is not the proprietor of any of these things, but barely entrusted with them by another; and entrusted on this express condition, -- that he shall dispose of all as his master orders. Now, this is exactly the case of every man, with relation to God. We are not at liberty to use what he has lodged in our hands as we please, but as he pleases, who alone is the possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature. We have no right to dispose of anything we have, but according to His will, seeing we are not proprietors of any of these things; they are all, as our Lord speaks, CNNQVTKC, belonging to another person; nor is anything properly our own, in the land of our pilgrimage. We shall not receive VcýKFKC, our own things, till we come to our own country. Eternal things only are our own: With all these temporal things we are barely entrusted by another, the Disposer and Lord of all. And he entrusts us with them on this express condition, -- that we use them only as our Master’s goods, and according to the particular directions which he has given us in his Word.

2. On this condition he hath entrusted us with our souls, our bodies, our goods, and whatever other talents we have received: But in order to impress this weighty truth on our hearts, it will be needful to come to particulars.

And, first, God has entrusted us with our soul, an immortal spirit, made in the image of God; together with all the powers and faculties thereof, understanding, imagination, memory, will, and a train of affections, either included in it or closely dependent upon it, -- love and hatred, joy and sorrow, respecting present good and evil; desire and aversion, hope and fear, respecting that which is to come. All these St. Paul seems to include in two words, when he says, “The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds.” Perhaps, indeed, the latter word,
PQGOCVC, might rather be rendered thoughts, provided we take that word in its most extensive sense, for every perception of the mind, whether active or passive.

3. Now, of all these, it is certain, we are only stewards. God has entrusted us with these powers and faculties, not that we may employ them according to our own will, but according to the express orders which he has given us; although it is true that, in doing His will, we most effectually secure our own happiness; seeing it is herein only that we can be happy, either in time or in eternity. Thus we are to use our understanding, our imagination, our memory, wholly to the glory of Him that gave them. Thus our will is to be wholly given up to Him, and all our affections to be regulated as he directs. We are to love and hate, to rejoice and grieve, to desire and shun, to hope and fear, according to the rule which he prescribes whose we are, and whom we are to serve in all things. Even our thoughts are not our own, in this sense; they are not at our own disposal; but for every deliberate motion of our mind we are accountable to our great Master.

4. God has, Secondly, entrusted us with our bodies (those exquisitely wrought machines, so “fearfully and wonderfully made,”) with all the powers and members thereof. He has entrusted us with the organs of sense; of sight, hearing, and the rest: But none of these are given us as our own, to be employed according to our own will. None of these are lent us in such a sense as to leave us at liberty to use them as we please for a season. No: We have received them on these very terms, - that, as long as they abide with us, we should employ them all in that very manner, and no other, which he appoints.

5. It is on the same terms that he has imparted to us that most excellent talent of speech. “Thou hast given me a tongue,” says the ancient writer, “that I may praise Thee therewith.” For this purpose was it given to all the children of men, -- to be employed in glorifying God. Nothing, therefore, is more ungrateful or more absurd, than to think or say, “Our tongues are our own.” That cannot be, unless we have created ourselves, and so are independent on the Most High. Nay, but “it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;” the manifest consequence is, that he is still Lord over us, in this as in all other respects. It follows, that there is not a word of our tongue for which we are not accountable to Him.

6. To Him we are equally accountable for the use of our hands and feet, and all the members of our body. These are so many talents which are committed to our trust, until the time appointed by the Father. Until then, we have the use of all these; but as stewards, not as proprietors; to the end we should “render them, not as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

7. God has entrusted us, Thirdly, with a portion of worldly goods; with food to eat, raiment to put on, and a place where to lay our head; with not only the necessaries, but the conveniences, of life.

Above all, he has committed to our charge that precious talent which contains all the rest, -- money: Indeed it is unspeakably precious, if we are wise and faithful stewards of it; if we employ every part of it for such purposes as our blessed Lord has commanded us to do.

8. God has entrusted us, Fourthly, with several talents which do not properly come under any of these heads. Such is bodily strength; such are health, a pleasing person, an agreeable address; such are learning and knowledge, in their various degrees, with all the other advantages of education.

Such is the influence which we have over others, whether by their love and esteem of us, or by power; power to do them good or hurt, to help or hinder them in the circumstances of life. Add to these, that invaluable talent of time, with which God entrusts us from moment to moment. Add, lastly, that on which all the rest depend, and without which they would all be curses, not blessings; namely, the grace of God, the power of his Holy Spirit, which alone worketh in us all that is acceptable in his sight.

II.

1. In so many respects are the children of men stewards of the Lord, the Possessor of heaven and earth: So large a portion of His goods, of various kinds, hath he committed to their charge. But it is not for ever, nor indeed for any considerable time: We have this trust reposed in us only during the short, uncertain space that we sojourn here below; only so long as we remain on earth, as this fleeting breath is in our nostrils. The hour is swiftly approaching, it is just at hand, when we “can be no longer stewards!” The moment the body “returns to the dust as it was, and the spirit to God that gave it,” we bear that character no more; the time of our stewardship is at an
Part of those goods wherewith we were before entrusted are now come to an end; at least, they are so with regard to us; nor are we longer entrusted with them: And that part which remains can no longer be employed or improved as it was before.

2. Part of what we were entrusted with before is at an end, at least with regard to us. What have we to do, after this life, with food, and raiment, and houses, and earthly possessions? The food of the dead is the dust of the earth; they are clothed only with worms and rottenness. They dwell in the house prepared for all flesh; their lands know them no more: All their worldly goods are delivered into other hands, and they have “no more portion under the sun.”

3. The case is the same with regard to the body. The moment the spirit returns to God, we are no longer stewards of this machine, which is then sown in corruption and dishonour. All the parts and members of which it was composed lie mouldering in the clay. The hands have no longer power to move; the feet have forgot their office; the flesh, sinews, and bones, are all hastening to be dissolved into common dust.

4. Here end also the talents of a mixed nature; our strength, our health, our beauty, our eloquence, and address, our faculty of pleasing or persuading, or convincing others. Here end, likewise, all the honours we once enjoyed, all the power which was lodged in our hands, all the influence which we once had over others, either by the love or the esteem which they bore us. Our love, our hatred, our desire, is perished: None regard how we were once affected toward them. They look upon the dead as neither able to help nor hurt them; so that “a living dog is better than a dead lion.”

5. Perhaps a doubt may remain concerning some of the other talents wherewith we are now entrusted, whether they will cease to exist when the body returns to dust or only cease to be improvable. Indeed, there is no doubt but the kind of speech which we now use, by means of these bodily organs, will then be entirely at an end, when those organs are destroyed. It is certain, the tongue will no more occasion any vibrations in the air; neither will the ear convey these tremulous motions to the common sensory. Even the sonus exilis, the low, shrill voice, which the poet supposes to belong to a separate spirit, we cannot allow to have a real being; it is a mere flight of imagination.

   Indeed, it cannot be questioned, but separate spirits have some way to communicate their sentiments to each other; but what inhabitant of flesh and blood can explain that way? What we term “speech,” they cannot have: So that we can no longer be stewards of this talent when we are numbered with the dead.

6. It may likewise admit of a doubt, whether our senses will exist, when the organs of sense are destroyed. Is it not probable, that those of the lower kind will cease – the feeling, the smell, the taste – as they have a more immediate reference to the body, and are chiefly, if not wholly, intended for the preservation of it? But will not some kind of sight remain, although the eye be closed in death? And will there not be something in the soul equivalent to the present sense of hearing? Nay, is it not probable, that these will not only exist in the separate state, but exist in a far greater degree, in a more eminent manner, than now, when the soul, disentangled from its clay, is no longer “a dying sparkle in a cloudy place;” when it no longer “looks through the windows of the eye and ear;” but rather is all eye, all ear, all sense, in a manner we cannot yet conceive? And have we not a clear proof of the possibility of this, of seeing without the use of the eye, and hearing without the use of the ear? Yea, and earnest of it continually? For does not the soul see, in the clearest manner, when the eye is of no use; namely, in dreams? Does she not then enjoy the faculty of hearing, without any help from the ear? But however this be, certain it is, that neither will our senses, any more than our speech, be entrusted to us in the manner they are now, when the body lies in the silent grave.

7. How far the knowledge or learning which we have gained by education will then remain, we cannot tell. Solomon indeed says, “There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” But it is evident, these words cannot be understood in an absolute sense.

   For it is so far from being true that there is no knowledge after we have quitted the body, that the doubt lies on the other side, whether there be any such thing as real knowledge till then; whether it be not a plain sober truth, not a mere poetical fiction, that

   All these shadows which for things we take,
Are but the empty dreams, which in death’s sleep we make; only excepting those things which God Himself has been pleased to reveal to man. I will speak for one. After having sought for truth, with some diligence, for half a century, I am, at this day, hardly sure of anything but what I learn from the Bible. Nay, I positively affirm, I know nothing else so certainly, that I would dare to stake my salvation upon it.

So much, however, we may learn from Solomon’s words, that “there is no” such “knowledge or wisdom in the grave,” as will be of any use to an unhappy spirit; “there is no device” there, whereby he can now improve those talents with which he was once entrusted. For time is no more; the time of our trial for everlasting happiness or misery is past. Our day, the day of man, is over; the day of salvation is ended! Nothing now remains but the “day of the Lord,” ushering in wide, unchangeable eternity!

8. But still, our souls, being incorruptible and immortal, of a nature “little lower than the angels” (even if we are to understand that phrase of our original nature, which may well admit of a doubt,) when our bodies are mouldered into earth, will remain with all their faculties. Our memory, our understanding, will be so far from being destroyed, yea, or impaired, by the dissolution of the body, that, on the contrary, we have reason to believe, they will be inconceivably strengthened. Have we not the clearest reason to believe, that they will then be wholly freed from those defects which now naturally result from the union of the soul with the corruptible body? It is highly probable, that, from the time these are disunited, our memory will let nothing slip; yea, that it will faithfully exhibit everything to our view which was ever committed to it. It is true, that the invisible world is, in Scripture, termed “the land of forgetfulness;” or, as it is still more strongly expressed in the old translation, “the land where all things are forgotten.” They are forgotten; but by whom? Not by the inhabitants of that land, but by the inhabitants of the earth. It is with regard to them that the unseen world is “the land of forgetfulness.” All things therein are too frequently forgotten by these; but not by disembodied spirits. From the time they have put off the earthly tabernacle, we can hardly think they forget anything.

9. In like manner, the understanding will, doubtless, be freed from the defects that are now inseparable from it. For many ages it has been an unquestioned maxim, Humanum est errare et nescire; -- ignorance and mistake are inseparable from human nature. But the whole of this assertion is only true with regard to living men; and holds no longer than while “the corruptible body presses down the soul.” Ignorance, indeed, belongs to every finite understanding (seeing there is none beside God that knoweth all things;) but not mistake: When the body is laid aside, this also is laid aside, for ever.

10. What then can we say to an ingenious man, who has lately made a discovery, that disembodied spirits have not only no senses (not even sight or hearing,) but no memory or understanding; no thought or perception; not so much as a consciousness of their own existence! That they are in a dead sleep from death to the resurrection! Consanguineus lethi sopor indeed! Such a sleep we may call “a near kinsman of death,” if it be not the same thing. What can we say, but that ingenious men have strange dreams; and these they sometimes mistake for realities?

11. But to return. As the soul will retain its understanding and memory, notwithstanding the dissolution of the body, so undoubtedly the will, including all the affections, will remain in its full vigour. If our love or anger, our hope or desire, perish, it is only with regard to those whom we leave behind. To them it matters not, whether they were the objects of our love or hate, of our desire or aversion. But in separate spirits themselves we have no reason to believe that any of these are extinguished. It is more probable, that they work with far greater force, than while the soul was clogged with flesh and blood.

12. But although all these, although both our knowledge and senses, our memory and understanding, together with our will, our love, hate, and all our affections, remain after the body is dropped off; yet, in this respect, they are as though they were not – we are no longer stewards of them. The things continue, but our stewardship does not: We no more act in that capacity. Even the grace which was formerly entrusted with us, in order to enable us to be faithful and wise stewards, is now no longer entrusted for that purpose. The days of our stewardship are ended.

III.

1. It now remains, that, being no longer stewards, we give an account of our stewardship.
Some have imagined, this is to be done immediately after death, as soon as we enter into the world of spirits. Nay, the Church of Rome does absolutely assert this; yea, makes it an article of faith. And thus much we may allow, the moment a soul drops the body, and stands naked before God, it cannot but know what its portion will be to all eternity. It will have full in its view, either everlasting joy, or everlasting torment; as it is no longer possible to be deceived in the judgment which we pass upon ourselves. But the Scripture gives us no reason to believe, that God will then sit in judgment upon us. There is no passage in all the oracles of God which affirms any such thing. That which has been frequently alleged for this purpose seems rather to prove the contrary; namely (Heb. 9:27,) “It is appointed for men once to die, and after this the judgment:” For, in all reason, the word “once” is here to be applied to judgment as well as death. So that the fair inference to be drawn from this very text is, not that there are two judgments, a particular and a general; but that we are to be judged, as well as to die, once only: Not once immediately after death, and again after the general resurrection; but then only “when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him.” The imagination therefore of one judgment at death, and another at the end of the world, can have no place with those who make the written Word of God the whole and sole standard of their faith.

2. The time then when we are to give this account is, when the “great white throne comes down from heaven, and he that sitteth thereon, from whose face the heavens and the earth flee away, and there is found no place for them.” It is then “the dead, small and great, will stand before God; and the books will be opened:” -- The book of Scripture, to them who were entrusted therewith; the book of conscience to all mankind. The “book of remembrance,” likewise (to use another scriptural expression,) which had been writing from the foundation of the world, will then be laid open to the view of all the children of men. Before all these, even the whole human race, before the devil and his angels, before an innumerable company of holy angels, and before God the Judge of all, thou wilt appear, without any shelter or covering, without any possibility of disguise, to give a particular account of the manner wherein thou hast employed all thy Lord’s goods!

3. The Judge of all will then inquire, “How didst thou employ thy soul? I entrusted thee with an immortal spirit, endowed with various powers and faculties, with understanding, imitation, memory, will, affections. I gave thee withal full and express directions, how all these were to be employed. Didst thou employ thy understanding, as far as it was capable, according to those directions; namely, in the knowledge of thyself and me – my nature, my attributes? -- my works, whether of creation, of providence, or of grace? -- in acquainting thyself with my word? -- in using every means to increase thy knowledge thereof? -- in meditating thereon day and night? Didst thou employ thy memory, according to my will, in treasuring up whatever knowledge thou hadst acquired, which might conduce to my glory, to thy own salvation, or the advantage of others? Didst thou store up therein, not things of no value, but whatever instruction thou hadst learned from my word; and whatever experience thou hadst gained of my wisdom, truth, power, and mercy? Was thy imagination employed, not in painting vain images, much less such as nourished “foolish and hurtful desires;” but in representing to thee whatever would profit thy soul, and awaken thy pursuit of wisdom and holiness? Didst thou follow my directions with regard to thy will? Was it wholly given up to me? Was it swallowed up in mine, so as never to oppose, but always run parallel with it? Were thy affections placed and regulated in such a manner, as I appointed in my word? Didst thou give me thy heart? Didst thou not love the world, neither the things of the world? Was I the object of thy love? Was all thy desire unto me, and unto the remembrance of my name? Was I the joy of thy heart, the delight of thy soul, the chief among ten thousand? Didst thou sorrow for nothing, but what grieved my spirit? Didst thou fear and hate nothing but sin? Did the whole stream of thy affections flow back to the ocean from whence they came? Were thy thoughts employed according to my will – not in ranging to the ends of the earth, not on folly, or sin; but on `whatsoever things were pure, whatsoever things were holy,’ on whatsoever was conducive to my glory, and to `peace and good-will among men?’”

4. Thy Lord will then inquire, “How didst thou employ the body wherewith I entrusted thee? I gave thee a tongue to praise me therewith: Didst thou use it to the end for which it was given? Didst thou employ it, not in evil speaking or idle speaking, not in uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; but in such as was good, as was necessary or useful either to thyself or others? Such as always tended, directly or indirectly, to `minister grace to the hearers?’ I gave thee, together with thy other senses, those grand avenues of knowledge, sight, and hearing: were these employed to those excellent purposes for which they were bestowed upon thee? In bringing thee in more and more instruction in righteousness and true holiness? I gave thee hands and feet, and various members,
wherewith to perform the works which were prepared for thee: were they employed, not in doing the will of the flesh, of thy evil nature; or the will of the mind; (the things to which thy reason or fancy led thee;) but “the will of Him that sent” thee into the world, merely to work out thy own salvation? Didst thou present all thy members, not to sin, as instruments of unrighteousness, but to me alone, through the Son of my love, “as instruments of righteousness?”

5. The Lord of all will next inquire, “How didst thou employ the worldly goods which I lodged in thy hands? Didst thou use thy food, not so as to seek or place thy happiness therein, but so as to preserve thy body in health, in strength and vigour, a fit instrument for the soul? Didst thou use apparel, not to nourish pride or vanity, much less to tempt others to sin, but conveniently and decently to defend thyself from the injuries of the weather? Didst thou prepare and use thy house, and all other conveniences, with a single eye to my glory – in every point seeking not thy own honour, but mine; studying to please, not thyself, but me? Once more: in what manner didst thou employ that comprehensive talent, money? -- not in gratifying the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life; not squandering it away in vain expenses – the same as throwing it into the sea; not hoarding it up to leave behind thee – the same as burying it in the earth; but first supplying thy own reasonable wants, together with those of thy family; then restoring the remainder to me, through the poor, whom I had appointed to receive it; looking upon thyself as only one of that number of poor, whose wants were to be supplied out of that part of my substance which I had placed in thy hands for this purpose; leaving thee the right of being supplied first, and the blessedness of giving rather than receiving? Wast thou accordingly a general benefactor to mankind? Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sick, assisting the stranger, relieving the afflicted, according to their various necessities? Wast thou eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, a father to the fatherless, and an husband to the widow? And didst thou labour to improve all outward works of mercy, as means of saving souls from death?”

6. Thy Lord will farther inquire, “Hast thou been a wise and faithful steward with regard to the talents of a mixed nature which I lent thee? Didst thou employ thy health and strength, not in folly or sin, not in the pleasures which perished in the using, not in making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the desires thereof,” but in a vigorous pursuit of that better part which none could take away from thee? Didst thou employ whatever was pleasing in thy person or address, whatever advantages thou hadst by education, whatever share of learning, whatever knowledge of things or men, was committed thee, for the promoting of virtue in the world, for the enlargement of my kingdom? Didst thou employ whatever share of power thou hadst, whatever influence over others, by the love or esteem of thee which they had conceived, for the increase of their wisdom and holiness? Didst thou employ that inestimable talent of time, with wariness and circumspection, as duly weighing the value of every moment, and knowing that all were numbered in eternity? Above all, wast thou a good steward of my grace, preventing, accompanying, and following thee? Didst thou duly observe, and carefully improve, all the influences of my Spirit – every good desire, every measure of light, all His sharp or gentle reproofs? How didst thou profit by “the Spirit of bondage and fear,” which was previous to “the Spirit of adoption?” And when thou wast made a partaker of this Spirit, crying in thy heart, “Abba, Father,” didst thou stand fast in the glorious liberty wherewith I made thee free? Didst thou from thenceforth present thy soul and body, all thy thoughts, thy words, and actions, in one flame of love, as a holy sacrifice, glorifying me with thy body and thy spirit? Then “well done, good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!”

And what will remain, either to the faithful or unfaithful steward? Nothing but the execution of that sentence which has been passed by the righteous Judge; fixing thee in a state which admits of no change through everlasting ages! It remains only that thou be rewarded, to all eternity, according to thy works.

IV.

1. From these plain considerations we may learn, First, How important is this short, uncertain day of life! How precious, above all utterance, above all conception, is every portion of it! The least of these a serious care demands;

For though they’re little, they are golden sands!

How deeply does it concern every child of man, to let none of these run to waste; but to improve them all to the noblest purposes, as long as the breath of God is in his nostrils!
2. We learn from hence, Secondly, that there is no employment of our time, no action or conversation, that is purely indifferent. All is good or bad, because all our time, as everything we have, is not our own. All these are, as our Lord speaks, VcýCNNQVT KC --the property of another; of God our Creator. Now, these either are or are not employed according to his will. If they are so employed, all is good; if they are not, all is evil. Again: it is His will, that we should continually grow in grace, and in the living knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, every thought, word, and work, whereby this knowledge is increased, whereby we grow in grace, is good; and every one whereby this knowledge is not increased, is truly and properly evil.

3. We learn from hence, Thirdly, that there are no works of supererogation; that we can never do more than our duty; seeing all we have is not our own, but God’s; all we can do is due to Him. We have not received this or that, or many things only, but everything from Him: therefore, everything is His due. He that gives us all, must needs have a right to all: so that if we pay Him anything less than all, we cannot be faithful stewards. And considering, “every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour,” we cannot be wise stewards unless we labour to the uttermost of our power; not leaving anything undone which we possibly can do, but putting forth all our strength.

4. Brethren, “who is an understanding man and endued with knowledge among you?” Let him show the wisdom from above, by walking suitably to his character. If he so account of himself as a steward of the manifold gifts of God, let him see that all his thoughts, and words, and works, be agreeable to the post God has assigned him. It is no small thing, to lay out for God all which you have received from God. It requires all your wisdom, all your resolution, all your patience and constancy; far more than ever you had by nature, but not more than you may have by grace. For His grace is sufficient for you; and “all things,” you know, “are possible to him that believeth.” By faith, then, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ;” “put on the whole armour of God;” and you shall be enabled to glorify Him in all your words and works; yea, to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!

Edinburgh, May 14, 1768

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The above sermons were excerpted from “141 Sermons” on the Wesleyan Holiness Library CD by Earnest Seeker (2006) in earnest hope for the soon purification of your heart....

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