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”.

John Wesley
SERMON 55

(text from the 1872 edition)

ON THE TRINITY

Some days since I was desired to preach on this text. I did so yesterday morning. In the afternoon I was pressed to write down and print my sermon, if possible, before I left Cork. I have wrote it this morning; but I must beg the reader to make allowance for the disadvantages I am under; as I have not here any books to consult, nor indeed any time to consult them.

Cork, May 8, 1775.

“There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one.” 1 John 5:7.

1. whatsoever the generality of people may think, it is certain that opinion is not religion: No, not right opinion; assent to one, or to ten thousand truths. There is a wide difference between them: Even right opinion is as distant from religion as the east is from the west. Persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all; and, on the other hand, persons may be truly religious, who hold many wrong opinions. Can any one possibly doubt of this, while there are Romanists in the world? For who can deny, not only that many of them formerly have been truly religious, as Thomas a Kempis, Gregory Lopez, and the Marquis de Renty; but that many of them, even at this day, are real inward Christians? And yet what a heap of erroneous opinions do they hold, delivered by tradition from their fathers! Nay, who can doubt of it while there are Calvinists in the world, - assertors of absolute predestination? For who will dare to affirm that none of these are truly religious men? Not only many of them in the last century were burning and shining lights, but many of them are now real Christians, loving God and all mankind. And yet what are all the absurd opinions of all the Romanists in the world, compared to that one, that the God of love, the wise, just, merciful Father of the spirits of all flesh, has, from all eternity, fixed an absolute, unchangeable, irresistible, decree, that part of all mankind shall be saved, do what they will; and the rest damned, do what they can!

2. Hence, we cannot but infer, that there are ten thousand mistakes which may consist with real religion; with regard to which every candid, considerate man will think and let think. But there are some truths more important than others. It seems there are some which are of deep importance. I do not term them fundamental truths; because that is an ambiguous word: And hence there have been so many warm disputes about the number of fundamentals. But surely there are some which it nearly concerns us to know, as having a close connexion with vital religion. And doubtless we may rank among these that contained in the words above cited:- There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one.

3. I do not mean that it is of importance to believe this or that explication of these words. I know not that any well judging man would attempt to explain them at all. One of the best tracts which that great man, Dean Swift, ever wrote, was his Sermon upon the Trinity. Herein he shows, that all who endeavored to explain it at all, have utterly lost their way; have, above all other persons hurt the cause which they intended to promote; having only, as Job speaks, “darkened counsel by words without knowledge.” It was in an evil hour that these explainers began their fruitless work I insist upon no explication at all; no, not even on the best I ever saw; I mean, that which is given us in the creed commonly ascribed to Athanasius. I am far from saying, he who does not assent to this shall without doubt perish everlastingly.” For the sake of that and another clause, I, for some time, scrupled subscribing to that creed; till I considered:- (1.) That these sentences only relate to wilful, not involuntary, unbelievers; to those who, having all the means of knowing the truth, nevertheless obstinately reject it; (2.) that they relate only to the substance of the doctrine there delivered; not the philosophical illustrations of it.
4. I dare not insist upon any one’s using the word Trinity, or Person. I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better: But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot: Much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist, green wood, for saying, -- Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; yet I scruple using the words Trinity and Persons, because I do not find those terms in the Bible.” These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servitus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words, unexplained, just as they lie in the text: “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one.”

5. ”As they lie in the text :” -- but here arises a question: Is that text genuine? Was it originally written by the Apostle, or inserted in later ages? Many have doubted of this; and, in particular, the great light of the Christian church, lately removed to the Church above, Bengelius, -- the most pious, the most judicious, and the most laborious, of all the modern Commentators on the New Testament.

For some time he stood in doubt of its authenticity, because it is wanting in many of the ancient copies. But his doubts were removed by three considerations: (1.) That though it is wanting in many copies, yet it is found in more; and those copies of the greatest authority: -- (2.) That it is cited by a whole gain of ancient writers, from the time of St. John to that of Constantine. This argument is conclusive: For they could not have cited it, had it not been in the sacred canon: -- (3.) That we can easily account for its being, after that time, wanting in many copies, when we remember that Constantine’s successor was a zealous Arian, who used every means to promote his bad cause, to spread Arianism throughout the empire; in particular the erasing this text out of as many copies as fell into his hands. And he so far prevailed, that the age in which he lived is commonly styled, Seculum Aranium, -- “the Arian age;” there being then only one eminent man who opposed him at the peril of his life. So that it was a proverb, Athanasius contra mundum: “Athanasius against the world.”

6. But it is objected:- “Whatever becomes of the text, we cannot believe what we cannot comprehend. When, therefore, you require us to believe mysteries, we pray you to have us excused.” Here is a two-fold mistake: (1.) We do not require you to believe any mystery in this; whereas; you suppose the contrary. But, (2.) You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend.

7. To begin with the latter: You do already believe many things which you cannot comprehend.

For you believe there is a sun over your head. But whether he stands still in the midst of his system, or not only revolves on his own axis, but rejoiceth as a giant to run his course; you cannot comprehend either one or the other: How he moves, or how he rests. By what power, what natural, mechanical power, is he upheld in the fluid either? You cannot deny the fact: Yet you cannot account for it, so as you satisfy any rational inquirer. You may indeed give us the hypothesis of Ptolemy, Tycho Brahe, Copernicus, and twenty more. I have read them over and over: I am sick of them; I care not three straws for them all.

Each new solution but once more affords
New change of terms, and scaffolding of words:
In other garb my question I receive,
And take my doubt the very same I gave.

Still I insist, the fact you believe, you cannot deny; but the manner you cannot comprehend.

8. You believe there is such a thing as light, whether flowing from the sun, or any other luminous body; but you cannot comprehend either its nature. Or the manner wherein it flows. How does it move from Jupiter to the earth in eight minutes; two hundred thousand miles in a moment? How do the rays of the candle, brought into the room, instantly disperse into every corner? Again: Here are three candles, yet there is but one light. I explain this, and I will explain the Three-One God.

9. You believe there is such a thing as air. It both covers you as a garment, and, Wide interfused, Embraces round this florid earth.

But can you comprehend how? Can you give me a satisfactory account of its nature, or the cause of its properties? Think only of one, its elasticity: Can you account for this? It may be owing to electric fire attached to each particle of it; it may not; and neither you nor I can tell. But if we will not breathe it till we can comprehend it, our life is very near its period.
10. You believe there is such a thing as earth. Here you fix your foot upon it: You are supported by it. But do you comprehend what it is that supports the earth? “O, an elephant, says a Malabarian philosopher “and a bull supports him.” But what supports the bull? The Indian and the Briton are equally at a loss for an answer. We know it is God that “spreadeth the north over the empty space, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. This is the fact. But how? Who can account for this? Perhaps angelic but not human creatures.

I know what is plausibly said concerning the powers of projection and attraction. But spin as fine as we can, matter of fact sweeps away our cobweb hypothesis. Connect the force of projection and attraction how you can, they will never produce a circular motion. The moment the projected steel comes within the attraction of the magnet, it does not form a curve, but drops down.

11. You believe you have a soul. “Hold there,” says the Doctor; [Dr. Bl__r, in his late tract.] I believe no such thing. “If you have an immaterial soul so have the brutes too.” I will not quarrel with any that think they have; nay, I wish he could prove it: And surely I would rather allow them souls, than I would give up my own. In this I cordially concur in the sentiment of the honest Heathen. Si erro, libenter erro; et me redargui valde recusem. “If I err, I err willingly; and I vehemently refuse to be convinced of it.” And I trust most of those who do not belie a Trinity are of the same mind.

Permit me then to go on. You believe you have a soul connected with this house of clay. But can you comprehend how? What are the ties that unite the heavenly flame with the earthly clod? You understand just nothing of the matter. So it is; but how none can tell.

12. You surely believe you have a body, together with your soul, and that each is dependent on the other. Run only a thorn into your hand; immediately pain is felt in your soul. On the other side is shame felt in your soul? Instantly a blush overspreads your cheek. Does the soul feel fear or violent anger? Presently the body trembles. These also are facts which you cannot deny; nor can you account for them.

13. I bring but one instance more: At the command of your soul, your hand is lifted up. But who is able to account for this? For the connexion between the act of the mind, and the outward actions? Nay, who can account for muscular motion at all; in any instance of it whatever? When one of the most ingenious Physicians in England had finished his lecture upon that head, he added, --Now, gentlemen, I have told you all the discoveries of our enlightened age; and now, if you understand one jot of the matter, you understand more than I do.” The short of the matter is this: Those who will not believe anything but what they can comprehend, must not believe that there is a sun in the firmament; that there is light shining around them; that there is air, though it encompasses them on every side; that there is any earth, though they stand upon it. They must not believe they have a soul; no, nor that they have a body.

14. But, secondly, as strange as it may seem. In requiring you to believe, “there are three that bear record in heaven the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: And these three are one;” you are not required to believe any mystery. Nay, that, great and good man, Dr. Peter Browne, sometime Bishop of Cork, has proved at large that the Bible does not require you to believe any mystery at all. Thee Bible barely requires you to believe such facts; not the manner of them. Now the mystery does not lie in the fact, but altogether in the manner.

For instance: “God said, let there be light: And there was light.” I believe it: I believe the plain fact: There is no mystery at all in this. The mystery lies in the manner of it. But of this I believe nothing at all; nor does God require it of me.

Again: “The Word was made flesh.” I Believe this fact also. There is no mystery in it; but as to the manner how he was made flesh, wherein the mystery lies, I know nothing about it; I believe nothing about it: It is no more the object of my faith, than it is of my understanding.

15. To apply this to the case before us: There are three that bear record in heaven: And these three are One. I believe this fact also, (if I may use the expression,) that God is Three and One. But the manner how I do not comprehend and I do not believe it. Now in this, in the manner, lies the mystery; and so it may; I have no concern with it: It is no object of my faith: I believe just so much as God has revealed, and no more. But this, the manner, he has not revealed; therefore, I believe nothing about it. But would it not be absurd in me to deny the fact, because I do not understand the manner? That is, to reject what God has revealed, because I do not comprehend what he has not
16. This is a point much to be observed. There are many things “which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. Part of these God Hath “revealed to us by his Spirit:” – “Revealed;” that is, unveiled, uncovered: That part he requires us to believe. Part of them he has not revealed: That we need not, and indeed cannot, believe: It is far above, out of our sight.

Now, where is the wisdom of rejecting what is revealed, because we do not understand what is not revealed? Of denying the fact which God has unveiled, because we cannot see the manner, which is veiled still?

17. Especially when we consider that what God has been pleased to reveal upon his head, is far from being a point of indifference, is a truth of the last importance. It enters into the very heart of Christianity: It lies at the heart of all vital religion.

Unless these Three are One, how can “all men honour the Son, even as they honour the Father?” “I know not what to do,” says Socinus in a letter to his friend, with my untoward followers: They will not worship Jesus Christ. I tell them it is written, ’Let all the angels of God worship him.’ They answer, However that be, if he is not God, we dare not worship him. For ‘it is written, Thou shalt worship the lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.’”

But the thing, which I here particularly mean is this: The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith; with all vital religion.

I do not say that every real Christian can say with the Marquis de Renty, “I bear about with me continually an experimental verity, and a plenitude of the presence of the ever-blessed Trinity.”I apprehend this is not the experience of babes,” but, rather, “fathers in Christ.”

But I know not how any one can be a Christian believer till he “hath,” as St. John speaks, “the witness in himself;” till “the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit, that he is a child of God;” that is, in effect, till God the holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son: And, having this witness, he honours the Son, and the blessed Spirit, “even as he honours the Father.”

18. Not that every Christian believer adverts to this; perhaps, at first, not one in twenty: But if you ask any of them a few questions, you will easily find it is implied in what he believes. Therefore, I do not see how it is possible for any to have vital religion who denies that these Three are one. And all my hope for them is, not that they will be saved during their unbelief, (unless on the footing of honest Heathens, upon the plea of invincible ignorance,) but that God, before they go hence, “will bring them to the knowledge of the truth.”

John Wesley
SERMON 56
(text from the 1872 edition)

GOD’S APPROBATION OF HIS WORKS

“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” Gen. 1:31.

1. When God created the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, at the conclusion of each day’s work it is said, “And God saw that it was good.” Whatever was created was good in its kind; suited to the end for which it was designed; adapted to promote the good of the whole and the glory of the great Creator. This sentence it pleased God to pass with regard to each particular creature. But there is a remarkable variation of the expression, with regard to all the parts of the universe, taken in connection with each other, and constituting one system: “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”

2. How small a part of this great work of God is man able to understand! But it is our duty to contemplate what he has wrought, and to understand as much of it as we are able. For “the merciful Lord,” as the Psalmist observes,
“hath so done his marvellous works” of creation, as well as of providence, “that they ought to be had in remembrance” by all that fear him; which they cannot well be, unless they are understood. Let us, then, by the assistance of that Spirit who giveth unto man understanding, endeavour to take a general survey of the works which God made in this lower world, as they were before they were disordered and depraved in consequence of the sin of man: We shall then easily see, that as every creature was good in its primeval state; so, when all were compacted in one general system, “behold, they were very good.” I do not remember to have seen any attempt of this kind, unless in that truly excellent poem, (termed by Mr. Hutchinson, “That wicked farce!”) Milton’s “Paradise Lost.”

I.

1. “In the beginning God created the matter of the heavens and the earth.” (So the words, as a great man observes, may properly be translated.) He first created the four elements, out of which the whole universe was composed; earth, water, air, and fire, all mingled together in one common mass.

The grossest parts of this, the earth and water, were utterly without form, till God infused a principle of motion, commanding the air to move “upon the face of the waters.” In the next place, “the Lord God said, Let there be light: And there was light.” Here were the four constituent parts of the universe; the true, original, simple elements. They were all essentially distinct from each other; and yet so intimately mixed together, in all compound bodies, that we cannot find any, be it ever so minute, which does not contain them all.

2. ”And God saw that” every one of these “was good;” was perfect in its kind. The earth was good.

The whole surface of it was beautiful in a high degree. To make it more agreeable, He clothed The universal face with pleasant green.

He adorned it with flowers of every hue, and with shrubs and trees of every kind. And every part was fertile as well as beautiful; it was no way deformed by rough or ragged rocks; it did not shock the view with horrid precipices, huge chasms, or dreary caverns; with deep, impassable morasses, or deserts of barren sand. But we have not any authority to say, with some learned and ingenious authors, that there were no mountains on the original earth, no unevenness on its surface. It is not easy to reconcile this hypothesis with those words of Moses: “The waters prevailed; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward” above the highest “did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.” (Gen. 7:19, 20.) We have no reason to believe that these mountains were produced by the deluge itself: Not the least intimation of this is given: Therefore, we cannot doubt but they existed before it. -- Indeed they answered many excellent purposes, besides greatly increasing the beauty of the creation, by a variety of prospects, which had been totally lost had the earth been one extended plain. Yet we need not suppose their sides were abrupt, or difficult of ascent. It is highly probable that they rose and fell by almost insensible degrees.

3. As to the internal parts of the earth, even to this day, we have scarce any knowledge of them.

Many have supposed the centre of the globe to be surrounded with an abyss of fire. Many others have imagined it to be encompassed with an abyss of water; which they supposed to be termed in Scripture, “the great deep;” (Gen. 7:11;) all the fountains of which were broken up, in order to the General Deluge. But, however this was, we are sure all things were disposed therein with the most perfect order and harmony. Hence there were no agitations within the bowels of the globe, no violent convulsions, no concussions of the earth, no earthquakes; but all was unmoved as the pillars of heaven! There were then no such things as eruptions of fire; there were no volcanoes, or burning mountains. Neither Vesuvius, Etna, or Hecla, if they had any being, then poured out smoke and flame, but were covered with a verdant mantle from the top to the bottom.

4. The element of water, it is probable, was then mostly confined within the great abyss. In the new earth, (as we are informed by the Apostle, Rev. 21:1,) there will be “no more sea;” none covering as now the face of the earth, and rendering so large a part of it uninhabitable by man. Hence it is probable, there was no external sea in the paradisiacal earth; none, until the great deep burst the barriers which were originally appointed for it. -- Indeed there was not then that need of the ocean for navigation which there is now: For either, as the poet supposes, Omnis tuli omnia tellus; every country produced whatever was requisite either for the necessity or comfort of its inhabitants; or man, being then (as he will be again at the resurrection) equal to angels, was able to convey
himself, at his pleasure, to any given distance; over and above that, there were rivers sufficient to water the earth, and make it very plenteous. These answered all the purposes of convenience and pleasure by Liquid lapse of murmuring stream; to which were added gentle, genial showers, with salutary mists and exhalations. But there were no putrid lakes, no turbid or stagnating waters; but only such as

Bore imprest
Fair nature’s image on their placid breast.

5. The element of air was then always serene, and always friendly to man. It contained no frightful meteor, no unwholesome vapours, no poisonous exhalations. There were no tempests, but only cool and gentle breezes, -- genitabilis aura Favoni, -- fanning both man and beast, and wafting the fragrant odours on their silent wings.

6. The sun, the fountain of fire, Of this great world both eye and soul, was situated at the most exact distance from the earth, so as to yield a sufficient quantity of heat (neither too little nor too much) to every part of it. God had not yet

Bid his angels turn askance
This oblique globe.
There was, therefore, then no country that groaned under
The rage of Arctos, and eternal frost.
There was no violent winter, or sultry summer; no extreme, either of heat or cold. No soil was burned up by the solar heat; none uninhabitable through the want of it. Thus earth, water, air, and fire, all conspired together to the welfare and pleasure of man!

7. To the same purpose served the grateful vicissitude of light and darkness, -- day and night. For as the human body, though not liable to death or pain, yet needed continual sustenance by food; so, although it was not liable to weariness, yet it needed continual reparation by sleep. By this the springs of the animal machine were wound up from time to time, and kept always fit for the pleasing labour for which man was designed by his Creator. Accordingly, “the evening and the morning were the first day,” before sin or pain was in the world. The first natural day had one part dark for a season of repose; one part light for a season of labour. And even in paradise “Adam slept,” (Gen. 2:21,) before he sinned: Sleep, therefore, belonged to innocent human nature. Yet I do not apprehend it can be inferred from hence, that there is either darkness or sleep in heaven. Surely there is no darkness in that city of God. Is it not expressly said, (Rev. 22:5,) “There shall be no night there?” Indeed they have no light from the sun; but “the Lord giveth them light.” So it is all day in heaven, as it is all night in hell! On earth we have a mixture of both. Day and night succeed each other, till earth shall be turned to heaven. Neither can we at all credit the account given by the ancient poet, concerning sleep in heaven; although he allows “cloud-compelling Jove” to remain awake while the inferior gods were sleeping. It is pity, therefore, that our great poet should copy so servilely after the old Heathen, as to tell us,

Sleep had seal’d
All but the’ unsleeping eyes of God himself.
Not so: They are “before the throne of God serve him day and night,” speaking after the manner of men, “in his temple;” (Rev. 7:15;) that is, without any interval. As wicked spirits are tormented day and night without any intermission of their misery; so holy spirits enjoy God day and night without any intermission of their happiness.

8. On the second day God encompassed the terraqueous globe with that noble appendage, the atmosphere, consisting chiefly of air; but replete with earthly particles of various kinds, and with huge volumes of water, sometimes invisible, sometimes visible, buoyed up by that ethereal fire, a particle of which cleaves to every particle of air. By this the water was divided ed into innumerable drops, which, descending, watered the earth, and made it very plenteous, without incommoding any of its inhabitants. For there were then no impetuous currents of air; no tempestuous winds; no furious hail; no torrents of rain; no rolling thunders, or forkly lightnings. One perennial spring was perpetually smiling over the whole surface of the earth.

9. On the third day God commanded all kind of vegetables to spring out of the earth; and then, to add thereto innumerable herbs, intermixed with flowers of all hues. To these were added shrubs of every kind; together with
tall and stately trees, whether for shade, for timber, or for fruit, in endless variety. Some of these were adapted to particular climates, or particular exposures; while vegetables of more general use (as wheat in particular) were not confined to one country, but would flourish almost in every climate. But among all these there were no weeds, no useless plants, none that encumbered the ground; much less were there any poisonous ones, tending to hurt any one creature; but every thing was salutary in its kind, suitable to the gracious design of its great Creator.

10. The Lord now created “the sun to rule the day, and the moon to govern the night.” The sun was Of this great world both eye and soul: --

The eye, making all things visible; distributing light to every part of the system; and thereby rejoicing both earth and sky; -- and the soul; the principle of all life, whether to vegetables or animals. Some of the uses of the moon we are acquainted with; her causing the ebbing and flowing of the sea; and influencing, with a greater or smaller degree, all the fluids in the terraqueous globe. And many other uses she may have, unknown to us, but known to the wise Creator. But it is certain she had no hurtful, no unwholesome influence on any living creature. “He made the stars also;” both those that move round the sun, whether of the primary or secondary order; or those that, being at a far greater distance, appear to us as fixed in the firmament of heaven. Whether Comets are to be numbered among the stars, and whether they were parts of the original creation, is, perhaps, not so easy to determine, at least with certainty; as we have nothing but probable conjecture, either concerning their nature or their use. We know not whether (as some ingenious men have imagined) they are ruined worlds, -- worlds that have undergone a general conflagration; or whether (as others not improbably suppose) they are immense reservoirs of fluids, appointed to revolve at certain seasons, and to supply the still decreasing moisture of the earth. But certain we are that they did not either produce or portend any evil. They did not (as many have fancied since)

From their horrid hair
Shake pestilence and war.

11. The Lord God afterward peopled the earth with animals of every kind. He first commanded the waters to bring forth abundantly; -- to bring forth creatures, which, as they inhabited a grosser element, so they were, in general, of a more stupid nature; endowed with fewer senses and less understanding than other animals. The bivalved shell-fish, in particular, seem to have no sense but that of feeling, unless perhaps a low measure of taste; so that they are but one degree above vegetables. And even the king of the waters, (a title which some give the whale, because of his enormous magnitude,) though he has sight added to taste and feeling, does not appear to have an understanding proportioned to his bulk. Rather, he is inferior therein not only to most birds and beasts, but to the generality of even reptiles and insects. However, none of these then attempted to devour, or in anyway hurt, one another. All were peaceful and quiet, as were the watery fields wherein they ranged at pleasure.

12. It seems the insect kinds were at least one degree above the inhabitants of the waters. Almost all these too devour one another, and every other creature which they can conquer. Indeed, such is the miserably disordered state of the world at present, that innumerable creatures can no otherwise preserve their own lives than by destroying others. But in the beginning it was not so. The paradisiacal earth afforded a sufficiency of food for all its inhabitants; so that none of them had any need or temptation to prey upon the other. The spider was then as harmless as the fly, and did not then lie in wait for blood. The weakest of them crept securely over the earth, or spread their gilded wings in the air, that wavered in the breeze, and glittered in the sun, without any to make them afraid. Meantime, the reptiles of every kind were equally harmless, and more intelligent than they; yea, one species of them “was more subtil,” or knowing, “than any of the” brute creation “which God had made.”

13. But, in general, the birds, created to fly in the open firmament of heaven, appear to have been of an order far superior to either insects or reptiles; although still considerably inferior to beasts; as we now restrain that word to quadrupeds, four-footed animals, which, two hundred years ago, included every kind of living creatures. Many species of these are not only endowed with a large measure of natural understanding, but are likewise capable of much improvement by art, such as one would not readily conceive. But, among all these, there were no birds or beasts of prey; none that destroyed or molested another; but all the creatures breathed, in their several kinds, the benevolence of their great Creator.

14. Such was the state of the creation, according to the scanty ideas which we can now form concerning it, when its great Author, surveying the whole system at one view, pronounced it “very good.” It was good in the highest
degree whereof it was capable, and without any mixture of evil.

Every part was exactly suited to the others, and conducive to the good of the whole. There was “a golden chain” (to use the expression of Plato) “let down from the throne of God;” an exactly connected series of beings, from the highest to the lowest; from dead earth, through fossils, vegetables, animals, to man, created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and enjoy his Creator to all eternity.

II.

1. Here is a firm foundation laid, on which we may stand, and answer all the cavils of minute philosophers; all the objections which “vain men,” who “would be wise,” make to the goodness or wisdom of God in the creation. All these are grounded upon an entire mistake; namely, that the world is now in the same state it was at the beginning. And upon this supposition they plausibly build abundance of objections. But all these objections fall to the ground, when we observe, this supposition cannot be admitted. The world, at the beginning, was in a totally different state from that wherein we find it now. Object, therefore, whatever you please to the present state, either of the animate or inanimate creation, whether in general, or with regard to any particular instances; and the answer is ready: -- These are not now as they were in the beginning. Had you therefore heard that vain King of Castile crying out, with exquisite self-sufficiency, “If I had made the world, I would have made it better than God Almighty has made it;” you might have replied, “No: God Almighty, whether you know it or not, did not make it as it is now. He himself made it better, unspeakably better, than it is at present. He made it without any blemish, yea, without any defect. He made no corruption, no destruction, in the inanimate creation. He made not death in the animal creation; neither its harbingers, -- sin and pain. If you will not believe his own account, believe your brother Heathen: It was only

Post ignem aetherea domo
Subductum,
-- that is, in plain English, -- after man, in utter defiance of his Maker, had eaten of the tree of knowledge, that

-- Macies, et nova febrium
Teris incubuit cohors; --
that a whole army of evils, totally new, totally unknown till then, broke in upon rebel man, and all other creatures, and overspread the face of the earth.”

2. "Nay;” (says a bold man [Mr. S--- J---s.], who has since personated a Christian, and so well that many think him one;) “God is not to blame for either the natural or moral evils that are in the world; for he made it as well as he could; seeing evil must exist in the very nature of things.” It must, in the present nature of things, supposing man to have rebelled against God: But evil did not exist at all in the original nature of things. It was no more the necessary result of matter, than it was the necessary result of spirit. All things then, without exception, were very good. And how should they be otherwise? There was no defect at all in the power of God, any more than in his goodness or wisdom. His goodness inclined him to make all things good; and this was executed by his power and wisdom. Let every sensible infidel, then, be ashamed of making such miserable excuses for his Creator. He needs none of us to make apologies, either for him or for his creation. “As for God, his way is perfect;” and such originally were all his works; and such they will be again, when “the Son of God” shall have “destroyed” all “the works of the devil.”

3. Upon this ground, then, that “God made man upright,” and every creature perfect in its kind, but that man “found out to himself many inventions” of happiness, independent on God; and that, by his apostasy from God, he threw not only himself, but likewise the whole creation, which was intimately connected with him, into disorder, misery, death; -- upon this ground, I say, we do not find it difficult to

Justify the ways of God with men.

For although he left man in the hand of his own counsel, to choose good or evil, life or death; although he did not take away the liberty he had given him, but suffered him to choose death, in consequence of which the whole creation now groaneth together; yet, when we consider, all the evils introduced into the creation may work together for our good, yea, may “work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” we may well praise God for permitting these temporary evils, in order to our eternal good: Yea, we may well cry out, “O the
depth both of the wisdom” and the goodness of God! “He hath done all things well.” “Glory be unto God, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever!”

John Wesley
SERMON 57
(text from the 1872 edition)

ON THE FALL OF MAN

“Dust thou are, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Gen. 3:19.

1. Why is there pain in the world; seeing God is “loving to every man, and his mercy is over all his works?” Because there is sin: Had there been no sin, there would have been no pain. But pain (supposing God to be just) is the necessary effect of sin. But why is there still in the world? Because man was created in the image of God: Because he is not mere matter, a clod of earth, a lump of clay, without sense or understanding; but a spirit like his Creator, a being endued not only with sense and understanding, but also with a will exerting itself in various affections. To crown all the rest, he was endued with liberty; a power of directing his own affections and actions; a capacity of determining himself, or of choosing good or evil. Indeed, had not man been endued with this, all the rest would have been of no use: Had he not been a free as well as an intelligent being, his understanding would have been as incapable of holiness, or any kind of virtue, as a tree or a block of marble. And having this power, a power of choosing good or evil, he chose the latter: He chose evil. Thus “sin entered into the world,” and pain of every kind, preparatory to death.

2. But this plain, simple account of the origin of evil, whether natural or moral, all the wisdom of man could not discover till it pleased God to reveal it to the world. Till then man was a mere enigma to himself; a riddle which none but God could solve. And in how full and satisfactory a manner has he solved it in this chapter! In such a manner, as does not indeed serve to gratify vain curiosity, but as is abundantly sufficient to answer a nobler end; to Justify the ways of God with men.

To this great end I would. First, briefly consider the preceding part of this chapter; and then, Secondly, more particularly weigh the solemn words which have been already recited.

I.

1. In the First place let us briefly consider the preceding part of this chapter. “Now the serpent was more subtil,” or intelligent, “than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made;” (Gen. 3:1;) -- endued with more understanding than any other animal in the brute creation. Indeed, there is no improbability in the conjecture of an ingenious man, [The late Dr. Nicholas Robinson.] that the serpent was endued with reason, which is now the property of man. And this accounts for a circumstance which, on any other supposition, would be utterly unintelligible. How comes Eve not to be surprised, yea, startled and affrighted, at hearing the serpent speak and reason; unless she knew that reason, and speech in consequence of it, were the original properties of the serpent? Hence, without showing any surprise, she immediately enters into conversation with him. “And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” See how he, who was a liar from the beginning, mixes truth and falsehood together! Perhaps on purpose, that she might be the more inclined to speak, in order to clear God of the unjust charge. Accordingly, the woman said unto the serpent, (Gen. 3:2.) “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the tree in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.” Thus far she appears to have been clear of blame. But how long did she continue so? “And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:4, 5.) Here sin began; namely, unbelief. “The woman was deceived,” says the Apostle. She believed a lie: She gave more credit to the word of the devil, than to the word of God. And unbelief brought forth actual sin: “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit, and did eat;” and so completed her sin. But “the man,” as the Apostle observes, “was not
deceived.” How then came he to join in the transgression? “She gave unto her husband, and he did eat.” He sinned with his eyes open. He rebelled against his Creator, as is highly probable,

Not by stronger reason moved,
But fondly overcome with female charms.

And if this was the case, there is no absurdity in the assertion of a great man, “That Adam sinned in his heart before he sinned outwardly; before he ate of the forbidden fruit;” namely, by inward idolatry, by loving the creature more than the Creator.

2. Immediately pain followed sin. When he lost his innocence he lost his happiness. He painfully feared that God, in the love of whom his supreme happiness before consisted. “He said,” (Gen. 3:10,) “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid.” He fled from Him who was, till then, his desire and glory and joy. He “hid himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” Hid himself! What, from the all-seeing eye? The eye which, with one glance, pervades heaven and earth? See how his understanding likewise was impaired! What amazing folly was this! Such as one would imagine very few, even of his posterity, could have fallen into. So dreadfully was his “foolish heart darkened” by sin, and guilt, and sorrow, and fear. His innocence was lost, and, at the same time, his happiness and his wisdom. Here is the clear, intelligible answer to that question, “How came evil into the world?”

3. One cannot but observe, throughout this whole narration, the inexpressible tenderness and lenity of the almighty Creator, from whom they had revolted, the Sovereign against whom they had rebelled. “And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” -- thus graciously calling him to return, who would otherwise have eternally fled from God. “And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked.” Still here is no acknowledgment of his fault, no humiliation for it. But with what astonishing tenderness does God lead him to make that acknowledgment! “And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked?” How camest thou to make this discovery? “Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?” “And the man said,” still unhumbled, yea, indirectly throwing the blame upon God himself, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” “And the Lord God,” still in order to bring them to repentance, “said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done?” (Gen. 3:13.) “And the woman said,” nakedly declaring the thing as it was, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” “And the Lord God said unto the serpent,” to testify his utter abhorrence of sin, by a lasting monument of his displeasure, in punishing the creature that had been barely the instrument of it, “Thou art cursed above the cattle, and above every beast of the field.

-- And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Thus, in the midst of judgment hath God remembered mercy, from the beginning of the world; connecting the grand promise of salvation with the very sentence of condemnation!

4. ”Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and,” or in, “thy conception: In sorrow” or pain “thou shalt bring forth children;” -- yea, above any other creature under heaven; which original curse we see is entailed on her latest posterity. “And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” It seems, the latter part of this sentence is explanatory of the former. Was there, till now, any other inferiority of the woman to the man than that which we may conceive in one angel to another? “And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake. -- Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee:” - Useless, yea, and hurtful productions; whereas nothing calculated to hurt or give pain had at first any place in the creation. “And thou shalt eat the herb of the field;” -- Coarse and vile, compared to the delicious fruits of paradise! “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: For out of it wast thou taken: For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

II.

1. Let us now, in the Second place, weigh these solemn words in a more particular manner.

“Dust thou art:” But how fearfully and wonderfully wrought into innumerable fibres, nerves, membranes, muscles, arteries. Veins, vessels of various kinds! And how amazingly is this dust connected with water, with inclosed, circulating fluids, diversified a thousand ways by a thousand tubes and strainers! Yea, and how
wonderfully is air impacted into every part, solid, or fluid, of the animal machine; air not elastic, which would tear the machine in pieces, but as fixed as water under the pole! But all this would not avail, were not ethereal fire intimately mixed both with this earth, air, and water. And all these elements are mingled together in the most exact proportion; so that while the body is in health, no one of them predominates, in the least degree, over the others.

II. Such was man, with regard to his corporeal part, as he came out of the hands of his Maker.

But since he sinned, he is not only dust, but mortal, corruptible dust. And by sad experience we find, that this “corruptible body presses down the soul.” It very frequently hinders the soul in its operations; and, at best, serves it very imperfectly. Yet the soul cannot dispense with its service, imperfect as it is: For an embodied spirit cannot form one thought but by the mediation of its bodily organs. For thinking is not, as many suppose, the act of a pure spirit; but the act of a spirit connected with a body, and playing upon a set of material keys. It cannot possibly, therefore, make any better music than the nature and state of its instruments allow it. Hence every disorder of the body, especially of the parts more immediately subservient to thinking, lay an almost insuperable bar in the way of its thinking justly. Hence the maxim received in all ages, Humanum est errare et nescire, -- “Not ignorance alone,' (that belongs, more or less, to every creature in heaven and earth; seeing none is omniscient, none knoweth all things, save the Creator,) “but error, is entailed on every child of man.” Mistake, as well as ignorance, is, in our present state, inseparable from humanity. Every child of man is in a thousand mistakes, and is liable to fresh mistakes every moment. And a mistake in judgment may occasion a mistake in practice; yea, naturally leads thereto. I mistake, and possibly cannot avoid mistaking the character of this or that man. I suppose him to be what be is not; to be better or worse than he really is. Upon this wrong supposition I behave wrong to him; that is, more or less affectionately than he deserves. And by the mistake which is occasioned by the defect of my bodily organs I am naturally led so to do. Such is the present condition of human nature; of a mind dependent on a mortal body. Such is the state entailed on all human spirits, while connected with flesh and blood!

3. ”And unto dust thou shalt return.” How admirably well has the wise Creator secured the execution of this sentence on all the offspring of Adam! It is true He was pleased to make one exception from this general rule, in a very early age of the world, in favour of an eminently righteous man. So we read, Gen. 5:23, 24, after Enoch had “walked with God” three hundred sixty and five years, “he was not; for God took him:' He exempted him from the sentence passed upon all flesh, and took him alive into heaven. Many ages after, he was pleased to make a second exception; ordering the Prophet Elijah to be taken up into heaven, in a charriot of fire, -- very probably by a convoy of angels, assuming that appearance. And it is not unlikely that he saw good to make a third exception in the person of the beloved disciple. There is transmitted to us a particular account of the Apostle John’s old age; but we have not any account of his death, and not the least intimation concerning it.

Hence we may reasonably suppose that he did not die, but that, after he had finished his course, and “walked with God” for about a hundred years, the Lord took him, as he did Enoch; not in so open and conspicuous a manner as he did the Prophet Elijah.

4. But setting these two or three instances aside, who has been able, in the course of near six thousand years, to evade the execution of this sentence, passed on Adam and all his posterity? Be men ever so great masters of the art of healing, can they prevent or heal the gradual decays of nature? Can all their boasted skill heal old age, or hinder dust from returning to dust? Nay, who among the greatest in masters of medicine has been able to add a century to his own years? Yea, or to protract his own life any considerable space beyond the common period? The days of man, for above three thousand years, (from the time of Moses at least,) have been fixed, by a middling computation at threescore years and ten. How few are there that attain to fourscore years! Perhaps hardly one in five hundred. So little does the art of man avail against the appointment of God!

5. God has indeed provided for the execution of his own decree in the very principles of our nature. It is well known, the human body, when it comes into the world, consists of innumerable membranes exquisitely thin, that are filled with circulating fluid, to which the solid parts bear a very small proportion. Into the tubes composed of these membranes, nourishment must be continually infused; otherwise life cannot continue, but will come to an end almost as soon as it is begun. And suppose this nourishment to be liquid, which, as it flows through those fine canals, continually enlarges them in all their dimensions; yet it contains innumerable solid particles, which
continually adhere to the inner surface of the vessels through which they flow; so that in the same proportion as any vessel is enlarged, it is stiffened also. Thus the body grows firmer as it grows larger, from infancy to manhood. In twenty, five-and-twenty, or thirty years, it attains its full measure of firmness.

Every part of the body is then stiffened to its full degree; as much earth adhering to all the vessels, as gives the solidity they severally need to the nerves, arteries, veins, muscles, in order to exercise their functions in the most perfect manner. For twenty, or, it may be, thirty years following, although more and more particles of earth continually adhere to the inner surface of every vessel in the body, yet the stiffness caused thereby is hardly observable, and occasions little inconvenience. But after sixty years (more or less, according to the natural constitution, and a thousand accidental circumstances) the change is easily perceived, even at the surface of the body. Wrinkles show the proportion of the fluids to be lessened, as does also the dryness of the skin, through a diminution of the blood and juices, which before moistened and kept it smooth and soft. The extremities of the body grow cold, not only as they are remote from the centre of motion, but as the smaller vessels are filled up, and can no longer admit the circulating fluid. As age increases, fewer and fewer of the vessels are pervious, and capable of transmitting the vital stream; except the larger ones, most of which are lodged within the trunk of the body. In extreme old age, the arteries themselves, the grand instruments of circulation, by the continual apposition of earth, become hard, and, as it were, bony, till, having lost the power of contracting themselves, they can no longer propel the blood, even through the largest channels; in consequence of which, death naturally ensues. Thus are the seeds of death sown in our very nature! Thus from the very hour when we first appear on the stage of life, we are travelling toward death: We are preparing, whether we will or no, to return to the dust from whence we came!

6. Let us now take a short review of the whole, as it is delivered with inimitable simplicity; what an unprejudiced person might, even from hence, infer to be the word of God. In that period of duration which He saw to be most proper, (of which He alone could be the judge, whose eye views the whole possibility of things from everlasting to everlasting,) the Almighty, rising in the greatness of his strength, went forth to create the universe. “In the beginning he created,” made out of nothing, “the matter of the heavens and the earth:” (So, Mr. Hutchinson observes, the original words properly signify:) Then “the Spirit” or breath “from the Lord,” that is, the air, “moved upon the face of the waters.” Here were earth, water, air; three of the elements, or component parts of the lower world.

“And God said, Let there be light: And there was light.” By his omnific word, light, that is, fire, the fourth element, sprang into being. Out of these, variously modified and proportioned to each other, he composed the whole. “The earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed, and the tree yielding fruit after his kind;” and then the various tribes of animals, to inhabit the waters, the air, and the earth. But the very Heathen could observe, Sanctius his animal, mentisque capacious aluae
Deerat adhuc!
There was still wanting a creature of a higher rank, capable of wisdom and holiness. Natus homo est.
So “God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him!” Mark the emphatical repetition. God did not make him mere matter, a piece of senseless, unintelligent clay; but a spirit, like himself, although clothed with a material vehicle. As such he was endued with understanding; with a will including various affections; and with liberty, a power of using them in a right or wrong manner, of choosing good or evil. Otherwise neither his understanding nor his will would have been to any purpose; for he must have been as incapable of virtue or holiness as the stock of a tree. Adam, in whom all mankind were then contained, freely preferred evil to good. He chose to do his own will, rather than the will of his Creator. He “was not deceived,” but knowingly and deliberately rebelled against his Father and his King. In that moment he lost the moral image of God, and, in part, the natural: He commenced unholy, foolish, and unhappy. And “in Adam all died:” He entitled all his posterity to error, guilt, sorrow, pain, diseases, and death.

7. How exactly does matter of fact, do all things round us, even the face of the whole world, agree with this account! Open your eyes! Look round you! See darkness that may be felt; see ignorance and error; see vice in ten thousand forms; see consciousness of guilt, fear, sorrow, shame, remorse, covering the face of the earth! See misery, the daughter of sin. See, on every side, sickness and pain, inhabitants of every nation under heaven; driving on the poor, helpless sons of men, in every age, to the gates of death! So they have done well nigh from
the beginning of the world. So they will do, till the consummation of all things.

8. But can the Creator despise the work of his own hands? Surely that is impossible! Hath he not then, seeing he alone is able, provided a remedy for all these evils? Yea, verily he hath! And a sufficient remedy; every way adequate to the disease. He hath fulfilled his word: He hath given “the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent’s head.” -- “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is a remedy provided for all our guilt: He “bore all our sins in his body on the tree.” And “if any one have sinned, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” And here is a remedy for all our disease, all the corruption of our nature. For God hath also, through the intercession of his Son, given us his Holy Spirit, to renew us both “in knowledge,” in his natural image; -- opening the eyes of our understanding, and enlightening us with all such knowledge as is requisite to our pleasing God; -- and also in his moral image, namely, “righteousness and true holiness.” And supposing this is done, we know that “all things” will “work together for our good.” We know by happy experience, that all natural evils change their nature and turn to good; that sorrow, sickness, pain, will all prove medicines, to heal our spiritual sickness. They will all be to our profit; will all tend to our unspeakable advantage; making us more largely “partakers of his holiness,” while we remain on earth; adding so many stars to that crown which is reserved in heaven for us.

9. Behold then both the justice and mercy of God! -- his justice in punishing sin, the sin of him in whose loins we were then all contained, on Adam and his whole posterity; -- and his mercy in providing an universal remedy for an universal evil; in appointing the Second Adam to die for all who had died in the first; that, “as in Adam all died, so in Christ all” might “be made alive;” that, “as by one man’s offence, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so by the righteousness of one, the free gift” might “come upon all unto justification of life,” -- “justification of life,” as being connected with the new birth, the beginning of spiritual life, which leads us, through the life of holiness, to life eternal, to glory.

10. And it should be particularly observed, that “where sin abounded, grace does much more abound.” For not as the condemnation, so is the free gift; but we may gain infinitely more than we have lost. We may now attain both higher degrees of holiness, and higher degrees of glory, than it would have been possible for us to attain. If Adam had not sinned, the Son of God had not died: Consequently that amazing instance of the love of God to man had never existed, which has, in all ages, excited the highest joy, and love, and gratitude from his children. We might have loved God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Governor; but there would have been no place for love to God the Redeemer. This could have had no being. The highest glory and joy of saints on earth, and saints in heaven, Christ crucified, had been wanting. We could not then have praised him that, thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, yet emptied himself, took upon him the form of a servant, and was obedient to death, even the death of the cross! This is now the noblest theme of all the children of God on earth; yea, we need not scruple to affirm, even of angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven.

“Hallelujah,” they cry,
“To the King of the sky,
To the great everlasting I AM;
To the Lamb that was slain,
And liveth again,
Hallelujah to God and the Lamb!”

John Wesley
SERMON 58

ON PREDESTINATION

“Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son: -- Whom he did predestinate, them he also called. And whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Romans 8:29, 30.

Our beloved brother Paul,” says St. Peter, “according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as
also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:15, 16)

2. It is not improbable, that among those things spoken by St. Paul, which are hard to be understood, the Apostle Peter might place what he speaks on this subject in the eighth and ninth chapters of his epistle to the Romans. And it is certain not only the unlearned, but many of the most learned men in the world, and not the “unstable” only, but many who seemed to be well established in the truths of the gospel, have for several centuries, “wrested” these passages “to their own destruction.”

3. "Hard to be understood” we may well allow them to be, when we consider how men of the strongest understanding, improved by all the advantages of education, have continually differed in judgment concerning them. And this very consideration, that there is so wide a difference upon the head between men of the greatest learning, sense, and piety, one might imagine would make all who now speak upon the subject exceedingly wary and self-diffident. But I know not how it is, that just the reverse is observed in every part of the Christian world. No writers upon earth appear more positive than those who write on this difficult subject. Nay, the same men, who, writing upon any other subject, are remarkably modest and humble, on this alone lay aside all self-distrust, and speak ex cathedra infallible.

This is peculiarly observable of almost all those who assert the absolute decrees. But surely it is possible to avoid this: Whatever we propose, may be proposed with modesty, and with deference to those wise and good men who are of a contrary opinion; and the rather, because so much has been said already, on every part of the question, so many volumes have been written, that it is scarcely possible to say anything which has not been said before. All I would offer at present, not to the lovers of contention, but to men of piety and candour, are a few short hints, which perhaps may cast some light on the text above recited.

4. The more frequently and carefully I have considered it, the more I have been inclined to think that the apostle is not here (as many have supposed) describing a chain of causes and effects; (this does not seem to have entered into his heart;) but simply showing the method in which God works; the order in which the several branches of salvation constantly follow each other. And this, I apprehend, will be clear to any serious and impartial inquirer, surveying the work of God either forward or backward; either from the beginning to the end, or from the end to the beginning.

5. And, First, let us look forward on the whole work of God in the salvation of man; considering it from the beginning, the first point, till it terminates in glory. The first point is, the foreknowledge of God. God foreknew those in every nation those who would believe, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things. But, in order to throw light upon this dark question, it should be well observed, that when we speak of God’s foreknowledge, we do not speak according to the nature of things, but after the manner of men. For, if we speak properly, there is no such thing as either foreknowledge or afterknowledge in God. All time, or rather all eternity, (for the children of men,) being present to him at once, he does not know one thing in one point of view from everlasting to everlasting. As all time, with everything that exists therein, is present with him at once, so he sees at once, whatever was is, or will be, to the end of time. But observe: We must not think they are because he knows them. No: he knows them because they are. Just as I (if one may be allowed to compare the things of men with the deep things of God) now know the sun shines: Yet the sun does not shine because I know it, but I know it because he shines. My knowledge supposes the sun to shine; but does not in anywise cause it. In like manner, God knows that man sins; for he knows all things: Yet we do not sin because he knows it, but he knows it because we sin; and his knowledge supposes our sin, but does not in anywise cause it. In a word, God, looking on all ages, from the creation to the consummation, as a moment, and seeing at once whatever is in the hearts of all the children of men, knows every one that does or does not believe, in every age or nation. Yet what he knows, whether faith or unbelief, is in nowise caused by his knowledge. Men are as free in believing or not believing as if he did not know it at all.

6. Indeed, if man were not free, he could not be accountable either for his thoughts, word, or actions. If he were not free, he would not be capable either of reward or punishment; he would be incapable either of virtue or vice, of being either morally good or bad. If he had no more freedom than the sun, the moon, or the stars, he would be no more accountable than them. On supposition that he had no more freedom than them, the stones of the earth
would be as capable of reward, and as liable to punishment, as man: One would be as accountable as the other. Yea, and it would be as absurd to ascribe either virtue or vice to him as to ascribe it to the stock of a tree.

7. But to proceed: “Whom he did foreknow, them he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.” This is the Second step: (To speak after the manner of men: For in fact, there is nothing before or after in God:) In other words, God decrees, from everlasting to everlasting, that all who believe in the Son of his love, shall be conformed to his image; shall be saved from all inward and outward sin, into all inward and outward holiness. Accordingly, it is a plain undeniable fact all who truly believe in the name of the Son of God do now “receive the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls;” and this in virtue of the unchangeable, irreversible, irresistible decree of God, -- “He that believeth shall be saved,” “he that believeth not, shall be damned.”

8. "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.” This is the Third step: (Still remembering that we speak after the manner of men:) To express it a little more largely: According to his fixed decree, that believers shall be saved, those whom he foreknows as such, he calls both outwardly and inwardly, --outwardly by the word of his grace, and inwardly by his Spirit. This inward application of his word to the heart, seems to be what some term “effectual calling;” And it implies, the calling them children of God; the accepting them “in the Beloved;” the justifying them “freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.”

9. “Whom he called, them he justified.” This is the Fourth step. It is generally allowed that the word “justified” here is taken in a peculiar sense; that it means he made them just or righteous. He executed his decree, “conforming them to the image of his Son;” or, as we usually speak, sanctified them.

10. It remains, “whom he justified, them he also glorified.” This is the Last step. Having made them “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,” he gives them “the kingdom which was prepared for them before the world began.” This is the order wherein, “according to the counsel of his will,” the plan he has laid down from eternity, he saves those whom he foreknew; the true believers in every place and generation.

11. The same great work of salvation by faith, according to the foreknowledge and decree of God, may appear in a still clearer light, if we view it backward, from the end to the beginning. Suppose then you stood with the “great multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and tongue, and kindred, and people,” who “give praise unto Him that stretch upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever;” you would not find one among them all that were entered into glory, who was not a witness of that great truth, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;” “not one of all that innumerable company who was not sanctified before he was glorified. By holiness he was prepared for glory; according to the invariable will of the Lord, that the crown, purchased by the blood of his son, should be given to none but those who are renewed by his Spirit. He is become “the author of eternal salvation” only “to them that obey him;” “that obey him inwardly and outwardly; that are holy in heart, and holy in all manner of conversation.

12. And could you take view of all those upon earth who are now sanctified, you would find no one of these had been sanctified till after he was called. He was first called, not only with an outward call, by the word and the messengers of God, but likewise with an inward call, by his Spirit applying his word, enabling him to believe in the only-begotten Son of God, and bearing testimony with his spirit that he was a child of God. And it was by this very means they were all sanctified. It was by a sense of the love of God shed abroad in his heart, that everyone of them was enabled to love God.

Loving God, he loved his neighbor as himself, and had power to walk in all his commandments blameless. This is a rule which admits of no exception. God calls a sinner his own, that is, justifies him, before he sanctifies. And by this very thing, the consciousness of his favour, he works in him that grateful, filial affection, from which spring every good temper, and word, and work.

13. And who are they that are thus called of God, but those whom he had before predestinated, or decreed, to “conform to the image of his Son?” This decree (still speaking after the manner of men) precedes every man’s calling: Every believer was predestinated before he was called. For God calls none, but “according to the counsel of his will,” according to this QTQSGUKL, or plan of acting, which he had laid down before the foundation of the world.

14. Once more: As all that are called were predestinated, so all whom God has predestinated he foreknew. He knew,
he saw them as believers, and as such predestinated them to salvation, according to his eternal decree, “He that believeth shall be saved.” Thus we see the whole process of the work of God, from the end to the beginning. Who are glorified? None but those who were first sanctified.

Who are sanctified? None but those who were first justified. Who are justified? None but those who were first predestinated? Who are predestinated? None but those whom God foreknew as believers.

Thus the purpose and word of God stand unshaken as the pillars of heaven: -- “He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.” And thus God is clear from the blood of all men; since whoever perishes, perishes by his own act and deed. “They will not come unto me,” says the Savior of men; and “there is no salvation in any other.” They “will not believe;” and there is no other way either to present or eternal salvation. Therefore, their blood is upon their own head; and God is still “justified in his saying” that he “willeth all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of his truth.”

15. The sum of all is this: the almighty, all-wise God sees and knows, from everlasting to everlasting, all that is, that was, and that is to come, through one eternal now. With him nothing is either past or future, but all things equally present. He has, therefore, if we speak according to the truth of things, no foreknowledge, no afterknowledge. This would be inconsistent with the Apostle’s words, “With him is no variableness or shadow of turning;” and with the account he gives of himself by the Prophet, “I the Lord change not.” Yet when he speaks to us, knowing whereof we are made, knowing the sanctiness of our understanding, he lets himself down to our capacity, and speaks of himself after the manner of men. Thus, in condescension to our weakness, he speaks of his own purpose, counsel, plan, foreknowledge. Not that God has any need of counsel, of purpose, or of planning his work beforehand. Far be it from us to impute these to the Most High; to measure him by ourselves! It is merely in compassion to us that he speaks thus of himself, as foreknowing the things in heaven or earth, and as predestinating or fore-ordaining them. But can we possibly imagine that these expressions are to be taken literally? To one who was so gross in his conceptions might he not say, “Thinkest thou I am such an one as thyself?” Not so: As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than thy ways. I know, decree, work, in such a manner as it is not possible for thee to conceive: But to give thee some faint, glimmering knowledge of my ways, I use the language of men, and suit myself to thy apprehensions in this thy infant state of existence.

16. What is it, then, that we learn from this whole account? It is this, and no more: -- (1) God knows all believers; (2) wills that they should be saved from sin; (3) to that end, justifies them, (4) sanctifies and (5) takes them to glory.

O that men would praise the Lord for this his goodness; and that they would be content with this plain account of it, and not endeavour to wade into those mysteries which are too deep for angels to fathom!

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John Wesley
SERMON 60
(text of the 1872 edition)

THE GENERAL DELIVERANCE

“The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that subjected it: Yet in hope that the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now.” Rom. 8:19-22.

1. Nothing is more sure, than that as “the Lord is loving to every man,” so “his mercy is over all his works;” all that have sense, all that are capable of pleasure or pain, of happiness or misery. In consequence of this, “He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. He prepareth food for cattle,” as well as “herbs for the children of men.” He provideth for the fowls of the air, “feeding the young ravens when they cry unto him.” “He sendeth the springs into the rivers, that run among the hills, to give drink to every beast of the field,” and that
even “the wild asses may quench their thirst.” And, suitably to this, he directs us to be tender of even the meaner creatures; to show mercy to these also. “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn:” -- A custom which is observed in the eastern countries even to this day. And this is by no means contradicted by St. Paul’s question: “Doth God take care for oxen?” Without doubt he does. We cannot deny it, without flatly contradicting his word. The plain meaning of the Apostle is, Is this all that is implied in the text? Hath it not a farther meaning? Does it not teach us, we are to feed the bodies of those whom we desire to feed our souls? Meantime it is certain, God “giveth grass for the cattle,” as well as “herbs for the use of men.”

But, taking these for our guide we may inquire,

I. What was the original state of the brute creation?
II. In what state is it at present? And,
III. In what state will it be at the manifestation of the children of God?

I.

1. We may inquire, in the First place, What was the original state of the brute creation? And may we not learn this, even from the place which was assigned them; namely, the garden of God?

All the beasts of the field, and all the fowls of the air, were with Adam in paradise. And there is no question but their state was suited to their place: It was paradisiacal; perfectly happy. Undoubtedly it bore a near resemblance to the state of man himself. By taking, therefore, a short view of the one, we may conceive the other. Now, “man was made in the image of God.” But “God is a Spirit:” So therefore was man. (Only that spirit, being designed to dwell on earth, was lodged in an earthly tabernacle.) As such, he had an innate principle of self-motion. And so, it seems, has every spirit in the universe; this being the proper distinguishing difference between spirit and matter, which is totally, essentially passive and inactive, as appears from a thousand experiments. He was, after the likeness of his Creator, endued with understanding; a capacity of apprehending whatever objects were brought before it, and of judging concerning them. He was endued with a will, exerting itself in various affections and passions: And, lastly, with liberty, or freedom of choice; without which all the rest would have been in vain, and he would have been no more capable of serving his Creator than a piece of earth or marble; he would have been as incapable of vice or virtue, as any part of the inanimate creation. In these, in the power of self-motion, understanding, will, and liberty, the natural image of God consisted.

2. How far his power of self-motion then extended, it is impossible for us to determine. It is probable, that he had a far higher degree both of swiftness and strength, than any of his posterity ever had, and much less any of the lower creatures. It is certain, he had such strength of understanding as no man ever since had. His understanding was perfect in its kind; capable of apprehending all things clearly, and judging concerning them according to truth, without any mixture of error. His will had no wrong bias of any sort; but all his passions and affections were regular, Being steadily and uniformly guided by the dictates of his unerring understanding; embracing nothing but good, and every good in proportion to its degree of intrinsic goodness. His liberty likewise was wholly guided by his understanding: He chose, or refused, according to its direction. Above all, (which was his highest excellence, far more valuable than all the rest put together,) he was a creature capable of God; capable of knowing, loving, and obeying his Creator. And, in fact, he did know God, did unfeignedly love and uniformly obey him. This was the supreme perfection of man; (as it is of all intelligent beings;) the continually seeing, and loving, and obeying the Father of the spirits of all flesh. From this right state and right use of all his faculties, his happiness naturally flowed. In this the essence of his happiness consisted; But it was increased by all the things that were round about him. He saw, with unspeakable pleasure, the order, the beauty, the harmony, of all the creatures; of all animated, all inanimate nature; the serenity of the skies; the sun walking in brightness; the
sweetly variegated clothing of the earth; the trees, the fruits, the flowers, And liquid lapse of murmuring streams.

Nor was this pleasure interrupted by evil of any kind. It had no alloy of sorrow or pain, whether of body or mind. For while he was innocent he was impassive; incapable of suffering. Nothing could stain his purity of joy. And, to crown all, he was immortal.

3. To this creature, endued with all these excellent faculties, thus qualified for his high charge, God said, “Have thou dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:28.) And so the Psalmist: “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.” (Psalm 8:6, &c.) So that man was God’s vicegerent upon earth, the prince and governor of this lower world; and all the blessings of God flowed through him to the inferior creatures. Man was the channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole brute creation.

4. But what blessings were those that were then conveyed through man to the lower creatures? What was the original state of the brute creatures, when they were first created? This deserves a more attentive consideration than has been usually given it. It is certain these, as well as man, had an innate principle of self-motion; and that, at least, in as high a degree as they enjoy it at this day.

Again: They were endued with a degree of understanding; not less than that they are possessed of now. They had also a will, including various passions, which, likewise, they still enjoy: And they had liberty, a power of choice; a degree of which is still found in every living creature. Nor can we doubt but their understanding too was, in the beginning, perfect in its kind. Their passions and affections were regular, and their choice always guided by their understanding.

5. What then is the barrier between men and brutes? The line which they cannot pass? It was not reason. Set aside that ambiguous term: Exchange it for the plain word, understanding: and who can deny that brutes have this? We may as well deny that they have sight or hearing. But it is this: Man is capable of God; the inferior creatures are not. We have no ground to believe that they are, in any degree, capable of knowing, loving, or obeying God. This is the specific difference between man and brute; the great gulf which they cannot pass over. And as a loving obedience to God was the perfection of man, so a loving obedience to man was the perfection of brutes. And as long as they continued in this, they were happy after their kind; happy in the right state and the right use of their respective faculties. Yea, and so long they had some shadowy resemblance of even moral goodness.

For they had gratitude to man for benefits received, and a reverence for him. They had likewise a kind of benevolence to each other, unmixed with any contrary temper. How beautiful many of them were, we may conjecture from that which still remains; and that not only in the noblest creatures, but in those of the lowest order. And they were all surrounded, not only with plenteous food, but with every thing that could give them pleasure; pleasure unmixed with pain; for pain was not yet; it had not entered into paradise. And they too were immortal: For “God made not death; neither hath he pleasure in the death of any living.”

6. How true then is that word, “God saw everything that he had made: and behold it was very good!” But how far is this from being the present case! In what a condition is the whole lower world! -- to say nothing of inanimate nature, wherein all the elements seem to be out of course, and by turns to fight against man. Since man rebelled against his Maker, in what a state is all animated nature! Well might the Apostle say of this: “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now.” This directly refers to the brute creation. In what state this is at present we are now to consider.

II.

1. As all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication, between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off. The intercourse between God and the inferior creatures being stopped, those blessings could no longer flow in upon them. And then it was that “the creature,” every creature, “was subjected to vanity,” to sorrow, to pain of every kind, to all manner of evils: Not, indeed, “willingly,” not by its own choice, not by any act or deed of its own; “but by reason of Him that
subjected it,” by the wise permission of God, determining to draw eternal good out of this temporary evil.

2. But in what respect was “the creature,” every creature, then “made subject to vanity?” What did the meaner creatures suffer, when man rebelled against God? It is probable they sustained much loss, even in the lower faculties; their vigour, strength, and swiftness. But undoubtedly they suffered far more in their understanding; more than we can easily conceive. Perhaps insects and worms had then as much understanding as the most intelligent brutes have now: Whereas millions of creatures have, at present, little more understanding than the earth on which they crawl, or the rock to which they adhere. They suffered still more in their will, in their passions; which were then variously distorted, and frequently set in flat opposition to the little understanding that was left them. Their liberty, likewise, was greatly impaired; yea, in many cases, totally destroyed. They are still utterly enslaved to irrational appetites, which have the full dominion over them. The very foundations of their nature are out of course; are turned upside down. As man is deprived of his perfection, his loving obedience to God; so brutes are deprived of their perfection, their loving obedience to man. The far greater part of them flee from him; studiously avoid his hated presence. The most of the rest set him at open defiance; yea, destroy him, if it be in their power. A few only, those we commonly term domestic animals, retain more or less of their original disposition, (through the mercy of God,) love him still, and pay obedience to him.

3. Setting these few aside, how little shadow of good, of gratitude, of benevolence, of any right temper, is now to be found in any part of the brute creation! On the contrary, what savage fierceness, what unrelenting cruelty; are invariably observed in thousands of creatures; yea, is inseparable from their natures! Is it only the lion, the tiger, the wolf, among the inhabitants of the forest and plains – the shark, and a few more voracious monsters, among the inhabitants of the waters, -- or the eagle, among birds, -- that tears the flesh, sucks the blood, and crushes the bones of their helpless fellow-creatures? Nay; the harmless fly, the laborious ant, the painted butterfly, are treated in the same merciless manner, even by the innocent songsters of the grove! The innumerable tribes of poor insects are continually devoured by them. And whereas there is but a small number, comparatively, of beasts of prey on the earth, it is quite otherwise in the liquid element. There are but few inhabitants of the waters, whether of the sea, or of the rivers, which do not devour whatsoever they can master: Yea, they exceed herein all the beasts of the forest, and all the birds of prey. For none of these have been ever observed to prey upon their own species:

Saevis inter se convenit ursis:
Even savage bears will not each other tear.

But the water-savages swallow up all, even of their own kind, that are smaller and weaker than themselves. Yea, such, at present, is the miserable constitution of the world, to such vanity is it now subjected, that an immense majority of creatures, perhaps a million to one, can no otherwise preserve their own lives, than by destroying their fellow-creatures!

4. And is not the very form, the outward appearance, of many of the creatures, as horrid as their dispositions? Where is the beauty which was stamped upon them when they came first out of the hands of their Creator? There is not the least trace of it left: So far from it, that they are shocking to behold! Nay, they are not only terrible and grisly to look upon, but deformed, and that to a high degree. Yet their features, ugly as they are at best, are frequently made more deformed than usual, when they are distorted by pain; which they cannot avoid, any more than the wretched sons of men.

Pain of various kinds, weakness, sickness, diseases innumerable, come upon them; perhaps from within; perhaps from one another; perhaps from the inclemency of seasons; from fire, hail, snow, or storm; or from a thousand causes which they cannot foresee or prevent.

5. Thus, “as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; even so death passed upon all men;” and not on man only, but on those creatures also that “did not sin after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” And not death alone came upon them, but all of its train of preparatory evils; pain, and ten thousand sufferings. Nor these only, but likewise all those irregular passions, all those unlovely tempers, (which in men are sins, and even in the brutes are sources of misery,) “passed upon all” the inhabitants of the earth; and remain in all, except the children of God.

6. During this season of vanity, not only the feeblest creatures are continually destroyed by the stronger; not only the
strong are frequently destroyed by those that are of equal strength; but both the one and the other are exposed to the violence and cruelty of him that is now their common enemy, -- man. And if his swiftness or strength is not equal to theirs, yet his art more than supplies that defect. By this he eludes all their force, how great soever it be; by this he defeats all their swiftness; and, notwithstanding their various shifts and contrivances, discovers all their retreats. He pursues them over the widest plains, and through the thickest forests. He overtakes them in the fields of air, he finds them out in the depths of the sea. Nor are the mild and friendly creatures who still own his sway, and are dutifuse to his commands, secured thereby from more than brutal violence; from outrage and abuse of various kinds. Is the generous horse, that serves his master’s necessity or pleasure with unwearied diligence, -- is the faithful dog, that waits the motion of his hand, or his eye, exempt from this? What returns for their long and faithful service do many of these poor creatures find? And what a dreadful difference is there, between What they suffer from their fellow-brutes, and what they suffer from the tyrant man! The lion, the tiger, or the shark, gives them pain from mere necessity, in order to prolong their own life; and puts them out of their pain at once: But the human shark, without any such necessity, torments them of his free choice; and perhaps continues their lingering pain till, after months or years, death signs their release.

III.

1. But will “the creature,” will even the brute creation, always remain in this deplorable condition? God forbid that we should affirm this; yea, or even entertain such a thought! While “the whole creation groaneth together,” (whether men attend or not,) their groans are not dispersed in idle air, but enter into the ears of Him that made them. While his creatures “travail together in pain,” he knoweth all their pain, and is bringing them nearer and nearer to the birth, which shall be accomplished in its season. He seeth “the earnest expectation” wherewith the whole animated creation “waiteth for” that final “manifestation of the sons of God;” in which “they themselves also shall be delivered” (not by annihilation; annihilation is not deliverance) “from the” present “bondage of corruption, into” a measure of “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

2. Nothing can be more express: Away with vulgar prejudices, and let the plain word of God take place. They “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into glorious liberty,” -- even a measure, according as they are capable, -- of “the liberty of the children of God.” A general view of this is given us in the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation. When He that “sitteth on the great white throne” hath pronounced, “Behold, I make all things new;” when the word is fulfilled, “The tabernacle of God is with men, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God;” -- then the following blessing shall take place (not only on the children of men; there is no such restriction in the text; but) on every creature according to its capacity: “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.”

3. To descend to a few particulars: The whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigour, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they ever enjoyed. They will be restored, not only to that measure of understanding which they had in paradise, but to a degree of it as much higher than that, as the understanding of an elephant is beyond that of a worm. And whatever affections they had in the garden of God, will be restored with vast increase; being exalted and refined in a manner which we ourselves are not now able to comprehend. The liberty they then had will be completely restored, and they will be free in all their motions. They will be delivered from all irregular appetites, from all unruly passions, from every disposition that is either evil in itself, or has any tendency to evil. No rage will be found in any creature, no fierceness, no cruelty, or thirst for blood. So far from it that “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” (Isaiah 11:6, &c.)

4. Thus, in that day, all the vanity to which they are now helplessly subject will be abolished; they will suffer no more, either from within or without; the days of their groaning are ended. At the same time, there can be no reasonable doubt, but all the horridness of their appearance, and all the deformity of their aspect, will vanish away, and be exchanged for their primeval beauty. And with their beauty their happiness will return; to which there can then be no obstruction. As there will be nothing within, so there will be nothing without, to give them any uneasiness: No heat or cold, no storm or tempest, but one perennial spring. In the new earth, as well as in the
new heavens, there will be nothing to give pain, but everything that the wisdom and goodness of God can create
to give happiness. As a recompence for what they once suffered, while under the “bondage of corruption,” when
God has “renewed the face of the earth,” and their corruptible body has put on incorruption, they shall enjoy
happiness suited to their state, without alloy, without interruption, and without end.

5. But though I doubt not that the Father of All has a tender regard for even his lowest creatures, and that, in
consequence of this, he will make them large amends for all they suffer while under their present bondage; yet I
dare not affirm that he has an equal regard for them and for the children of men. I do not believe that

He sees with equal eyes, as Lord of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall.

By no means. This verse is exceeding pretty; but it is absolutely false. For though

Mercy, with truth and endless grace,
O’er all his works doth reign,
Yet chiefly he delights to bless
His favourite creature, man.

God regards his meanest creatures much; but he regards man much more. He does not equally regard a hero and
a sparrow; the best of men and the lowest of brutes. “How much more does your heavenly Father care for you!”
says He “who is in the bosom of his Father.” Those who thus strain the point, are clearly confuted by his
question, “Are not ye much better than they?” Let it suffice, that God regards everything that he hath made, in its
own order, and in proportion to that measure of his own image which he has stamped upon it.

6. May I be permitted to mention here a conjecture concerning the brute creation? What, if it should then please the
all-wise, the all-gracious Creator to raise them higher in the scale of beings? What, if it should please him, when
he makes us “equal to angels,” to make them what we are now, -- creatures capable of God; capable of knowing
and loving and enjoying the Author of their being? If it should be so, ought our eye to be evil because he is
good? However this be, he will certainly do what will be most for his own glory.

7. If it be objected to all this, (as very probably it will,) “But of what use will those creatures be in that future
state?” I answer this by another question, What use are they of now? If there be (as has commonly been
supposed) eight thousand species of insects, who is able to inform us of what use seven thousand of them are? If
there are four thousand species of fishes, who can tell us of what use are more than three thousand of them? If
there are six hundred sorts of birds, who can tell of what use are five hundred of those species are? If there be four
hundred sorts of beasts, to what use do three hundred of them serve? Consider this; consider how little we know
of even the present designs of God; and then you will not wonder that we know still less of what he designs to do
in the new heavens and the new earth.

8. “But what end does it answer to dwell upon this subject, which we so imperfectly understand?” To consider so
much as we do understand, so much as God has been pleased to reveal to us, may answer that excellent end – to
illustrate that mercy of God which “is over all his works.” And it may exceedingly confirm our belief that, much
more, he “is loving to every man.” For how well may we urge our Lord’s words, “Are not ye much better than
they?” If, then, the Lord takes such care of the fowls of the air, and of the beasts of the field, shall he not much
more take care of you, creatures of a nobler order? If “the Lord will save,” as the inspired writer affirms, “both
man and beast,” in their several degrees, surely “the children of men may put their trust under the shadow of his
wings!”

9. May it not answer another end; namely, furnish us with a full answer to a plausible objection against the justice
of God, in suffering numberless creatures that never had sinned to be so severely punished? They could not sin,
for they were not moral agents. Yet how severely do they suffer! - yea, many of them, beasts of burden in
particular, almost the whole time of their abode on earth; So that they can have no retribution here below. But the
objection vanishes away, if we consider that something better remains after death for these poor creatures also;
that these, likewise, shall one day be delivered from this bondage of corruption, and shall then receive an ample
amends for all their present sufferings.
10. One more excellent end may undoubtedly be answered by the preceding considerations. They may encourage us to imitate Him whose mercy is over all his works. They may soften our hearts towards the meaner creatures, knowing that the Lord careth for them. It may enlarge our hearts towards those poor creatures, to reflect that, as vile as they appear in our eyes, not one of them is forgotten in the sight of our Father which is in heaven. Through all the vanity to which they are now subjected, let us look to what God hath prepared for them. Yea, let us habituate ourselves to look forward, beyond this present scene of bondage, to the happy time when they will be delivered therefrom into the liberty of the children of God.

11. From what has been said, I cannot but draw one inference, which no man of reason can deny. If it is this which distinguishes men from beasts, -- that they are creatures capable of God, capable of knowing and loving and enjoying him; then whoever is “without God in the world,” whoever does not know or love or enjoy God, and is not careful about the matter, does, in effect, disclaim the nature of man, and degrade himself into a beast. Let such vouchsafe a little attention to those remarkable words of Solomon: “I said in my heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, -- They might see that they themselves are beasts.” (Eccles. 3:18.) These sons of men are undoubtedly beasts; and that by their own act and deed; for they deliberately and wilfully disclaim the sole characteristic of human nature. It is true, they may have a share of reason; they have speech, and they walk erect; but they have not the mark, the only mark, which totally separates man from the brute creation. “That which befalleth beasts, the same thing befalleth them.” They are equally without God in the world; “so that a man” of this kind “hath no pre-eminence above a beast.”

12. So much more let all those who are of a nobler turn of mind assert the distinguishing dignity of their nature. Let all who are of a more generous spirit know and maintain their rank in the scale of beings. Rest not till you enjoy the privilege of humanity – the knowledge and love of God. Lift up your heads, ye creatures capable of God! Lift up your hearts to the Source of your being! Know God, and teach your souls to know

The joys that from religion flow.

Give your hearts to Him who, together with ten thousand blessings, has given you his Son, his only Son! Let your continual “fellowship be with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ!” Let God be in all your thoughts, and ye will be men indeed. Let him be your God and your All, -- the desire of your eyes, the joy of your heart, and your portion for ever.
Accordingly, the Lamb being, in the purpose of God, “slain from the beginning of the world,” from the same period his sanctifying Spirit began to renew the souls of men. We have an undeniable instance of this in Abel, who “obtained a testimony” from God “that he was righteous.” (Heb. 11:4.) And from that very time all that were partakers of the same faith were partakers of the same salvation; were not only re-instated in the favour, but likewise restored to the image, of God.

4. But how exceeding small was the number of these even from the earliest ages! No sooner did “the sons of men multiply upon the face of the earth,” than God, looking down from heaven, “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth;” so great that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was evil,” only evil, and that “continually.” (Gen. 6:1-5.) And so it remained, without any intermission, till God executed that terrible sentence, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.” (Gen. 6:7.)

5. Only “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord;” being “a just man, and perfect in his generations.” Him, therefore, with his wife, his sons, and their wives, God preserved from the general destruction. And one might have imagined that this small remnant would likewise have been “perfect in their generations.” But how far was this from being the case! Presently after this signal deliverance we find one of them, Ham, involved in sin, and under his father’s curse. And how did “the mystery of iniquity” afterwards work, not only in the posterity of Ham, but in the posterity of Japheth; yea, and of Shem, -- Abraham and his family only excepted!

6. Yea, how did it work even in the posterity of Abraham; in God’s chosen people! Were not these also, down to Moses, to David, to Malachi, to Herod the Great, a faithless and stubborn generation, a “sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity,” continually forsaking the Lord, and “provoking the Holy One of Israel?” And yet we have no reason to believe that these were worse than the nations that surrounded them, who were universally swallowed up in all manner of wickedness, as well as in damnable idolatries; not having the God of heaven “in all their thoughts,” but working all uncleanness with greediness.

7. In the fulness of time, when iniquity of every kind, when ungodliness and unrighteousness, had spread over all nations, and covered the earth as a flood, it pleased God to lift up a standard against it by “bringing his first-born into the world.” Now, then, one would expect “the mystery of godliness” would totally prevail over “the mystery of iniquity;” that the Son of God would be “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” as well as “salvation to his people Israel.” And yet we have no reason to believe that these were worse than the nations that surrounded them, who were universally swallowed up in all manner of wickedness, as well as in damnable idolatries; not having the God of heaven “in all their thoughts,” but working all uncleanness with greediness.

8. It was then, when he had “ascended up on high, and led captivity captive,” that “the promise of the Father” was fulfilled, which they had heard from him. It was then he began to work like himself, showing that “all power was given to him in heaven and earth.” “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and there appeared tongues as of fire; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:1 &c.) In consequence of this, three thousand souls received medicine to heal their sickness, were restored to the favour and the image of God under one sermon of St. Peter’s. (Acts 2:41.) “And the Lord added to them daily, “not such as should be saved; a manifest perversion of the text; but “such as were saved.” The expression is peculiar; and so indeed is the position of the words, which run thus: “And the Lord added those that were saved daily to the church.” First, they “were saved” from the power of sin; then they “were added” to the assembly of the faithful.

9. In order clearly to see how they were already saved, we need only observe the short account of them which is recorded in the latter part of the second and in the fourth chapter. “They continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine, and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers.” That is, they were daily taught by the Apostles, and had all things common, and received the Lord’s supper, and attended all the public service. (Acts 2:42.) “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” (Acts 2:44, 45.) And again: “The multitude of them that believed,” now greatly increased, “were of one heart and of one soul: Neither said any of them that aught of the
things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.” (Acts 4:32.) And yet again: “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 at the Apostles’ feet: And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” (Acts 4:33-35.)

10. But here a question will naturally occur: “How came they to act thus, to have all things in common, seeing we do not read of any positive command to do this?” I answer, There needed no outward command: The command was written on their hearts. It naturally and necessarily resulted from the degree of love which they enjoyed. Observe! “They were of one heart, and of one soul:” And not so much as one (so the words run) said, (they could not, while their hearts so overflowed with love,) “that any of the things which he possessed was his own.” And wheresoever the same cause shall prevail, the same effect will naturally follow.

11. Here was the dawn of the proper gospel day. Here was a proper Christian Church. It was now “the Sun of Righteousness” rose upon the earth, “with healing in his wings.” He did now “save his people from their sins:” He “healed all their sickness.” He not only taught that religion which is the true “healing of the soul,” but effectually planted it in the earth; filling the souls of all that believed in him with righteousness, -- gratitude to God, and good-will to man; attended with a peace that surpassed all understanding, and with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

12. But how soon did “the mystery of iniquity” work again, and obscure the glorious prospect! It began to work (not openly indeed, but covertly) in two of the Christians, Ananias and Sapphira.

“But they sold their possession,” like the rest, and probably for the same motive; but afterwards, giving place to the devil, and reasoning with flesh and blood, they “kept back part of the price.” See the first Christians, that “made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience;” the first that “drew back to perdition;” instead of continuing to “believe to the” final “salvation of the soul!” Mark the first plague which infected the Christian Church; namely, the love of money! And will it not be the grand plague in all generations, whenever God shall revive the same work? O ye believers in Christ, take warning! Whether you are yet but little children, or young men that are strong in the faith, see the snare; your snare in particular, -- that which you will be peculiarly exposed to after you have escaped from gross pollutions. “Love not the world, neither the things of the world! If any man love the world,” whatever he was in times past, “the love of the Father is not” now “in him!”

13. However, this plague was stayed in the first Christian Church, by instantly cutting off the infected persons. By that signal judgment of God on the first offenders, “great fear came upon all;” (Acts 5:11;) so that, for the present at least, not one dared to follow their example. Meantime believers, men full of faith and love, who rejoiced to have all things in common, “were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” (Acts 5:14.)

14. If we inquire in what manner “the mystery of iniquity,” the energy of Satan, began to work again in the Christian Church, we shall find it wrought in quite a different way; putting on quite another shape: Partiality crept in among the Christian believers. Those by whom the distribution to everyone was made had respect of persons; largely supplying those of their own nation, while the other widows, who were not Hebrews, “were neglected in the daily administration.” (Acts 6:1.) Distribution was not made to them according as everyone had need. Here was a manifest breach of brotherly love in the Hebrews; a sin both against justice and mercy: Seeing the Grecians, as well as the Hebrews, had “sold all they had, and laid the price at the Apostles’ feet.” See the second plague that broke in upon the Christian Church! -- Partially; respect of persons; too much regard for those of our own side; and too little for others, though equally worthy.

15. The infection did not stop here, but one evil produced many more. From partiality in the Hebrews, “there arose in the Grecians a murmuring against” them; not only discontent and resentful thoughts, but words suitable thereto; unkind expressions, hard speeches, evil-speaking, and backbiting, naturally followed. And by the “root of bitterness” thus “springing up,” undoubtedly “many were defiled.” The Apostles indeed soon found out a means of removing the occasion of this murmuring; yet so much of the evil root remained, that God saw it needful to use a severer remedy.

He let loose the world upon them all; if haply by their sufferings, by the spoiling of their goods, by pain, imprisonment, and death itself, he might at once punish and amend them. And persecution, God’s last remedy for a backsliding people, had the happy effect for which he intended it. Both the partiality of the Hebrews
ceased, and the murmuring of the Grecians: And “then had the churches rest, and were edified;” built up in the love of God and one another; “and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” (Acts 9:31.)

16. It seems to have been some time after this, that “the mystery of iniquity” began to work in the form of zeal. Great troubles arose by means of some who zealously contended for circumcision, and the rest of the ceremonial law; till the Apostles and Elders put an end to the spreading evil, by that final determination, -- “It seemed good unto the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay on you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication.” (Acts 15:28, 29.) Yet was not this evil so thoroughly suppressed, but that it frequently broke out again; as we learn from various parts of St. Paul’s Epistles, particularly that to the Galatians.

17. Nearly allied to this was another grievous evil, which at the same time sprang up in the Church; -- want of mutual forbearance, and, of consequence, anger, strife, contention, variance. One very remarkable instance of this we find in this very chapter. When “Paul said to Barnabas, Let us visit the brethren where we have preached the word, Barnabas determined to take with him John;” because he was “his sister’s son.” “But Paul thought it not good to take him who had deserted them before.” And he had certainly reason on his side. But Barnabas resolved to have his own way. GIGPGVQyQWPyRCTQZWUOQL,--and there was a fit of anger. It does not say, on St. Paul’s side: Barnabas only had passion, to supply the want of reason. Accordingly he departed from the work, and went home; while St. Paul went forward “through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.” (Acts 15:41.)

18. The very first society of Christians at Rome were not altogether free from this evil leaven. There were “divisions and offences” among them also; (Rom. 16:17;) although, in general, they seem to have “walked in love.” But how early did the “mystery of iniquity” work, and how powerfully, in the Church at Corinth! Not only schisms and heresies, animosities, fierce and bitter contentions were among them; but open, actual sins; yea, “such fornication as was not named among the Heathens.”

(1 Cor. 5:1.) Nay, there was need to remind them that “neither adulterers, nor thieves, nor drunkards” could “enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10.) And in all St. Paul’s Epistles we meet with abundant proof, that tares grew up, with the wheat in all the Churches, and that “the mystery of iniquity” did every where, in a thousand forms, counterwork “the mystery of godliness.”

19. When St. James wrote his Epistle, directed more immediately “to the twelve tribes scattered abroad,” to the converted Jews, the tares sown among his wheat had produced a plentiful harvest. That grand pest of Christianity, a faith without works, was spread far and wide; filling the Church with a “wisdom from beneath,” which was “earthly, sensual, devilish,” and which gave rise, not only to rash judging and evil-speaking, but to “envy, strife, confusion, and every evil work.” Indeed, whoever peruses the fourth and fifth chapters of this Epistle, with serious attention, will be inclined to believe, that even in this early period the tares had nigh choked the wheat, and that among most of those to whom St. James wrote, no more than the form of godliness, if so much, was left.

20. St. Peter wrote about the same time “to the strangers,” the Christians, “scattered abroad through” all those spacious provinces of “Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia” Minor, “and Bithynia.” These, probably, were some of the most eminent Christians that were then in the world. Yet how exceeding far were even these from being “without spot and blemish!” And what grievous tares were here also growing up with the wheat! Some of them were “bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them:” (2 Pet. 2:1 &c.:) And “many followed their pernicious ways;” of whom the Apostle gives that terrible character: “They walk after the flesh,” in “the lust of uncleanness, like brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed. Spots they are, and blemishes, while they feast with you;” (in the “feasts of charity,” then celebrated throughout the whole Church:) “having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest, for whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.” And yet these very men were called Christians, and were even then in the bosom of the Church! Nor does the Apostle mention them as infesting any one particular church only; but as a general plague, which even then was dispersed far and wide among all the Christians to whom he wrote!
21. Such is the authentic account of “the mystery of iniquity” working even in the apostolic Churches! -- an account given, not by the Jews or Heathens, but by the Apostles themselves. To this we may add the account which is given by the Head and Founder of the Church; Him “who holds the stars in his right hand;” who is “the faithful and true Witness.” We may easily infer what was the state of the Church in general, from the state of the seven Churches in Asia. One of these indeed, the Church of Philadelphia, had “kept his word, and had not denied his name;” (Rev. 3:8;) the Church of Smyrna was likewise in a flourishing state: But all the rest were corrupted, more or less; insomuch that many of them were not a jot better than the present race of Christians; and our Lord then threatened, what he has long since performed, to “remove the candlestick” from them.

22. Such was the real state of the Christian Church, even during the first century; while not only St. John, but most of the Apostles were present with and presided over it. But what a mystery is this, that the All-wise, the All-gracious, the Almighty, should suffer it so to be, not in one only, but as far as we can learn, in every Christian society, those of Smyrna and Philadelphia excepted! And how came these to be excepted? Why were these less corrupted (to go no farther) than the other Churches of Asia? It seems, because they were less wealthy. The Christians in Philadelphia were not literally “increased in goods,” like those in Ephesus or Laodicea; and if the Christians at Smyrna had acquired more wealth, it was swept away by persecution. So that these, having less of this world’s goods, retained more of the simplicity and purity of the gospel.

23. But how contrary is this scriptural account of the ancient Christians to the ordinary apprehensions of men! We have been apt to imagine, that the Primitive Church was all excellence and perfection; answerable to that strong description which St. Peter cites from Moses: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.” And such, without all doubt, the first Christian Church, which commenced at the day of Pentecost, was. But how soon did the fine gold become dim! How soon was the wine mixed with water! How little time elapsed, before the “god of this world” so far regained his empire, that Christians in general were scarce distinguishable from Heathens, save by their opinions and modes of worship!

24. And if the state of the Church in the very first century was so bad, we cannot suppose it was any better in the second. Undoubtedly it grew worse and worse. Tertullian, one of the most eminent Christians of that age, has given us an account of it in various parts of his writings, whence we learn that real, internal religion was hardly found; nay, that not only the tempers of the Christians were exactly the same with those of their heathen neighbours, (pride, passion, love of the world reigning alike in both,) but their lives and manners also. The bearing a faithful testimony against the general corruption of Christians, seems to have raised the outcry against Montanus; and against Tertullian himself, when he was convinced that the testimony of Montanus was true. As to the heresies fathered upon Montanus, it is not easy to find what they were. I believe his grand heresy was, the maintaining that “without” inward and outward “holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

25. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, in every respect an unexceptionable witness, who flourished about the middle of the third century, has left us abundance of letters, in which he gives a large and particular account of the state of religion in his time. In reading this, one would be apt to imagine, he was reading an account of the present century: So totally void of true religion were the generality both of the laity and clergy, so immersed in ambition, envy, covetousness, luxury, and all other vices, that the Christians of Africa were then exactly the same as the Christians of England are now.

26. It is true, that during this whole period, during the first three centuries, there were intermixed longer or shorter seasons wherein true Christianity revived. In those seasons the justice and mercy of God let loose the Heathens upon the Christians. Many of these were then called to resist unto blood. And “the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.” The apostolic spirit returned; and many “counted not their lives dear unto themselves, so they might finish their course with joy.” Many others were reduced to happy poverty; and being stripped of what they had loved too well, they “remembered from whence they were fallen, and repented, and did their first works.”

27. Persecution never did, never could, give any lasting wound to genuine Christianity. But the greatest it ever received, the grand blow which was struck at the very root of that humble, gentle, patient love, which is the fulfilling of the Christian law, the whole essence of true religion, was struck in the fourth century by Constantine the Great, when he called himself a Christian, and poured in a flood of riches, honours, and power upon the Christians; more especially upon the Clergy. Then was fulfilled in the Christian Church, what Sallust says of the
people of Rome: Sublata imperii aemula, non sensim, sed praecipiti cursu, a virtutibus descitum, ad vitia transcursum. [Mr. Wesley doubtless quoted from memory; and this accounts for the slight mistake into which he has here fallen. The passage referred to does not occur in Sallust, but in Velleius Paterculus, and reads thus: -- Remoto Carthaginis metu, sublataque imperri aemula, non gradu, sed praecipiti cursu, a virtute descitum, ad vitia transcursum. Lib. ii. Cap. 1. -- Edit.] Just so, when the fear of persecution was removed, and wealth and honour attended the Christian profession, the Christians “did not gradually sink, but rushed headlong into all manner of vices.” Then “the mystery of iniquity” was no more hid, but stalked abroad in the face of the sun. Then, not the golden but the iron age of the Church commenced: Then one might truly say,

Protinus irrupit venae pejoris in aevum
Omne nefas; fugere pudor, verumque fidesque,
In quorum subiere locum fraudesque, dolique,
Insidiaeque, et vis, et amor sceleratus habendi.
At once, in that unhappy age, broke in
All wickedness, and every deadly sin:
Truth, modesty, and love fled far away,
And force, and thirst of gold, claim’d universal sway,

28. And this is the event which most Christian expositors mention with such triumph! Yea, which some of them suppose to be typified in the Revelation, by “the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven!” Rather say, it was the coming of Satan and all his legions from the bottomless pit: Seeing from that very time he hath set up his throne over the face of the whole earth, and reigned over the Christian as well as the Pagan world with hardly any control. Historians, indeed, tell us, very gravely, of nations, in every century, who were by such and such (Saints without doubt!) converted to Christianity: But still these converts practised all kinds of abominations, exactly as they did before; no way differing, either in their tempers or in their lives, from the nations that were still called Heathens. Such has been the deplorable state of the Christian Church, from the time of Constantine till the Reformation. A Christian nation, a Christian city, (according to the scriptural model,) was nowhere to be seen; but every city and country, a few individuals excepted, was plunged in all manner of wickedness.

29. Has the case been altered since the Reformation? Does “the mystery of iniquity” no longer work in the Church? No: The Reformation itself has not extended to above one third of the Western Church: so that two thirds of this remain as they were; so do the Eastern, Southern, and Northern Churches. They are as full of heathenish, or worse than heathenish, abominations, as ever they were before. And what is the condition of the Reformed Churches? It is certain that they were reformed in their opinions, as well as their modes of worship. But is not this all? Were either their tempers or lives reformed? Not at all. Indeed many of the Reformers themselves complained, that “the Reformation was not carried far enough.” But what did they mean? Why, that they did not sufficiently reform the rites and ceremonies of the Church. Ye fools and blind! To fix your whole attention on the circumstantials of religion! Your complaint ought to have been, the essentials of religion were not carried far enough! You ought vehemently to have insisted on an entire change of men’s tempers and lives; on their showing they had “the mind that was in Christ,” by “walking as he also walked.” Without this, how exquisitely trifling was the reformation of opinions and rites and ceremonies! Now, let any one survey the state of Christianity in the Reformed parts of Switzerland; in Germany, or France; in Sweden, Denmark, Holland; in Great Britain and Ireland. How little are any of these Reformed Christians better than heathen nations! Have they more, (I will not say, communion with God, although there is no Christianity without it,) but have they more justice, mercy, or truth, than the inhabitants of China, or Indostan? O no! We must acknowledge with sorrow and shame, that we are far beneath them!

That we, who by thy Name are named,
The heathens unbaptized out-sin!

30. Is not this the falling away or apostasy from God, foretold by St. Paul in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians? (2 Thess. 2:3.) Indeed, I would not dare to say, with George Fox, that this apostasy was universal; that there never were any real Christians in the world, from the days of the Apostles till his time. But we may boldly say, that wherever Christianity has spread, the apostasy has spread also; insomuch that, although there are now, and always have been, individuals who were real Christians; yet the whole world never did, nor can at this
31. I would now refer it to every man of reflection, who believes the Scriptures to be of God, whether this general apostasy does not imply the necessity of a general reformation? Without allowing this, how can we possibly justify either the wisdom or goodness of God? According to Scripture, the Christian religion was designed for “the healing of the nations;” for the saving from sin by means of the Second Adam, all that were “constituted sinners” by the first. But it does not answer this end: It never did; unless for a short time at Jerusalem. What can we say, but that if it has not yet, it surely will answer it? The time is coming, when not only “all Israel shall be saved,” but “the fullness of the Gentiles will come in.” The time cometh, when “violence shall no more be heard in the earth, wasting or destruction within our borders;” but every city shall call her “walls Salvation, and her gates Praise;” when the people, saith the Lord, “shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.” (Isa. 60:18, 21.)

32. From the preceding considerations we may learn the full answer to one of the grand objections of infidels against Christianity; namely, the lives of Christians. Of Christians, do you say? I doubt whether you ever knew a Christian in your life. When Tomo Chachi, the Indian Chief, keenly replied to those who spoke to him of being a Christian, “Why, these are Christians at Savannah! These are Christians at Frederica!” -- the proper answer was, “No, they are not; they are no more Christians than you and Sinauky.” “But are not those Christians in Canterbury, in London, in Westminster?” No: no more than they are angels. None are Christians, but they that have the mind which was in Christ, and walk as he walked. “Why, if these only are Christians,” said an eminent wit, “I never saw a Christian yet.” I believe it: You never did; and, perhaps, you never will; for you will never find them in the grand or the gay world. The few Christians that are upon the earth, are only to be found where you never look for them. Never therefore, urge this objection more: Never object to Christianity the lives or tempers of Heathens. Though they are called Christians, the name does not imply the thing: They are as far from this as hell from heaven!

33. We may learn from hence, Secondly, the extent of the fall, -- the astonishing spread of original corruption. What among so many thousands, so many millions, is there “none righteous, no, not one?” Not by nature. But including the grace of God, I will not say with the heathen poet, -- Rari quippe boni: numero vix sunt totidem, quot Thebarum portae, vel divitis ostia Nili.
[The following is Gifford’s translation of this quotation from Juvenal: --
-- The good are few! “the valued file”
Scarce pass the gates of Thebes, the mouths of Nile. -- Edit.]
As if he had allowed too much, in supposing there were a hundred good men in the Roman Empire, he comes to himself, and affirms there are hardly seven. Nay, surely, there were seven thousand! There were so many long ago in one small nation, where Elijah supposed there were none at all. But, allowing a few exceptions, we are authorized to say, “The whole world lieth in wickedness;” yea, “in the wicked one,” as the words properly signify. “Yes, the whole heathen world.” Yea, and the Christian too; (so called;) for where is the difference, save in a few externals? See with your own eyes! Look into that large country, Indostan. There are Christians and Heathens too. Which have more justice, mercy, and truth? The Christians or the Heathens? Which are most corrupt, infernal, devilish, in their tempers and practice? The English or the Indians? Which have desolated whole countries, and clogged the rivers with dead bodies?

O sacred name of Christian! How profaned!
O earth, earth, earth! How dost thou groan under the villainies of thy Christian inhabitants!

34. From many of the preceding circumstances we may learn, Thirdly, what is the genuine tendency of riches: What a baleful influence they have had, in all ages, upon pure and undefiled religion. Not that money is an evil of itself: It is applicable to good as well as bad purposes. But, nevertheless, it is an undoubted truth, that “the love of money is the root of all evil;” and also, that the possession of riches naturally breeds the love of them. Accordingly, it is an old remark, Crescit amor nummi, quantum ipsa pecunia crescit:

“As money increases, so does the love of it;” and always will, without a miracle of grace. Although, therefore, other causes may concur; yet this has been, in all ages, the principal cause of the decay of true religion in every
Christian community. As long as the Christians in any place were poor, they were devoted to God. While they had little of the world, they did not love the world; but the more they had of it, the more they loved it. This constrained the Lover of their souls, at various times, to unchain their persecutors; who, by reducing them to their former poverty, reduced them to their former purity. But still remember, riches have, in all ages, been the bane of genuine Christianity!

35. We may learn hence, Fourthly, how great watchfulness they need who desire to be real Christians; considering what a state the world is in! May not each of them well say, Into a world of ruffians sent,

I walk on hostile ground:
Wild human bears, on slaughter bent,
And ravening wolves surround?

They are the more dangerous, because they commonly appear in sheep’s clothing. Even those who do not pretend to religion, yet make fair professions of good-will, of readiness to serve us, and, perhaps, of truth and honesty. But beware of taking their word! Trust not any man, until he fears God! It is a great truth,

He that fears no God, can love no friend:
Therefore stand upon your guard against every one that is not earnestly seeking to save his soul. We have need to keep both our heart and mouth as “with a bridle, while the ungodly are in our sight.” Their conversation, their spirit, is infectious, and steals upon us unawares, we know not how. “Happy is the man that feareth always,” in this sense also, lest he should partake of other men’s sins. O “keep thyself pure!” “Watch and pray, that thou enter not into temptation!”

36. We may learn from hence, Lastly, what thankfulness becomes those who have escaped the corruption that is in the world; whom God hath chosen out of the world, to be holy and unblamable.

“Who is it that maketh thee to differ?” “And what hast thou which thou hast not received?” Is it not “God” alone “who worketh in thee both to will and to do of his good pleasure?” “And let those give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed and delivered from the hand of the enemy.” Let us praise him, that he hath given us to see the deplorable state of all that are round about us, to see the wickedness which overflows the earth, and yet not be borne away by the torrent! We see the general, the almost universal contagion; and yet it cannot approach to hurt us! Thanks be unto Him “who hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth still deliver!” And have we not farther ground for thankfulness, yea, and strong consolation, in the blessed hope which God hath given us, that the time is at hand, when righteousness shall be as universal as unrighteousness is now? Allowing that “the whole creation now groaneth together” under the sin of man, our comfort is, it will not always groan: God will arise and maintain his own cause; and the whole creation shall then be delivered both from moral and natural corruption. Sin, and its consequence, pain, shall be no more: Holiness and happiness will cover the earth. Then shall all the ends of the world see the salvation of our God; and the whole race of mankind shall know, and love, and serve God, and reign with him for ever and ever!

John Wesley
SERMON 62
(text of the 1872 edition)

THE END OF CHRIST’S COMING

“For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:8.

1. Many eminent writers, heathen as well as Christian, both in earlier and later ages, have employed their utmost labour and art in painting the beauty of virtue. And the same pains they have taken to describe, in the liveliest colours, the deformity of vice; both of vice in general, and of those particular vices which were most prevalent in their respective ages and countries. With equal care they have placed in a strong light the happiness that attends virtue, and the misery which usually accompanies vice, and always follows it. And it may be acknowledged, that
treatises of this kind are not wholly without their use. Probably hereby some, on the one hand, have been stirred up to desire and follow after virtue; and some, on the other hand, checked in their career of vice, -- perhaps reclaimed from it, at least for a season. But the change effected in men by these means is seldom either deep or universal: Much less is it durable; in a little space it vanishes away as the morning cloud. Such motives are far too feeble to overcome the numberless temptations that surround us. All that can be said of the beauty and advantage of virtue, and the deformity and ill effects of vice, cannot resist, and much less overcome and heal, one irregular appetite or passion.

All these fences and their whole array,
One cunning bosom-sin sweeps quite away.

2. There is, therefore, an absolute necessity, if ever we would conquer vice, or steadily persevere in the practice of virtue, to have arms of a better kind than these; otherwise, we may see what is right, but we cannot attain it. Many of the men of reflection among the very Heathens were deeply sensible of this. The language of their heart was that of Medea: --

Video meliora, proboque;
Detertiora sequor:

How exactly agreeing with the words of the Apostle: (Personating a man convinced of sin, but not yet conquering it:) “The good that I would, I do not; but the evil I would not, that I do!” The impotence of the human mind, even the Roman philosopher could discover: “There is in every man,” says he, “this weakness;” (he might have said, this sore disease;) “gloriae sitis, -- thirst for glory.

Nature points out the disease; but nature shows us no remedy.”

3. Nor is it strange, that though they sought for a remedy, yet they found none. For they sought it where it never was and never will be found, namely, in themselves; in reason, in philosophy: Broken reeds, bubbles, smoke! They did not seek it in God, in whom alone it is possible to find it.

In God! No; they totally disclaim this; and that in the strongest terms. For although Cicero, one of their oracles, once stumbled upon that strange truth, Nemo unquam vir magnus sine afflatu divino fuit, -- “There never was any great man who was not divinely inspired;” yet in the very same tract he contradicts himself, and totally overthrows his own assertion, by asking, Quis pro virtute aut sapientia gratias dedit Deis unquam? -- “Who ever returned thanks to God for his virtue or wisdom?” The Roman poet is, if possible, more express still; who, after mentioning several outward blessings, honestly adds, --

Haec satis est orare Jovem, qui donat et aufert;
Det vitam, det opes: aequum mi animum ipse parabo.

4. The best of them either sought virtue partly from God and partly from themselves, or sought it from those gods who were indeed but devils, and so not likely to make their votaries better than themselves. So dim was the light of the wisest of men, till “life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel;” till “the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil!” But what are “the works of the devil,” here mentioned? How was “the Son of God manifested” to destroy them? And how, in what manner, and by what steps, does he actually “destroy” them? These three very important points we may consider in their order.

I. 1. And, First, what these works of the devil are, we learn from the words preceding and following the text: “We know that he was manifested to take away our sins.” (1 John 3:5.) “Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not: Whosoever sinneth, seeth him not, neither knoweth him.” (1 John 3:6.) “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8.) “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.” (1 John 3:9.) From the whole of this it appears, that “the works of the devil,” here spoken of, are sin, and the fruits of sin.

2. But since the wisdom of God has now dissipated the clouds which so long covered the earth, and put an end to the childish conjectures of men concerning these things, it may be of use to take a more distinct view of these
“works of the devil,” so far as the oracles of God instruct us. It is true, the design of the Holy Spirit was to assist our faith, not gratify our curiosity; and therefore the account he has given in the first chapters of Genesis is exceeding short. Nevertheless, it is so clear that we may learn therefrom whatsoever it concerns us to know.

3. To take the matter from the beginning: “The Lord God” (literally, JEHOVAH, the GODS; that is, One and Three) “created man in his own image;” -- in his own natural image, as to his better part; that is, a spirit, as God is a spirit; endowed with understanding; which, if not the essence, seems to be the most essential property, of a spirit. And probably the human spirit, like the angelical, then discerned truth by intuition. Hence he named every creature, as soon as he saw it, according to its inmost nature. Yet his knowledge was limited, as he was a creature: Ignorance, therefore, was inseparable from him; but error was not; it does not appear that he was mistaken in any thing. But he was capable of mistaking, of being deceived, although not necessitated to it.

4. He was endued also with a will, with various affections; (which are only the will exerting itself various ways;) that he might love, desire, and delight in that which is good: Otherwise his understanding had been to no purpose. He was likewise endued with liberty; a power of choosing what was good, and refusing what was not so. Without this, both the will and the understanding would have been utterly useless. Indeed, without liberty, man had been so far from being a free agent, that he could have been no agent at all. For every unfree being is purely passive; not active in any degree. Have you a sword in your hand? Does a man, stronger than you, seize your hand, and force you to wound a third person? In this you are no agent, any more than the sword: The hand is as passive as the steel. So in every possible case. He that is not free is not an agent, but a patient.

5. It seems, therefore, that every spirit in the universe, as such, is endued with understanding, and, in consequence, with a will, and with a measure of liberty; and that these three are inseparably united in every intelligent nature. And observe: Liberty necessitated, or over-ruled, is really no liberty at all. It is a contradiction in terms. It is the same as unfree freedom; that is, downright nonsense.

6. It may be farther observed, (and it is an important observation,) that where there is no liberty, there can be no moral good or evil, no virtue or vice. The fire warms us; yet it is not capable of virtue: It burns us; yet this is no vice. There is no virtue, but where an intelligent being knows, loves, and chooses what is good; nor is there any vice, but where such a being knows, loves, and chooses what is evil.

7. And God created man, not only in his natural, but likewise in his own moral, image. He created him not only “in knowledge,” but also in righteousness and true holiness. As his understanding was without blemish, perfect in its kind; so were all his affections. They were all set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects. And as a free agent, he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding. In so doing, he was unspeakably happy; dwelling in God, and God in him; having an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the eternal Spirit; and the continual testimony of his conscience, that all his ways were good and acceptable to God.

8. Yet his liberty (as was observed before) necessarily included a power of choosing or refusing either good or evil. Indeed it has been doubted whether man could then choose evil, knowing it to be such. But it cannot be doubted, he might mistake evil for good. He was not infallible; therefore not impeccable. And this unravels the whole difficulty of the grand question, Unde malum? “How came evil into the world?” It came from “Lucifer, son of the morning.” It was the work of the devil.

“For the devil,” saith the Apostle, “sinneth from the beginning;” that is, was the first sinner in the universe, the author of sin, the first being who, by the abuse of his liberty, introduced evil into the creation. He,

-- Of the first,
If not the first archangel,
was self-tempted to think too highly of himself. He freely yielded to the temptation; and gave way, first to pride, then to self-will. He said, “I will sit upon the sides of the north: I will be like the Most High.” He did not fall alone, but soon drew after him a third part of the stars of heaven; in consequence of which they lost their glory and happiness, and were driven from their former habitation.

9. ”Having great wrath,” and perhaps envy, at the happiness of the creatures whom God had newly created, it is not strange that he should desire and endeavour to deprive them of it. In order to this, he concealed himself in the
serpent, who was the most subtle, or intelligent, of all the brute creatures; and, on that account, the least liable to raise suspicion. Indeed, some have (not improbably) supposed that the serpent was then endued with reason and speech. Had not Eve known he was so, would she have admitted any parley with him? Would she not have been frightened rather than deceived? As the Apostle observes she was. To deceive her, Satan mingled truth with falsehood: -- “Hath God said, Ye may not eat of every tree of the garden?” -- and soon after persuaded her to disbelieve God, to suppose his threatening should not be fulfilled. She then lay open to the whole temptation: -- To “the desire of the flesh;” for the tree was “good for food;” To “the desire of the eyes;” for it was “pleasant to the eyes;” And to “the pride of life;” for it was “to be desired to make one wise,” and consequently honoured. So unbelief begot pride: She thought herself wiser than God; capable of finding a better way to happiness than God had taught her. It begot self-will: She was determined to do her own will, not the will of Him that made her. It begot foolish desires; and completed all by outward sin: “She took of the fruit, and did eat.”

10. She then “gave to her husband, and he did eat.” And in that day, yea, that moment, he died! The life of God was extinguished in his soul. The glory departed from him. He lost the whole moral image of God, -- righteousness and true holiness. He was unholy; he was unhappy; he was full of sin; full of guilt and tormenting fears. Being broke off from God, and looking upon him now as an angry Judge, “he was afraid.” But how was his understanding darkened, to think he could “hide himself from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden!” Thus was his soul utterly dead to God! And in that day his body likewise began to die, -- became obnoxious to weakness, sickness, pain; all preparatory to the death of the body, which naturally led to eternal death.

II. Such are “the works of the devil;” sin and its fruits; considered in their order and connexion.

We are, in the Second place, to consider how the Son of God was manifested in order to destroy them.

1. He was manifested as the only-begotten Son of God, in glory equal with the Father, to the inhabitants of heaven before and at the foundation of the world. These “morning stars sang together,” all these “sons of God shouted for joy,” when they heard him pronounce, “Let there be light; and there was light;” -- when he “spread the north over the empty space,” and “stretched out the heavens as a curtain.” Indeed, it was the universal belief of the ancient Church, that God the Father none hath seen, nor can see; that from all eternity He hath dwelt in light unapproachable; and it is only in and by the Son of his love that he hath, at any time, revealed himself to his creatures.

2. How the Son of God was manifested to our first parents in paradise it is not easy to determine.

It is generally, and not improbably, supposed that he appeared to them in the form of a man, and conversed with them face to face. Not that I can at all believe the ingenious dream of Dr. Watts concerning “the glorious humanity of Christ,” which he supposes to have existed before the world began, and to have been endued with I know not what astonishing powers. Nay, I look upon this to be an exceeding dangerous, yea, mischievous hypothesis; as it quite excludes the force of very many scriptures which have been hitherto thought to prove the Godhead of the Son. And I am afraid it was the grand means of turning that great man aside from the faith once delivered to the saints; -- that is, if he was turned aside; if that beautiful soliloquy be genuine which is printed among his Posthumous Works, wherein he so earnestly beseeches the Son of God not to be displeased because he cannot believe him to be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

3. May we not reasonably believe it was by similar appearances that He was manifested, in succeeding ages, to Enoch, while he “walked with God;” to Noah, before and after the deluge; to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, on various occasions; and, to mention no more, to Moses? This seems to be the natural meaning of the word: “My servant Moses is faithful in all my house. -- With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of Jehovah shall he behold;” namely, the Son of God.

4. But all these were only types of his grand manifestation. It was in the fulness of time (in just the middle age of the world, as a great man largely proves) that God “brought his first-begotten into the world, made of a woman,” by the power of the Highest overshadowing her. He was afterwards manifested to the shepherds; to devout Simeon; to Anna, the Prophetess; and to “all that waited for redemption in Jerusalem.”
5. When he was of due age for executing his priestly office, he was manifested to Israel; preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God in every town and in every city. And for a time he was glorified by all, who acknowledged that he “spake as never man spake;” that “he spake as one having authority;” with all the wisdom of God and the power of God. He was manifested by numberless “signs, and wonders, and mighty works which he did,” as well as by his whole life; being the only one born of a woman “who knew no sin,” who, from his birth to his death, did “all things well;” doing continually “not his own will, but the will of Him that sent him.”

6. After all, “behold the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world!” This was a more glorious manifestation of himself than any he had made before. How wonderfully was he manifested to angels and men, when he “was wounded for our transgressions;” when he “bore all our sins in his own body on the tree;” when, having “by that one oblation of himself once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world,” he cried out, “It is finished; and bowed his head, and gave up the ghost!” We need but just mention those farther manifestations, -- his resurrection from the dead; his ascension into heaven, into the glory which he had before the world began; and his pouring out the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost; both of which are beautifully described in those well-known words of the Psalmist: “Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and hast received gifts for men; yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among” or in “them.”

7. “That the Lord God might dwell in them:” This refers to a yet farther manifestation of the Son of God; even his inward manifestation of himself. When he spoke of this to his Apostles but a little before his death, one of them immediately asked, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?” By enabling us to believe in his name. For he is then inwardly manifested to us when we are enabled to say with confidence, “My Lord, and my God!” Then each of us can boldly say, “The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” [Gal. 2:20] And it is by thus manifesting himself in our hearts that he effectually “destroys the works of the devil.”

III.

1. How he does this, in what manner, and by what steps, he does actually destroy them, we are now to consider. And, First, as Satan began his work in Eve by tainting her with unbelief, so the Son of God begins his work in man by enabling us to believe in him. He both opens and enlightens the eyes of our understanding. Out of darkness he commands light to shine, and takes away the veil which the “god of this world” had spread over our hearts. And we then see not by a chain of reasoning, but by a kind of intuition, by a direct view, that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their former trespasses;” not imputing them to me. In that day “we know that we are of God,” children of God by faith; “having redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sin.” “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ;” -- that peace which enables us in every state therewith to be content; which delivers us from all perplexing doubts, from all tormenting fears; and in particular, from that “fear of death whereby we were all our life-time subject to bondage.”

2. At the same time the Son of God strikes at the root of that grand work of the devil, -- pride; causing the sinner to humble himself before the Lord, to abhor himself, as it were, in dust and ashes.

He strikes at the root of self-will; enabling the humbled sinner to say in all things, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” He destroys the love of the world; delivering them that believe in him from “every foolish and hurtful desire;” from the “desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life.” He saves them from seeking, or expecting to find, happiness in any creature. As Satan turned the heart of man from the Creator to the creature; so the Son of God turns his heart back again from the creature to the Creator. Thus it is, by manifesting himself, he destroys the works of the devil; restoring the guilty outcast from God, to his favour, to pardon and peace; the sinner in whom dwelleth no good thing, to love and holiness; the burdened, miserable sinner, to joy unspeakable, to real, substantial happiness.

3. But it may be observed, that the Son of God does not destroy the whole work of the devil in man, as long as he remains in this life. He does not yet destroy bodily weakness, sickness, pain, and a thousand infirmities incident to flesh and blood. He does not destroy all that weakness of understanding, which is the natural consequence of the soul’s dwelling in a corruptible body; so that still,
Humanum est errare et nescire:

“Both ignorance and error belong to humanity.” He entrusts us with only an exceeding small share of knowledge, in our present state; lest our knowledge should interfere with our humility, and we should again affect to be as gods. It is to remove from us all temptation to pride, and all thought of independency, (which is the very thing that men in general so earnestly covet under the name of liberty.) that he leaves us encompassed with all these infirmities, particularly weakness of understanding; till the sentence takes place, “Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return!”

4. Then error, pain, and all bodily infirmities cease: All these are destroyed by death. And death itself, “the last enemy” of man, shall be destroyed at the resurrection. The moment that we hear the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, “then shall be fulfilled the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” “This corruptible” body “shall put on incorruption; this mortal” body “shall put on immortality;” and the Son of God, manifested in the clouds of heaven, shall destroy this last work of the devil!

5. Here then we see in the clearest, strongest light, what is real religion: A restoration of man by Him that bruises the serpent’s head [Gen. 3:15], to all that the old serpent deprived him of; a restoration not only to the favour but likewise to the image of God, implying not barely deliverance from sin, but the being filled with the fullness of God. It is plain, if we attend to the preceding considerations, that nothing short of this is Christian religion. Everything else, whether negative or external, is utterly wide of the mark. But what a paradox is this! How little is it understood in the Christian world; yea, in this enlightened age, wherein it is taken for granted, the world is wiser than ever it was from the beginning! Among all our discoveries, who has discovered this? How few either among the learned or unlearned! And yet, if we believe the Bible, who can deny it? Who can doubt of it? It runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end, in one connected chain; and the agreement of every part of it, with every other, is, properly, the analogy of faith. Beware of taking any thing else, or anything less than this, for religion! Not any thing else: Do not imagine an outward form, a round of duties, both in public and private, is religion! Do not suppose that honesty, justice, and whatever is called morality, (though excellent in its place,) is religion! And least of all dream that orthodoxy, right opinion, (vulgarly called faith,) is religion. Of all religious dreams, this is the vainest; which takes hay and stubble for gold tried in the fire!

6. O do not take any thing less than this for the religion of Jesus Christ! Do not take part of it for the whole! What God hath joined together, put not asunder! Take no less for his religion, than the “faith that worketh by love;” all inward and outward holiness. Be not content with any religion which does not imply the destruction of all the works of the devil; that is, of all sin. We know, weakness of understanding, and a thousand infirmities, will remain, while this corruptible body remains; but sin need not remain: This is that work of the devil, eminently so called, which the Son of God was manifested to destroy in this present life. He is able, he is willing, to destroy it now, in all that believe in him. Only be not straitened in your own bowels! Do not distrust his power, or his love! Put his promise to the proof! He hath spoken: And is he not ready likewise to perform? Only “come boldly to the throne of grace,” trusting in his mercy; and you shall find, “He saveth to the uttermost all those that come to God through him!”

John Wesley
SERMON 68
(ext from the 1872 edition)

THE WISDOM OF GOD’S COUNSELS

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” Rom. 11:33.

1. Some apprehend the wisdom and the knowledge of God to mean one and the same thing.

Others believe that the wisdom of God more directly refers to his appointing the ends of all things; and his knowledge, to the means which he hath prepared and made conducive to those ends. The former seems to be the
most natural explication; as the wisdom of God, in its most extensive meaning, must include the one as well as
the other, the means as well as the ends.

2. Now the wisdom as well as the power of God is abundantly manifested in his creation; in the formation and
arrangement of all his works, in heaven above and in the earth beneath; and in adapting them all to the several
ends for which they were designed: Insomuch that each of them, apart from the rest, is good; but all together are
very good; all conspiring together, in one connected system, to the glory of God in the happiness of his
intelligent creatures.

3. As this wisdom appears even to short-sighted men (and much more to spirits of a higher order) in the creation
and disposition of the whole universe, and every part of it; so it equally appears in their preservation, in his
“upholding all things by the word of his power.” And it no less eminently appears in the permanent government
of all that he has created. How admirably does his wisdom direct the motions of the heavenly bodies! Of all the
stars in the firmament, whether those that are fixed, or those that wander, though never out of their several orbits!
Of the sun in the midst of heaven! Of those amazing bodies, the comets, that shoot in every direction through the
immeasurable fields of ether! How does he superintend all the parts of this lower world, this “speck of creation,”
the earth! So that all things are still, as they were at the beginning, “beautiful in their seasons;” and summer and
winter, seed-time and harvest, regularly follow each other. Yea, all things serve their Creator: “Fire and hail,
snow and vapour, wind and storm, are fulfilling his word;” so that we may well say, “O Lord, our Governor, how
excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

4. Equally conspicuous is the wisdom of God in the government of nations, of states and kingdoms; yea, rather,
more conspicuous; if infinite can be allowed to admit of any degrees. For the whole inanimate creation, being
totally passive and inert, can make no opposition to his will.

Therefore, in the natural world all things roll on in an even, uninterrupted course. But it is far otherwise in the
moral world. Here evil men and evil spirits continually oppose the divine will, and create numberless
irregularities. Here, therefore, is full scope for the exercise of all the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of
God, in counteracting all the wickedness and folly of men, and all the subtlety of Satan, to carry on his own
glorious design, -- the salvation of lost mankind. Indeed, were he to do this by an absolute decree, and by his
own irresistible power, it would imply no wisdom at all. But his wisdom is shown by saving man in such a
manner as not to destroy his nature, not to take away the liberty which he has given him.

5. But the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God are most eminently displayed in his Church; in
planting it like a grain of mustard seed, the least of all seeds; in preserving and continually increasing it, till it
grew into a great tree, notwithstanding the uninterrupted opposition of all the powers of darkness. This the
Apostle justly terms the manifold wisdom (RQNWQKMKNQLý UQHKC) of God. It is an uncommonly
expressive word, intimating that this wisdom, in the manner of its operation, is diversified a thousand ways, and
exerts itself with infinite varieties. These things the highest “angels desire to look into,” but can never fully
comprehend. It seems to be with regard to these chiefly that the Apostle utters that strong exclamation, “How
unsearchable are his judgments!” His counsels, designs, impossible to be fathomed; “and his ways” of
accomplishing them “past finding out!” impossible to be traced! According to the Psalmist, “His paths are in the
deep waters, and his footsteps are not known.”

6. But a little of this he has been pleased to reveal unto us; and by keeping close to what he has revealed, meantime
comparing the word and the work of God together, we may understand a part of his ways. We may in some
measure trace this manifold wisdom from the beginning of the world; from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Moses,
and from Moses to Christ. But I would now consider it (after just touching on the history of the Church in past
ages) only with regard to what He has wrought in the present age, during the last half century; yea, and in this
little corner of the world, the British islands only.

7. In the fulness of time, just when it seemed best to his infinite wisdom, God brought his first-begotten into the
world. He then laid the foundation of his Church; though it hardly appeared till the day of Pentecost. And it was
then a glorious Church; all the members thereof being “filled with the Holy Ghost;” being “of one heart and of
one mind, and continuing steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine, and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in
the prayers.” In fellowship; that is, having all things in common; no man counting anything he had his own
Meek, simple followers of the Lamb,

They lived, and thought, and spake the same:
They all were of one heart and soul,
And only love inspired the whole.

8. But this happy state did not continue long. See Ananias and Sapphira, through the love of money, ("the root of all evil," ) making the first breach in the community of goods! See the partiality, the unjust respect of persons on the one side, the resentment and murmuring on the other, even while the Apostles themselves presided over the church at Jerusalem! See the grievous spots and wrinkles that were found in every part of the Church, recorded not only in the Acts, but in the Epistles of St. Paul, James, Peter, and John. A still fuller account we have in the Revelation: And, according to this, in what a condition was the Christian Church, even in the first century, even before St. John was removed from the earth; if we may judge (as undoubtedly we may) of the state of the church in general, from the state of the particular Churches (all but that of Smyrna and Philadelphia) to which our Lord directed his Epistles! And from this time, for fourteen hundred years, it was corrupted more and more, as all history shows, till scarce any either of the power or form of religion was left.

9. Nevertheless it is certain, that the gates of hell did never totally prevail against it. God always reserved a seed for himself; a few that worshipped him in spirit and in truth. I have often doubted, whether these were not the very persons whom the rich and honourable Christians, who will always have number as well as power on their side, did not stigmatize, from time to time, with the title of heretics. Perhaps it was chiefly by this artifice of the devil and his children, that, the good which was in them being evil spoken of, they were prevented from being so extensively useful as otherwise they might have been. Nay, I have doubted whether that arch-heretic, Montanus, was not one of the holiest men in the second century. Yea, I would not affirm, that the arch-heretic of the fifth century, (as plentifully as he has been bespattered for many ages,) was not one of the holiest men of that age, not excepting St. Augustine himself. (A wonderful saint! As full of pride, passion, bitterness, censoriousness, and as foul-mouthed to all that contradicted him, as George Fox himself.) I verily believe, the real heresy of Pelagius was neither more nor less than this: The holding that Christians may, by the grace of God, (not without it; that I take to be a mere slander,) “go on to perfection;” or, in other words, “fulfil the law of Christ.”

“But St. Augustine says:” -- When Augustine’s passions were heated, his word is not worth a rush.

And here is the secret: St. Augustine was angry at Pelagius: Hence he slandered and abused him, (as his manner was,) without either fear or shame. And St. Augustine was then in the Christian world, what Aristotle was afterwards: There needed no other proof of any assertion, than Ipse dixit: “St. Augustine said it.”

10. But to return: When iniquity had overspread the Church as a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifted up a standard against it. He raised up a poor monk, without wealth, without power, and, at that time, without friends, to declare war, as it were, against all the world; against the Bishop of Rome and all his adherents. But this little stone being chosen of God, soon grew into a great mountain; and increased more and more, till it had covered a considerable part of Europe. Yet even before Luther was called home, the love of many was waxed cold. Many, that had once run well, turned, back from the holy commandment delivered to them; yea, the greater part of those that once experienced the power of faith, made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. The observing this was supposed to be the occasion of that illness (a fit of the stone) whereof Luther died; after uttering these melancholy words: “I have spent my strength for nought! Those who are called by my name, are, it is true, reformed in opinions and modes of worship; but in their hearts and lives, in their tempers and practice, they are not a jot better than the Papists!”

11. About the same time it pleased God to visit Great Britain. A few in the reign of King Henry the Eighth, and many more in the three following reigns, were real witnesses of true, scriptural Christianity. The number of these exceedingly increased in the beginning of the following century.

And in the year 1627, there was a wonderful pouring out of the Spirit in several parts of England, as well as in Scotland, and the north of Ireland. But from the time that riches and honour poured in upon them that feared and loved God, their hearts began to be estranged from him, and to cleave to the present world. No sooner was persecution ceased, and the poor, despised, persecuted Christians invested with power, and placed in ease and affluence, but a change of circumstances brought a change of spirit. Riches and honour soon produced their
usual effects. Having the world, they quickly loved the world: They no longer breathed after heaven, but became more and more attached to the things of earth. So that in a few years, one who knew and loved them well, and was an unexceptionable judge of men and manners, (Dr. Owen,) deeply lamented over them, as having lost all the life and power of religion, and being become just of the same spirit with those whom they despised as the mire in the streets.

12. What little religion was left in the land received another deadly wound at the Restoration, by one of the worst princes that ever sat on the English throne, and by the most abandoned court in Europe. And infidelity now broke in amain, and overspread the land as a flood. Of course, all kind of immorality came with it, and increased to the end of the century. Some feeble attempts were made to stem the torrent during the reign of Queen Anne; but it still increased till about the year 1725, when Mr. Law published his “Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection,” and, not long after, his “Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.” Here the seed was sown, which soon grew up, and spread to Oxford, London, Bristol, Leeds, York, and, within a few years, to the greatest part of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

13. But what means did the wisdom of God make use of in effecting this great work? He thrust out such labourers into his harvest as the wisdom of man would never have thought on. He chose the weak things to confound the strong, and the foolish things to confound the wise. He chose a few young, poor, ignorant men, without experience, learning, or art; but simple of heart, devoted to God, full of faith and zeal, seeking no honour, no profit, no pleasure, no ease, but merely to save souls; fearing neither want, pain, persecution, nor whatever man could do unto them; yea, not counting their lives dear unto themselves, so they might finish their course with joy. Of the same spirit were the people whom God by their word called out of darkness into his marvellous light, many of whom soon agreed to join together, in order to strengthen each other’s hands in God. These also were simple of heart, devoted to God, zealous of good works; desiring neither honour, nor riches, nor pleasure, nor ease, nor anything under the sun; but to attain the whole image of God, and to dwell with him in glory.

14. But as these young Preachers grew in years, they did not all grow in grace. Several of them indeed increased in other knowledge; but not proportionably in the knowledge of God. They grew less simple, less alive to God, and less devoted to him. They were less zealous for God; and, consequently, less active, less diligent in his service. Some of them began to desire the praise of men, and not the praise of God only; some to be weary of a wandering life, and so to seek ease and quietness. Some began again to fear the faces of men; to be ashamed of their calling; to be unwilling to deny themselves, to take up their cross daily, “and endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.” Wherever these Preachers labored, there was not much fruit of their labours. Their word was not, as formerly, clothed with power: It carried with it no demonstration of the Spirit. The same faintness of spirit was in their private conversation. They were no longer “instant in season, out of season,” “warning every man, and exhorting every man,” “if by any means they might save some.”

15. But as some Preachers declined from their first love, so did many of the people. They were likewise assaulted on every side; encompassed with manifold temptations: And while many of them triumphed over all, and were “more than conquerors through him that loved them,” others gave place to the world, the flesh, or the devil, and so “entered into temptation:” Some of them “made shipwreck of their faith” at once; some by slow, insensible degrees. Not a few, being in want of the necessaries of life, were overwhelmed with the cares of the world; many relapsed into “the desires of other things,” which “choked the good seed, and it became unfruitful.”

16. But of all temptations, none so struck at the whole work of God as “the deceitfulness of riches;” a thousand melancholy proofs of which I have seen within these last fifty years. Deceitful are they indeed! For who will believe they do him the least harm? And yet I have not known threescore rich persons, perhaps not half the number, during threescore years, who, as far as I can judge, were not less holy than they would have been had they been poor. By riches I mean, not thousands of pounds, but any more than will procure the conveniences of life. Thus I account him a rich man who has food and raiment for himself and family, without running into debt, and something over. And how few are there in these circumstances who are not hurt, if not destroyed, thereby? Yet who takes warning? Who seriously regards that awful declaration of the Apostle: Even “they that desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into divers foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition?” How many sad instances have we seen of this in London, in Bristol, in Newcastle; in all the large trading towns throughout the kingdom, where God has lately caused his power to be known! See how many of
those who were once simple of heart, desiring nothing but God, are now gratifying “the desire of the flesh;” studying to please their senses, particularly their taste; endeavouring to enlarge the pleasures of tasting as far as possible. Are not you of that number? Indeed, you are no drunkard, and no glutton; but do you not indulge yourself in a kind of regular sensuality? Are not eating and drinking the greatest pleasures of your life? The most considerable part of your happiness? If so, I fear St. Paul would have given you a place among those “whose god is their belly!” How many of them are now again indulging “the desire of the eye!” using every means which is in their power, to enlarge the pleasures of their imagination! If not in grandeur, which as yet is out of their way; yet in new or beautiful things! Are not you seeking happiness in pretty or elegant apparel, or furniture? Or in new clothes, or books, or in pictures, or gardens? “Why, what harm is there in these things?” There is this harm, that they gratify “the desire of the eye,” and thereby strengthen and increase it; making you more and more dead to God, and more alive to the world. How many are indulging “the pride of life!” seeking the honour that cometh of men! Or “laying up treasures on earth!” They gain all they can, honestly and conscientiously. They save all they can, by cutting off all needless expense; by adding frugality to diligence. And so far all is right. This is the duty of every one that fears God. But they do not give all they can; without which they must needs grow more and more earthly-minded. Their affections will cleave to the dust more and more; and they will have less and less communion with God. Is not this your case? Do you not seek the praise of men more than the praise of God? Do not you lay up, or at least desire and endeavor to “lay up, treasures on earth!” Are you not then (deal faithfully with your own soul!) more and more alive to the world, and, consequently, more and more dead to God? It cannot be otherwise. That must follow, unless you give all you can, as well as gain and save all you can. There is no other way under heaven to prevent your money from sinking you lower than the grave! For “if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” And if it was in him in ever so high a degree, yet if he slides into the love of the world, by that same degrees that this enters in, the love of God will go out of the heart.

17. And perhaps there is something more than all this contained in those words: “Love not the world, neither the things of the world.” Here we are expressly warned against loving against the world, as well as against loving “the things of the world.” The world is the men that know not God, that neither love nor fear him. To love these with a love of delight or complacence, to set our affections upon them, is here absolutely forbidden; and, by parity of reason, to converse or have intercourse with them, farther than necessary business requires. Friendship or intimacy with them, St. James does not scruple to term adultery: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend to the world is an enemy of God.” Do not endeavour to shuffle away, or evade, the meaning of those strong words. They plainly require us to stand aloof from them, to have no needless commerce with unholy men. Otherwise we shall surely slide into conformity to the world; to their maxims, spirit, and customs. For not only their words, harmless as they seem, do eat as doth a canker; but their very breath is infectious: Their spirit imperceptibly influences our spirit. It steals “like water into our bowels, and like oil into our bones.”

18. But all rich men are under a continual temptation to acquaintance and conversation with worldly men. They are likewise under a continual temptation to pride, to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. They are strongly tempted to revenge, when they are ever so little affronted: And, having the means in their own hands, how few are there that resist the temptation! They are continually tempted to sloth, indolence, love of ease, softness, delicacy; to hatred of self-denial, and taking up the cross, even that of fasting and rising early, without which it is impossible to grow in grace. If you are increased in goods, do not you know that these things cannot be otherwise. That must follow, unless you give all you can, as well as gain and save all you can. There is no other way under heaven to prevent your money from sinking you lower than the grave! For “if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” And if it was in him in ever so high a degree, yet if he slides into the love of the world, by that same degrees that this enters in, the love of God will go out of the heart.

Once more, therefore, I say, having gained and saved all you can, do you give all you can? Else your money will eat your flesh as fire, and will sink you to the nethermost hell! O beware of “laying up treasures upon earth!” Is it
not treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath?

Lord, I have warned them! But if they will not be warned, what can I do more? I can only “give them up unto their own heart’s lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations!”

19. By not taking this warning, it is certain many of the Methodists are already fallen; many are falling at this very time; and there is great reason to apprehend, that many more will fall, most of whom will rise no more!

But what method may it be hoped the all-wise God will take to repair the decay of his work? If he does not remove the candlestick from this people, and raise up another people, who will be more faithful to his grace, it is probable he will proceed in the same manner as he has done in time past.

And this has hitherto been his method: When any of the old Preachers left their first love; lost their simplicity and zeal, and departed from the work, he raised up young men, who are what they were, and sent them into the harvest in their place. The same he has done when he was pleased to remove any of his faithful labourers into Abraham’s bosom. So when Henry Millard, Edward Dunstone, John Manners, Thomas Walsh, or others, rested from their labours, he raised up other young men, from time to time, willing and able to perform the same service. It is highly probable, he will take the very same method for the time to come. The place of those Preachers who either die in the Lord, or lose the spiritual life which God had given them, he will supply by others that are alive to God, and desire only to spend and be spent for him.

20. Hear ye this, all ye Preachers who have not the same life, the same communion with God, the same zeal for his cause, the same burning love to souls, that you had once! “Take heed unto yourselves, that ye lose not the things ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward.” Beware lest God swear in his wrath, that ye shall bear his standard no more! Lest he be provoked to take the word of his grace utterly out of your mouth! Be assured, the Lord hath no need of you; his work doth not depend upon your help. As he is able “out of stones to raise up children to Abraham;” so he is able out of the same to raise up Preachers after his own heart! O make haste! Remember from whence you are fallen; and repent and do the first works!

21. Would it not provoke the Lord of the harvest to lay you altogether aside, if you despised the labourers he had raised up, merely because of their youth? This was commonly done to us, when we were first sent out, between forty and fifty years ago. Old, wise men asked, “What will these young heads do?” So the then Bishop of London in particular. But shall we adopt their language? God forbid! Shall we teach Him whom he shall send; whom He shall employ in his own work? Are we then the men, and shall wisdom die with us? Does the work of God hang upon us? O humble yourselves before God, lest he pluck you away, and there be none to deliver!

22. Let us next consider, what method has the wisdom of God taken, for these five-and-forty years, when thousands of the people that once ran well, one after another, “drew back to perdition?” Why, as fast as any of the poor were overwhelmed with worldly care, so that the seed they had received became unfruitful; and as fast as any of the rich drew back unto perdition, by giving way to the love of the world, to foolish and hurtful desires, or to any other of those innumerable temptations, which are inseparable from riches; God has constantly, from time to time, raised up men, endued with the spirit which they had lost: Yea, and generally this change has been made with considerable advantage: For the last were, not only (for the most part) more numerous than the first, but more watchful, profiting by their example; more spiritual, more heavenly-minded, more zealous, more alive to God, and more dead to all things here below.

23. And, blessed be God, we see he is now doing the same thing in various parts of the kingdom.

In the room of those that have fallen from their steadfastness, or are falling at this day, he is continually raising up out of the stones other children to Abraham. This he does at one or another place, according to his own will; pouring out his quickening Spirit on this or another people, just as it pleaseth him. He is raising up those of every age and degree, young men and maidens, old men and children, to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; to show forth His praise, who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light.” And we have no reason to doubt, but he will continue so to do, till the great promise is fulfilled; till “the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea; till all Israel is saved, and the fullness of the Gentiles is come in.”
24. But have all that have sunk under manifold temptations, so fallen that they can rise no more? Hath the Lord cast them all off for ever, and will he be no more entreated? Is his promise come utterly to an end for evermore? God forbid that we should affirm this! Surely He is able to heal all their backslidings: For with God no word is impossible. And is he not willing too? He is “God, and not man; therefore his compassions fail not.” Let no backslider despair. “Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; unto our God, and he will abundantly pardon.” Meantime, thus saith the Lord to you that now supply their place: “Be not high-minded, but fear!” If “the Lord spared not” thy elder brethren, “take heed lest he spare not thee!” Fear, though not with a servile, tormenting fear, lest thou fall by any of the same temptations; by either the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, or the desire of other things. Tempted you will be in ten thousand different ways, perhaps as long as you remain in the body; but as long as you continue to watch and pray, you will not “enter into temptations.” His grace has been hitherto sufficient for you; and so it will be unto the end.

25. You see here, brethren, a short and general sketch of the manner wherein God works upon earth, in repairing this work of grace, wherever it is decayed through the subtlety of Satan, and the unfaithfulness of men, giving way to the fraud and malice of the devil. Thus he is now carrying on his own work, and thus he will do to the end of time. And how wonderfully plain and simple is His way of working, in the spiritual as well as the natural world! That is, his general plan of working, of repairing whatsoever is decayed. But as to innumerable particulars, we must still cry out, “O the depth! How unfathomable are his counsels, and his paths past tracing out!”

John Wesley
SERMON 76
(text of the 1872 edition)

ON PERFECTION

“Let us go on to perfection.” Heb. 6:1.

The whole sentence runs thus: “Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God;” which he had just before termed, “the first principles of the oracles of God,” and “meat fit for babes,” for such as have just tasted that the Lord is gracious.

That the doing of this is a point of the utmost importance the Apostle intimates in the next words: “This will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and have fallen away, to renew them again unto repentance.” As if he had said, If we do not “go on to perfection,” we are in the utmost danger of “falling away;” And if we do fall away, it is “impossible” that is, exceeding hard, “to renew them again unto repentance.”

In order to make this very important scripture as easy to be understood as possible I shall endeavour,

I. To show what perfection is;
II. To answer some objections to it; and,
III. To expostulate a little with the opposers of it.

I. I will endeavour to show what perfection is.

1. And First, I do not conceive the perfection here spoken of, to be the perfection of angels. As those glorious beings never “left their first estate,” never declined from their original perfection, all their native faculties are unimpaired: Their understanding, in particular, is still a lamp of light, their apprehension of all things clear and distinct, and their judgment always true. Hence, though their knowledge is limited, (for they are creatures,) though they are ignorant of innumerable things, yet they are not liable to mistake: Their knowledge is perfect in its kind. And as their affections are all constantly guided by their unerring understanding, so all their actions are suitable thereto; so they do, every moment, not their own will, but the good and acceptable will of God.
Therefore it is not possible for man, whose understanding is darkened, to whom mistake is as natural as ignorance; who cannot think at all, but by the mediation of organs which are weakened and depraved, like the other parts of his corruptible body; it is not possible, I say, for men always to think right, to apprehend things distinctly, and to judge truly of them. In consequence hereof, his affections, depending on his understanding, are variously disordered. And his words and actions are influenced, more or less, by the disorder both of his understanding and affections. It follows that no man, while in the body, can possibly attain to angelic perfection.

2. Neither can any man, while he is in a corruptible body, attain to Adamic perfection. Adam, before his fall, was undoubtedly as pure, as free from sin, as even the holy angels. In like manner, his understanding was as clear as theirs, and his affections as regular. In virtue of this, as he always judged right, so he was able always to speak and act right. But since man rebelled against God, the case is widely different with him. He is no longer able to avoid falling into innumerable mistakes; consequently, he cannot always avoid wrong affections; neither can he always think, speak, and act right. Therefore man, in his present state, can no more attain Adamic than angelic perfection.

3. The highest perfection which man can attain, while the soul dwells in the body, does not exclude ignorance, and error, and a thousand other infirmities. Now, from wrong judgments, wrong words and actions will often necessarily flow: And, in some cases, wrong affections also may spring from the same source. I may judge wrong of you: I may think more or less highly of you than I ought to think; and this mistake in my judgment may not only occasion something wrong in my behaviour, but it may have a still deeper effect; it may occasion something wrong in my affection. From a wrong apprehension, I may love and esteem you either more or less than I ought. Nor can I be freed from a likableness to such a mistake while I remain in a corruptible body. A thousand infirmities, in consequence of this, will attend my spirit, till it returns to God who gave it. And, in numberless instances, it comes short of doing the will of God, as Adam did in paradise. Hence the best of men may say from the heart,

“Every moment, Lord, I need
The merit of thy death,
for innumerable violations of the Adamic as well as the angelic law.” It is well, therefore, for us, that we are not now under these, but under the law of love. “Love is” now “the fulfilling of the law,” which is given to fallen man. This is now, with respect to us, “the perfect law.” But even against this, through the present weakness of our understanding, we are continually liable to transgress. Therefore every man living needs the blood of atonement, or he could not stand before God.

4. What is then the perfection of which man is capable while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with that kind command, “My son, give me thy heart.” It is the “loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind.” This is the sum of Christian perfection: It is all comprised in that one word, Love. The first branch of it is the love of God: And as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;” Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets;” These contain the whole of Christian perfection.

5. Another view of this is given us in those words of the great Apostle: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” For although this immediately and directly refers to the humility of our Lord, yet it may be taken in a far more extensive sense, so as to include the whole disposition of his mind, all his affections, all his tempers, both toward God and man. Now it is certain that as there was no evil affection in him, so no good affection or temper was wanting. So that “ whatsoever things are holy, whatsoever things are lovely,” are all included in “the mind that was in Christ Jesus.”

6. St. Paul, when writing to the Galatians, places perfection in yet another view. It is the one undivided fruit of the Spirit, which he describes thus: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace; longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity,” (so the word should be translated here,) “meekness, temperance.” What a glorious constellation of graces is here! Now, suppose all these to be knit together in one, to be united together in the soul of a believer, this is Christian perfection.

7. Again: He writes to the Christians at Ephesus, of “putting on the new man, which is created after God, in
righteousness and true holiness;” and to the Colossians, of “the new man, renewed after the image of him that created him;” plainly referring to the words in Genesis, (Gen. 1:27) “So God created man in his own image.” Now, the moral image of God consists (as the Apostle observes) “in righteousness and true holiness.” By sin this is totally destroyed. And we never can recover it, till we are “created anew in Christ Jesus.” And this is perfection.

8. St. Peter expresses it in a still different manner, though to the same effect: “As he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.” (1 Peter 1:15.) According to this Apostle, then, perfection is another name for universal holiness: Inward and outward righteousness: Holiness of life, arising from holiness of heart.

9. If any expressions can be stronger than these, they are those of St. Paul to the Thessalonians: (1 Thess. 5:23:) “The God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may the whole of you, the spirit, the soul, and the body,” (this is the literal translation) “be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

10. We cannot show this sanctification in a more excellent way, than by complying with that exhortation of the Apostle: “I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies” (yourselves, your souls and bodies; a part put for the whole, by a common figure of speech) “a living sacrifice unto God;” to whom ye were consecrated many years ago in baptism. When what was then devoted is actually presented to God, then is the man of God perfect.

11. To the same effect St. Peter says, (1 Pet. 2:5,) “Ye are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” But what sacrifices shall we offer now, seeing the Jewish dispensation is at an end? If you have truly presented yourselves to God, you offer up to him continually all your thoughts, and words, and actions, through the Son of his love, as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

12. Thus you experience that He whose name is called Jesus does not bear that name in vain: That he does, in fact, “save his people from their sins;” the root as well as the branches. And this salvation from sin, from all sin, is another description of perfection; though indeed it expresses only the least, the lowest branch of it, only the negative part of the great salvation.

II. I proposed, in the Second Place, to answer some objections to this scriptural account of perfection.

1. One common objection to it is, that there is no promise of it in the Word of God. If this were so, we must give it up; we should have no foundation to build upon: For the promises of God are the only sure foundation of our hope. But surely there is a very clear and full promise that we shall all love the Lord our God with all our hearts. So we read, (Deut. 30:6,) “Then will I circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” Equally express is the word of our Lord, which is no less a promise, though in the form of a command: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” (Matt. 22:37.) No words can be more strong than these; no promise can be more express. In like manner, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” is as express a promise as a command.

2. And indeed that general and unlimited promise which runs through the whole gospel dispensation, “I will put my laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts,” turns all the commands into promises; and, consequently, that among the rest, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” The command here is equivalent to a promise, and gives us full reason to expect that he will work in us what he requires of us.

3. With regard to the fruit of the Spirit, the Apostle, in affirming, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance,” does, in effect, affirm that the Holy Spirit actually works love, and these other tempers, in those that are led by him.

So that here also, we have firm ground to tread upon, this scripture likewise being equivalent to a promise, and assuring us that all these shall be wrought in us, provided we are led by the Spirit.

4. And when the Apostle says to the Ephesians, (Eph. 4:21-24,) “Ye have been taught, as the truth is in Jesus,” -- to “be renewed in the spirit of your mind,” and “to put on the new man, which is created after God” -- that is, after the image of God, -- “in righteousness and true holiness,” he leaves us no room to doubt, but God will thus “renew us in the spirit of our mind,” and “create us anew” in the image of God, wherein we were at first created: Otherwise it could not be said, that this is “the truth as it is in Jesus.”
5. The command of God, given by St. Peter, “Be ye holy, as he that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation,” [1 Pet. 1:15] implies a promise that we shall be thus holy, if we are not wanting to ourselves. Nothing can be wanting on God’s part: As he has called us to holiness, he is undoubtedly willing, as well as able, to work this holiness in us. For he cannot mock his helpless creatures, calling us to receive what he never intends to give. That he does call us thereto is undeniable; therefore he will give it, if we are not disobedient to the heavenly calling.

6. The prayer of St. Paul for the Thessalonians, that God would “sanctify” them throughout, and “that the whole of them, the spirit, the soul, and the body, might be preserved blameless,” will undoubtedly be heard in behalf of all the children of God, as well as of those at Thessalonica.

   Hereby, therefore, all Christians are encouraged to expect the same blessing from “the God of peace;” namely, that they also shall be “sanctified throughout, in spirit, soul, and body;” and that “the whole of them shall be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [1 Thess. 5:23]

7. But the great question is, whether there is any promise in Scripture, that we shall be saved from sin. Undoubtedly there is. Such is that promise, (Psalm 130:8,) “He shall redeem Israel from all his sins;” exactly answerable to those words of the angel, “He shall save his people from their sins.” And surely “he is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God through him.” Such is that glorious promise given through the Prophet Ezekiel: (Ezek. 36:25-27:) “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 I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

   Such (to mention no more) is that pronounced by Zechariah, (Luke 1:73-75,) “The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies.” (and such, doubtless are all our sins,) “to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.” The last part of this promise is peculiarly worthy of our observation. Lest any should say, “True, we shall be saved from our sins when we die,” that clause is remarkably added, as if on purpose to obviate this pretence, all the days of our life. With what modesty then can anyone affirm, that none shall enjoy this liberty till death?

8. “But,” say some, “this cannot be the meaning of the words; for the thing is impossible.” It is impossible to men: but the things impossible with, men are possible with God. “Nay, but this is impossible in its own nature: For it implies a contradiction, that a man should be saved from all sin while he is in a sinful body.”

   There is a great deal of force in this objection. And perhaps we allow most of what you contend for. We have already allowed, that while we are in the body we cannot be wholly free from mistake.

   Notwithstanding all our care, we shall still be liable to judge wrong in many instances. And a mistake in judgment will very frequently occasion a mistake in practice. Nay, a wrong judgment may occasion something in the temper or passions which is not strictly right. It may occasion needless fear, or ill-grounded hope, unreasonable love, or unreasonable aversion. But all this is no way inconsistent with the perfection above described.

9. You say, “Yes, it is inconsistent with the last article: It cannot consist with salvation from sin.” I answer, It will perfectly well consist with salvation from sin, according to that definition of sin, (which I apprehend to be the scriptural definition of it,) a voluntary transgression of a known law.

   “Nay, but all transgressions of the law of God, whether voluntary or involuntary, are sin: For St. John says, `All sin is a transgression of the law.’” True, but he does not say, All transgression of the law is sin. This I deny: Let him prove it that can.

   To say the truth, this a mere strife of words. You say none is saved from sin in your sense of the word; but I do not admit of that sense, because the word is never so taken in Scripture. And you cannot deny the possibility of being saved from sin, in my sense of the word. And this is the sense wherein the word sin is over and over taken in Scripture.

   “But surely we cannot be saved from sin, while we dwell in a sinful body.” A sinful body? I pray observe, how
deeply ambiguous, how equivocal, this expression is! But there is no authority for it in Scripture: The word sinful body is never found there. And as it is totally unscriptural, so it is palpably absurd. For no body, or matter of any kind, can be sinful: Spirits alone are capable of sin.

Pray in what part of the body should sin lodge? It cannot lodge in the skin, nor in the muscles, or nerves, or veins, or arteries; it cannot be in the bones, any more than in the hair or nails. Only the soul can be the seat of sin.

10. “But does not St. Paul himself say, ‘They that are in the flesh cannot please God?’” I am afraid the sound of these words has deceived many unwary souls; who have been told, Those words, they that are in the flesh, mean the same as they that are in the body. No; nothing less. The flesh, in this text, no more means the body than it does the soul. Abel, Enoch, Abraham, yea, all that cloud of witnesses recited by St. Paul in the eleventh of the Hebrews, did actually please God while they were in the body, as he himself testifies. The expression, therefore, here means neither more nor less than they that are unbelievers, they that are in their natural state, they that are without God in the world.

11. But let us attend to the reason of the thing. Why cannot the Almighty sanctify the soul while it is in the body? Cannot he sanctify you while you are in this house, as well as in the open air? Can the walls of brick or stone hinder him? No more can these walls of flesh and blood hinder him a moment from sanctifying you throughout. He can just as easily save you from all sin in the body as out of the body.

“But has he promised thus to save us from sin while we are in the body?” Undoubtedly he has: For a promise is implied in every commandment of God: Consequently in that, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.” For this and every other commandment is given, not to the dead, but to the living. It is expressed in the words above recited, that we should walk “in holiness before him all the days of our life.”

I have dwelt the longer on this, because it is the grand argument of those that oppose salvation from sin; and also, because it has not been so frequently and so fully answered: Whereas the arguments taken from Scripture have been answered a hundred times over.

12. But a still more plausible objection remains, taken from experience; which is, that there are no living witnesses of this salvation from sin. In answer to this, I allow,

(1.) That there are not many. Even in this sense, there are not many fathers. Such is our hardness of heart, such our slowness to believe what both the Prophets and Apostles have spoke, that there are few, exceeding few, true witnesses of the great salvation.

(2.) I allow that there are false witnesses, who either deceive their own souls, and speak of the things they know not, or “speak lies in hypocrisy.” And I have frequently wondered, that we have not more of both sorts. It is nothing strange, that men of warm imaginations should deceive themselves in this matter. Many do the same with regard to justification: They imagine they are justified, and are not. But though many imagine it falsely, yet there are some that are truly justified.

And thus, though many imagine they are sanctified, and are not, yet there are some that are really sanctified.

(3.) I allow that some who once enjoyed full salvation have now totally lost it. They once walked in glorious liberty, giving God their whole heart, “rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks.” But it is past. They now are shorn of their strength, and become like other men. Perhaps they do not give up their confidence; they still have a sense of his pardoning love. But even this is frequently assaulted by doubts and fears, so that they hold it with a trembling hand.

13. "Nay, this,” say some pious and sensible men, “is the very thing which we contend for. We grant, it may please God to make some of his children for a time unspeakably holy and happy. We will not deny, that they may enjoy all the holiness and happiness which you speak of. But it is only for a time: God never designed that it should continue to their lives’ end. Consequently, sin is only suspended: It is not destroyed.”

This you affirm. But it is a thing of so deep importance, that it cannot be allowed without clear and cogent proof. And where is the proof? We know that, in general, “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” He
does not repent of any gifts which he hath bestowed upon the children of men. And how does the contrary appear, with regard to this particular gift of God? Why should we imagine, that he will make an exception with respect to the most precious of all his gifts on this side heaven? Is he not as able to give it us always, as to give it once? As able to give it for fifty years, as for one day? And how can it be proved, that he is not willing to continue this his lovingkindness? How is this supposition, that he is not willing, consistent with the positive assertion of the Apostle? Who, after exhorting the Christians at Thessalonica, and in them all Christians in all ages, “to rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks,” -- immediately adds, (as if on purpose to answer those who denied, not the power, but the will of God to work this in them.) “For this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus.” Nay, and it is remarkable, that, after he had delivered that glorious promise (such it properly is,) in the twenty-third verse, “The very God of peace shall sanctify you wholly: And the whole of you” (so it is in the original,) “the spirit, the soul, and the body, shall be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ;” he adds again, “Faithful is he that hath called you, who also will do it.” [1 Thess. 5:23-24] He will not only sanctify you wholly, but will preserve you in that state until he comes to receive you unto himself.

14. Agreeable to this is the plain matter of fact. Several persons have enjoyed this blessing, without any interruption, for many years. Several enjoy it at this day. And not a few have enjoyed it unto their death, as they have declared with their latest breath; calmly witnessing that God had saved them from all sin till their spirit returned to God.

15. As to the whole head of objections taken from experience, I desire it may be observed farther, either the persons objected to have attained Christian perfection, or they have not. If they have not, whatever objections are brought against them strike wide of the mark. For they are not the persons we are talking of: Therefore, whatever they are or do is beside the question. But if they have attained it, if they answer the description given under the nine preceding articles, no reasonable objection can lie against them. They are superior to all censure; and “every tongue that riseth up against them will they utterly condemn.”

16. ”But I never saw one,” continues the objector, “that answered my idea of perfection.” It may be so. And it is probable (as I observed elsewhere) you never will. For your idea includes abundantly too much; even freedom from those infirmities which are not separable from a spirit that is connected with flesh and blood. But if you keep to the account that is given above, and allow for the weakness of human understanding, you may see at this day undeniable instances of genuine, scriptural perfection.

III.

1. It only remains, in the Third place, to expostulate a little with the opposers of this perfection.

Now permit me to ask, Why are you so angry with those who profess to have attained this? And so mad (I cannot give it any softer title) against Christian perfection? -- against the most glorious gift which God ever gave to the children of men upon earth? View it in every one of the preceding points of light, and see what it contains that is either odious or terrible; that is calculated to excite either hatred or fear in any reasonable creature.

What rational objection can you have to the loving the Lord your God with all your heart? Why should you have any aversion to it? Why should you be afraid of it? Would it do you any hurt? Would it lessen your happiness, either in this world or the world to come? And why should you be unwilling that others should give him their whole heart? Or that they should love their neighbours as themselves? Yea, “as Christ hath loved us?” Is this detestable? Is it the proper object of hatred? Or is it the most amiable thing under the sun? Is it proper to move terror? Is it not rather desirable in the highest degree?

2. Why are you so averse to having in you the whole “mind which was in Christ Jesus?” -- all the affections, all the tempers and dispositions, which were in him while he dwelt among men? Why should you be afraid of this? Would it be any worse for you, were God to work in you this very hour all the mind that was in him? If not, why should you hinder others from seeking this blessing? Or be displeased at those who think they have attained it? Is anything more lovely? Anything more to be desired by every child of man?

3. Why are you averse to having the whole “fruit of the Spirit? -- “love, joy, peace; longsuffering, meekness, gentleness, fidelity, goodness, temperance?” Why should you be afraid of having all these planted in your inmost
soul? As “against these there is no law,” so there cannot be any reasonable objection. Surely nothing is more desirable, than that all these tempers should take deep root in your heart; nay, in the hearts of all that name the name of Christ; yea, of all the inhabitants of the earth.

4. What reason have you to be afraid of, or to entertain any aversion to the being “renewed in the” whole “image of him that created you?” Is not this more desirable than anything under heaven? Is it not consummately amiable? What can you wish for in comparison of this, either for your own soul, or for those for whom you entertain the strongest and tenderest affection? And when you enjoy this, what remains but to be “changed from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord?”

5. Why should you be averse to universal holiness, -- the same thing under another name? Why should you entertain any prejudice against this, or look upon it with apprehension? Whether you understand by that term the being inwardly conformed to the whole image and will of God, or an outward behaviour in every point suitable to that conformity. Can you conceive anything more amiable than this? Anything more desirable? Set prejudice aside, and surely you will desire to see it diffused over all the earth.

6. Is perfection (to vary the expression) the being “sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body?” What lover of God and man can be averse to this, or entertain frightful apprehension of it? Is it not, in your best moments, your desire to be all of a piece? -- all consistent with yourself? -- all faith, all meekness, and all love? And suppose you were once possessed of this glorious liberty, would not you wish to continue therein? -- to be preserved “blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?”

7. For what cause should you that are children of God be averse to, or afraid of, presenting yourselves, your souls and bodies, as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God? -- to God your Creator, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier? Can anything be more desirable than this entire self-dedication to him? And is it not your wish that all mankind should unite in this “reasonable service?” Surely no one can be averse to this, without being and enemy to all mankind.

8. And why should you be afraid of, or averse to, what is naturally implied in this; namely, the offering up all our thoughts, and words, and actions, as a spiritual sacrifice to God, acceptable to him through the blood and intercession of his well-beloved Son. Surely you cannot deny that this is good and profitable to men, as well as pleasing to God. Should you not then devoutly pray that both you and all mankind may thus worship him in spirit and in truth?

9. Suffer me to ask one question more. Why should any man of reason and religion be either afraid of, or averse to, salvation from all sin? Is not sin the greatest evil on this side hell? And if so, does it not naturally follow that an entire deliverance from it is one of the greatest blessings on this side heaven? How earnestly then should it be prayed for by all the children of God! By sin I mean a voluntary transgression of a known law. Are you averse to being delivered from this? Are you afraid of such a deliverance? Do you then love sin, that you are so unwilling to part with it? Surely no. You do not love either the devil or his works. You rather wish to be totally delivered from them, to have sin rooted out both of your life and your heart.

10. I have frequently observed, and not without surprise, that the opposers of perfection are more vehement against it when it is placed in this view, than in any other whatsoever. They will allow all you say of the love of God and man; of the mind which was in Christ; of the fruit of the spirit; of the image of God; of universal holiness; of entire self-dedication; of sanctification in spirit, soul, and body; yea, and of the offering up all our thoughts, words, and actions, as a sacrifice to God; -- all this they will allow so we will allow sin, a little sin, to remain in us till death.

11. Pray compare this with that remarkable passage in John Bunyan’s “Holy War.” “When Immanuel,” says he, “had driven Diabolus and all his forces out of the city of Mansoul, Diabolus preferred a petition to Immanuel, that he might have only a small part of the city. When this was rejected, he begged to have only a little room within the walls. But Immanuel answered, “He should have no place at all; no, not to rest the sole of his foot.

Had not the good old man forgot himself? Did not the force of truth so prevail over him here as utterly to overturn his own system? -- to assert perfection in the clearest manner? For if this is not salvation from sin, I cannot tell what is.
12. "No," says a great man, “this is the error of errors: I hate it from my heart. I pursue it through all the world with fire and sword.” Nay, why so vehement? Do you seriously think there is no error under heaven equal to this? Here is something which I cannot understand. Why are those that oppose salvation from sin (few excepted) so eager, -- I had almost said, furious? Are you fighting pro aris et focis? “for God and your country?” for all you have in the world? For all that is near and dear unto you? For your liberty, your life? In God’s name, why are you so fond of sin? What good has it ever done you? What good is it ever likely to do you, either in this world or in the world to come? And why are you so violent against those that hope for deliverance from it? Have patience with us, if we are in an error; yea, suffer us to enjoy our error. If we should not attain it, the very expectation of this deliverance gives us present comfort; yea, and ministers strength to resist those enemies which we expect to conquer. If you could persuade us to despair of that victory, we should give over the contest. Now “we are saved by hope:” From this very hope a degree of salvation springs. Be not angry at those who are felices errore suo, “happy in their mistake.” Else, be their opinion right or wrong, your temper is undeniably sinful. Bear then with us, as we do with you; and see whether the Lord will not deliver us! Whether he is not able, yea, and willing “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God through him.”

[Tunbridge Wells, Dec. 6, 1784]

John Wesley
SERMON 82
(text from the 1872 edition)

ON TEMPTATION

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” 1 Cor. 10:13.

1. In the foregoing part of the chapter, the Apostle has been reciting, on the one hand, the unparalleled mercies of God to the Israelites; and, on the other, the unparalleled ingratitude of that disobedient and gainsaying people. [1 Cor. 10:1-10] And all these things, as the Apostle observes, “were written for our ensample;” [1 Cor. 10:11] that we might take warning from them, so as to avoid their grievous sins, and escape their terrible punishment. He then adds that solemn and important caution, “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” [1 Cor. 10:12]

2. But if we observe these words attentively, will there not appear a considerable difficulty in them? “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” If a man only thinks he stands, he is in no danger of falling. It is not possible that any one should fall, if he only thinks he stands. The same difficulty occurs, according to our translation, in those well-known words of our Lord, (the importance of which we may easily learn from their being repeated in the Gospel no less than eight times,) “To him that hath shall be given; but from that hath not, shall be taken away even what he seemeth to have.” “That which he seemeth to have!” Nay, if he only seems to have it, it is impossible it should taken away. None can take away from another what he only seems to have. What a man only seems to have, he cannot possibly lose. This difficulty may, at first, appear impossible to be surmounted. It is really so: It cannot be surmounted, if the common translation be allowed. But if we observe the proper meaning of the original word, the difficulty vanishes away. It may be allowed that the word FQMGK does (sometimes at least, in some authors) mean no more than to seem. But I much doubt whether it ever bears that meaning in any part of the inspired writings. By a careful consideration of every text in the New Testament wherein this word occurs, I am fully convinced, that it nowhere lessens, but every where strengthens, the sense of the word to which it is annexed.

Accordingly JqýFQMGKýGEGKP, does not mean, what he seems to have, but, on the contrary, what he assuredly hath. And so JqýFQMYPýGUVCPCK, not he that seemeth to stand, or he that thinketh he standeth, but he that assuredly standeth; he who standeth so fast, that he does not appear to be in any danger of falling; he
that saith, like David, “I shall never be moved: Thou, Lord, hast made my hill so strong.” [Ps. 30:6, 7] Yet at that very time, thus saith the Lord, “Be not high-minded, but fear. Else shalt thou be cut off:” [Rom. 11:20, 21] Else shalt thou also be moved from thy steadfastness. The strength which thou assuredly hast, shall be taken away. As firmly as thou didst really stand, thou wilt fall into sin, if not into hell.

3. But lest any should be discouraged by the consideration of those who once ran well, and were afterwards overcome by temptation; lest the fearful of heart should be utterly cast down, supposing it impossible for them to stand; the Apostle subjoins to that serious exhortation, these comfortable words: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” [1 Cor. 10:13]

I.

1. Let us begin with the observation which ushers in this comfortable promise: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” Our translators seem to have been sensible that this expression, common to man, does by means reach the force of the original word. Hence they substitute another in the margin, moderate. But this seems to be less significant than the other, and farther from the meaning of it. Indeed it is not easy to find any word in the English tongue, which answers the word CPSTYRKPL. I believe the sense of it can only be expressed by some such circumlocution as this: “Such as is suited to the nature and circumstances of man; such as every man may reasonably expect, if he considers the nature of his body and his soul, and his situation in the present world.” If we duly consider these, we shall not be surprised at any temptation that hath befallen us; seeing it is no other than such a creature, in such a situation, has all reason to expect.

2. Consider, First, the nature of that body with which your soul is connected. How many are the evils which it is every day, every hour, liable to! Weakness, sickness and disorders of a thousand kinds are its natural attendants. Consider the inconceivably minute fibres, threads, abundantly finer than hair, (called from thence capillary vessels,) whereof every part of it is composed; consider the innumerable multitude of equally fine pipes and strainers, all filled with circulating juice! And will not the breach of a few of these fibres, or the obstruction of a few of these tubes, particularly in the brain, or heart, or lungs, destroy our ease, health, strength, if not life itself? Now, if we observe that all pain implies temptation, how numberless must the temptations be which will beset every man, more or less, sooner or later, while he dwells in this corruptible body!

3. Consider, Secondly, the present state of the soul, as long as it inhabits the house of clay. I do not mean in its unregenerate state; while it lies in darkness and the shadow of death; under the dominion of the prince of darkness, without hope and without God in the world: No; look upon men who are raised above that deplorable state. See those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Yet still how weak is their understanding! How limited its extent! How confused, how inaccurate, are our apprehensions of even the things that are round about us. How liable are the wisest of men to mistake! To inform false judgments; -- to take falsehood for truth, and truth for falsehood; evil for good, and good for evil! What starts, what wanderings of imagination, are we continually subject to! And how many are the temptations which we have to expect even from these innocent infirmities!

4. Consider, Thirdly, what is the present situation of even those that fear God. They dwell in the ruins of a disordered world, among men that know not God, that care not for him, and whose heart is fully set in them to do evil. How many are forced to cry out, “Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech; to have my habitations among the tents of Kedar!” among the enemies of God and man. How immensely out-numbered are those that would do well, by them that neither fear God nor regard man! And how striking is Cowley’s observation: “If a man that was armed cap-a-pie was closed in by a thousand naked Indians, their number would have them such advantage over him that it would be scarce possible for him to escape. What hope then would there be for a naked, unarmed man to escape, who was surrounded by a thousand armed men?” Now, this is the case of every good man. He is not armed either with force or fraud, and is turned out, naked as he is, among thousands that are armed with the whole armour of Satan, and provided with all the weapons which the prince of this world can supply out of the armory of hell. If then he is not destroyed, yet how must a good man be tempted in the midst of this evil world!

5. But is it only from wicked men that temptations arise to them that fear God? It is very natural to imagine this; and almost every one thinks so. Hence how many of us have said in our hearts, “O if my lot were but cast among
good men, among those that loved or even feared God, I should be free from all these temptations!” Perhaps you
would: Probably you would not find the same sort of temptations which you have now to encounter. But you
would surely meet with temptations of some other kind, which you would find equally hard to bear. For even
good men, in general, though sin has not dominion over the, yet are not freed from the remains of it. They have
still the remains of an evil heart, ever prone to “depart from the living God.” They have the seeds of pride, of
anger, of foolish desire; indeed, of every unholy temper. And any of these, if they do not continually watch and
pray, may, and naturally will, spring up, and trouble, not themselves only, but all that are round about them. We
must not therefore depend upon finding no temptation from those that fear, yea, in a measure love, God. Much
less must we be surprised, if some of those who once loved God in sincerity, should lay greater temptations in
our way than many of those that never knew him.

6. “But can we expect to find any temptation from those that are perfected in love?” This is an important question,
and deserves a particular consideration. I answer, First, You may find every kind of temptation from those who
suppose they are perfected when indeed they are not: And so you may, Secondly, from those who once really
were so, but are now moved from their steadfastness. And if you are not aware of this, if you think they are still
what they were once, the temptation will be harder to bear. Nay, Thirdly, even those who “stand fast in liberty
wherewith Christ has made them free,” [Gal. 5:1] who are now really perfect in love, may still be an occasion of
temptation to you; for they are still encompassed with infirmities. They may be dull of apprehension; they may
have natural heedlessness, or a treacherous memory; they may have too lively an imagination: And any of these
may cause little improprieties, either in speech or behaviour, which, though not sinful in themselves, may try all
the grace you have: Especially if you impute to perverseness of will (as it is very natural to do) what is really
owing to defect of memory, or weakness of understanding; -- if these appear to you to be voluntary mistakes,
which are really involuntary. So proper was the answer which a saint of God (now in Abraham’s bosom) gave
me some years ago, when I said, “Jenny, surely now your mistress and you can neither of you be a trial to
the other, as God has saved you both from sin!” “O, Sir,” said she, “if we are saved from sin, we still have
infirmities enough to try all the grace that God has given us!”

7. But besides evil men, do not evil spirits also continually surround us on every side? Do not Satan and his angels
continually go about seeking whom they may devour? Who is out of reach of their malice and subtlety? Not the
wisest or the best of the children of men. “The servant is not above his Master.” If then they tempted him, will
not they tempt us also? Yea, it may be, should God see good to permit, more or less, to the end of our lives. “No
temptation,” therefore, “hath taken us,” which we had not reason to expect, either from our body or soul; either
from evil spirits or evil men; yea, or even from good men, till our spirits return to God that gave them.

II.

1. Meantime, what a comfort it is to know, with the utmost certainty, that “God is faithful, who will not suffer us to
be tempted above what we are able.” He knoweth what our ability is, and cannot be mistaken. “He knoweth”
precisely “whereof we are made: He remembereth that we are but dust.” [Ps. 103:14] And we will suffer no
temptation to befall us but such as is proportioned to our strength.

Not only his justice requires this, which could not punish us for not resisting any temptation if it were so
disproportioned to our strength that it was impossible for us to resist it; not only his mercy, -- that tender mercy
which is over us, as well as over all his works, -- but, above all, his faithfulness: Seeing all his words are faithful
and true: and the whole tenor of his promises altogether agrees with that declaration, “As thy days, so thy
strength shall be.” [Deut. 33:25]

2. In that execrable slaughter-house, the Romish Inquisition, (most unfortunately called, The House of Mercy!) it is
the custom of those holy butchers, while they are tearing a man’s sinews upon the rack, to have the physician of
the house standing by. His business is, from time to time, to observe the eyes, the pulse, and other circumstances
of the sufferer, and to give notice when the torture has continued so long as it can without putting an end to his
life; that it may be preserved long enough for him to undergo the residue of their tortures. But notwithstanding all
the physician’s care, he is sometimes mistaken; and death puts a period to the sufferings of the patient before his
tormentors are aware. We may observe something like this in our own case. In whatever sufferings or
temptations we are, our great Physician never departs from us. He is about our bed, and about our path. He
observes every symptom of our distress, that it may not rise above our strength. And he cannot be mistaken
concerning us. He sees exactly how much we can endure with our present degree of strength. And if this is not sufficient, he can increase it to whatever degree it pleases him. Nothing, therefore, is more certain, than that, in consequence of his wisdom, as well as his justice, mercy, and faithfulness, he never will, he never can, suffer us to be tempted above that we are able: Above the strength which he either hath given already, or will give as soon as we need it.

III.

1. “He will with the temptation also” (this is the Third point we are to consider) “make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.”

The word GMDCUKP, which we render a way to escape, is extremely significant. The meaning of it is nearly expressed by the English word out-let; but more exact by the old word out-gate, still frequently used by the Scottish writers. It literally means a way out. And this God will either find our make; which He that hath all wisdom, as well as all power in heaven and earth, can never be at a loss how to do.

2. Either he makes a way to escape out of the temptation, by removing the occasion of it, or in the temptation; that is, the occasion remaining as it was, it is a temptation no longer. First, He makes a way to escape out of the temptation, by removing the occasion of it. The histories of mankind, of the Church in particular, afford us numberless instances of this. And many have occurred in our own memory, and within the little circle of our acquaintance. One of many I think it worth while to relate, as a memorable instance of the faithfulness of God, in making a way to escape out of temptation: - Elizabeth Chadsey, then living in London, (whose daughter is living at this day, and is no dishonour to her parent,) was advised to administer to her husband, who was supposed to leave much substance behind him. But when a full inquiry into his circumstances was made, it appeared that this supposition was utterly destitute of foundation; and that he not only left nothing at all behind him, but also was very considerably in debt. It was not long after his burial, that a person came to her house, and said, “Mrs. Chadsey, you are much indebted to your landlord, and he has sent me to demand the rent that is due to him.” She answered, “Sir, I have not so much money in the world: Indeed I have none at all!” “But,” said he, “have you nothing that will fetch money?” She replied, “Sir, you see all that I have. I have nothing in the house by these six little children.” “Then,” said he, “I must execute my writ, and carry you to Newgate. But it is a hard case. I will leave you here till to-morrow, and will go and try if I cannot persuade your landlord to give you time.” He returned the next morning, and said, “I have done all I can, I have used all the arguments I could think of, but your landlord is not to be moved. He vows, if I do not carry you to prison without delay, I shall go thither myself.” She answered, “You have done your part. The will of the Lord be done!” He said, “I will venture to make one trial more, and will come again in the morning.” He came in the morning, and said, “Mrs. Chadsey, God has undertaken your cause. None can give you any trouble now; for your landlord died last night. But he has left no will; and no one knows who is heir to the estate.”

3. Thus God is able to deliver out of temptations, by removing the occasion of them. But are there not temptations, the occasions of which cannot be taken away? Is it not a striking instance of this kind, which we have in a late publication? “I was walking,” says the writer of the letter, “over Dover cliffs, in a calm, pleasant evening with a person whom I tenderly loved, and to whom I was to be married in a few days. While we were engaged in earnest conversation, her foot slipped, she fell down, and I saw her dashed to pieces of the beach. I lifted up my hands, and cried out. ‘This evil admits of no remedy. I must now go mourning all my days! My wound is incurable. It is impossible I should ever find such another woman! One so every way fitted for me.’ I added in an agony, ‘This is such an affliction as even God himself cannot redress!’ And just as I uttered the words, I awoke: For it was a dream!” Just so can God remove any possible temptation; making it like a dream when one waketh!

4. Thus is God able to deliver out of temptation, by taking away the very ground of it. And he is equally able to deliver in the temptation; which, perhaps, is the greatest deliverance of all. I mean, suffering the occasion to remain as it was, he will take away the bitterness of it; so that it shall not be a temptation at all, but only an occasion of thanksgiving. How many proofs of this have the children of God, even in their daily experience! How frequently are they encompassed with trouble, or visited with pain or sickness! And when they cry unto the Lord, at some times he takes away the cup from them: He removes the trouble, or sickness, or pain; and it is as though it never had been: At other times he does not make any outward change; outward trouble, or pain, or sickness continues; but the consolations of the Holy One so increase, as to over-balance them all; and they can
boldly declare,

Labour is rest, and pain is sweet,
When thou, my God, art near.

5. An eminent instance of this kind of deliverance is that which occurs in the Life of that excellent man, the Marquis de Renty. When he was in a violent fit of the rheumatism, a friend asked him, “Sir, are you in much pain?” He answered, “My pains are extreme: But through the mercy of God, I give myself up, not to them, but to him.” It was in the same spirit that my own father answered, though exhausted with a severe illness, (an ulcer in the bowels, which had given him little rest day or night, for upwards of seven months.) when I asked, “Sir, are you in pain now?” He answered, with a strong and loud voice, “God does indeed chasten me with pain; yea, all my bones with strong pain. But I thank him for all; I bless him for all; I love him for all.”

6. We may observe one more instance of a somewhat similar kind, in the Life of the Marquis de Renty. When his wife, whom he very tenderly loved, was exceeding ill, and supposed to be near death, a friend took the liberty to inquire how he felt himself on the occasion. He replied, “I cannot but say, that this trial affects me in the most tender part. I am exquisitely sensible of my loss. I feel more than it is possible to express. And yet I am so satisfied, that the will of God is done, and not the will of a vile sinner, that, were it not for fear of giving offence to others, I could dance and sing!” Thus the merciful, the just, the faithful God, will, in one way or other, “in every temptation make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.”

7. This whole passage is fruitful of instruction. Some of the lessons which we may learn from it are,

First, “Let him that most assuredly standeth, take heed lest he fall” into murmuring; lest he say in his hear, “Surely no one’s case is like mine; no one was ever tried like me.” Yea, ten thousand.

“There was no temptation taken you,” but such as is “common to man;” such as you might reasonably expect, if you considered what you are; a sinner born to die; a sinful inhabitant of a mortal body, liable to numberless inward and outward sufferings; -- and where you are; in a shattered, disordered world. Surrounded by evil men, and evil spirits. Consider this, and you will not repine at the common lot, the general condition of humanity.

8. Secondly. “Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall;” lest he tempt God, by thinking or saying, “This is insupportable; this is too hard; I can never get through it; my burden is heavier that I can bear.” Not so; unless something is too hard for God. He will not suffer you to be “tempted above that ye are able.” He proportions the burden to your strength. If you want more strength, “ask, and it shall be given you.”

9. Thirdly. “Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall;” lest he tempt God by unbelief; by distrusting his faithfulness. Hath he said, “in every temptation he will make a way to escape?” And shall he not do it? Yea, verily;

And far above thy thought
His counsel shall appear,
When fully he the work hath wrought
That caused they needless fear.

10. Let us then receive every trial with calm resignation, and with humble confidence that He who hath all power, all wisdom, all mercy, and all faithfulness, will first support us in every temptation, and then deliver us out of all: So that in the end all things shall work together for good, and we shall happily experience, that all these things were for our profit, that we “might be partakers of his holiness.”

John Wesley
SERMON 83

(text of the 1872 edition)
ON PATIENCE

“Let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” James 1:4.

1. “My brethren,” says the Apostle in the preceding verse, “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” At first view, this may appear a strange direction; seeing most temptations are, “for the present, not joyous, but grievous.” Nevertheless ye know by your own experience, that “the trial of your faith worketh patience.” And if “patience have its perfect work, ye shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

2. It is not to any particular person, or Church, that the Apostle gives this instruction; but to all who are partakers of like precious faith, and are seeking after that common salvation. For as long as any of us are upon earth, we are in the region of temptation. He who came into the world to save his people from their sins, did not come to save them from temptation. He himself “knew no sin;” yet while he was in this vale of tears, “he suffered being tempted;” and herein also “left us an example, that we should tread in his steps.” We are liable to a thousand temptations, from the corruptible body variously affecting the soul. The soul itself, encompassed as it is with infirmities, exposes us to ten thousand more. And how many are the temptations which we meet with even from the good men (such, at least, they are in part, in their general character) with whom we are called to converse from day to day! Yet what are these to the temptations we may expect to meet with from an evil world? Seeing we all, in effect, “dwell with Mesech, and have our habitation in the tents of Kedar.” Add to this, that the most dangerous of our enemies are not those that assault us openly. No:

Angels our march oppose,
Who still in strength excel:
Our secret, sworn, eternal foes,
Countless, invisible!

For is not our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,” with all his infernal legions, still going “about seeking whom he may devour?” This is the case with all the children of men; yea, and with all the children of God, as long as they sojourn in this strange land. Therefore, if we do not wilfully and carelessly rush into them, yet we shall surely “fall into divers temptations;” temptations innumerable as the stars of heaven; and those varied and complicated a thousand ways. But, instead of counting this a loss, as unbelievers would do, “count it all joy; knowing that the trial of your faith,” even when it is “tried as by fire,” “worketh patience.” But “let patience have its perfect work, and ye shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

3. But what is Patience? We do not now speak of a heathen virtue; neither of a natural indolence; but of a gracious temper, wrought in the heart of a believer, by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is a disposition to suffer whatever pleases God, in the manner and for the time that pleases him. We thereby hold the middle way, neither despising our sufferings, making little of them, passing over them lightly, as if they were owing to chance, or second causes; nor, on the other hand, affected too much, unnerved, dissolved, sinking under them. We may observe, the proper object of patience is suffering, either in body or mind. Patience does not imply the not feeling this: It is not apathy or insensibility. It is at an equal distance from stoical stupidity; yea, at an equal distance from fretfulness or dejection. The patient believer is preserved from falling into either of these extremes, by considering, -- Who is the Author of all his suffering? Even God his Father; -- What is the motive of his giving us to suffer? Not so properly his justice as his love; -- and, What is the end of it? Our “profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.”

4. Very nearly related to patience is meekness, if it be not rather a species of it. For may it not be defined, patience of injuries; particularly affronts, reproach, or unjust censure? This teaches not to return evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing. Our blessed Lord himself seems to place a peculiar value upon this temper. This he peculiarly calls us to learn of him, if we would find rest for our souls.

5. But what may we understand by the work of patience? “Let patience have its perfect work.” It seems to mean, let it have its full fruit or effect. And what is the fruit which the Spirit of God is accustomed to produce hereby, in the heart of a believer? One immediate fruit of patience is peace: A sweet tranquillity of mind; a serenity of spirit, which can never be found, unless where patience reigns. And this peace often rises into joy. Even in the midst of various temptations, those that are enabled “in patience to possess their souls,” can witness, not only quietness of spirit, but triumph and exultation. This both
Lays the rough paths of peevish nature even,
And opens in each breast a little heaven.

6. How lively is the account which the Apostle Peter gives not only of the peace and joy, but of the hope and love, which God works in those patient sufferers “who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation!” Indeed he appears herein to have an eye to this very passage of St. James: “Though ye are grieved for a season, with manifold temptations,” (the very word RQKMKNQKLy RGKTCUOQKL,) “that the trial of your faith” (the same expression which was used by St. James) “may be found to praise, and honour, and glory, at the revelation of Jesus Christ; whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” See here the peace, the joy, and the love, which, through the mighty power of God, are the fruit or “work of patience!”

7. And as peace, hope, joy, and love are the fruits of patience, both springing from, and confirmed by it, so is also rational, genuine courage, which indeed cannot subsist without patience. The brutal courage, or rather fierceness, of a lion may probably spring from impatience; but true fortitude, the courage of a man, springs from just the contrary temper. Christian zeal is likewise confirmed and increased by patience, and so is activity in every good work; the same Spirit inciting us to be Patient in bearing ill, and doing well; making us equally willing to do and suffer the whole will of God.

8. But what is the perfect work of patience? Is it anything less than the “perfect love of God,” constraining us to love every soul of man, “even as Christ loved us?” Is it not the whole of religion, the whole “mind which was also in Christ Jesus?” Is it not “the renewal of our soul in the image of God, after the likeness of him that created us?” And is not the fruit of this, the constant resignation of ourselves, body and spirit, to God; entirely giving up all we are, all we have, and all we love, as a holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God through the Son of his love? It seems this is “the perfect work of patience,” consequent upon the trial of our faith.

9. But how does this work differ from that gracious work which is wrought in every believer, when he first finds redemption in the blood of Jesus, even the remission of his sins? Many persons that are not only upright of heart, but that fear, nay, and love God, have not spoken warily upon this head, not according to the oracles of God. They have spoken of the work of sanctification, taking the word in its full sense, as if it were quite of another kind, as if it differed entirely from that which is wrought in justification. But this is a great and dangerous mistake, and has a natural tendency to make us undervalue that glorious work of God which was wrought in us when we were justified: Whereas in that moment when we are justified freely by his grace, when we are accepted through the Beloved, we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit. And there is as great a change wrought in our souls when we are born of the Spirit, as was wrought in our bodies when we are born of a woman. There is, in that hour, a general change from inward sinfulness, to inward holiness. The love of the creature is changed to the love of the Creator; the love of the world into the love of God. Earthly desires, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life, are, in that instant, changed, by the mighty power of God, into heavenly desires. The whirlwind of our will is stopped in its mid career, and sinks down into the will of God. Pride and haughtiness subside into lowliness of heart; as do anger, with all turbulent and unruly passions, into calmness, meekness, and gentleness. In a word, the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, gives place to “the mind that was in Christ Jesus.”

10. "Well, but what more than this can be implied in entire sanctification?” It does not imply any new kind of holiness: Let no man imagine this. From the moment we are justified, till we give up our spirits to God, love is the fulfilling of the law; of the whole evangelical law, which took place of the Adamic law, when the first promise of “the seed of the woman” was made. Love is the sum of Christian sanctification; it is the one kind of holiness, which is found, only in various degrees, in the believers who are distinguished by St. John into “little children, young men, and fathers.” The difference between one and the other properly lies in the degree of love. And herein there is as great a difference in the spiritual, as in the natural sense, between fathers, young men, and babes.

Every one that is born of God, though he be as yet only a “babe in Christ,” has the love of God in his heart; the love of his neighbour; together with lowliness, meekness, and resignation. But all of these are then in a low degree, in proportion to the degree of his faith. The faith of a babe in Christ is weak,
generally mingled with doubts or fears; with doubts, whether he has not deceived himself; or fear, that he shall not endure to the end. And if, in order to prevent those perplexing doubts, or to remove those tormenting fears, he catches hold of the opinion that a true believer cannot make shipwreck of the faith, experience will sooner or later show that it is merely the staff of a broken reed, which will be so far from sustaining him, that it will only enter into his hand and pierce it. But to return: In the same proportion as he grows in faith, he grows in holiness; he increases in love, lowliness, meekness, in every part of the image of God; till it pleases God, after he is thoroughly convinced of inbred sin, of the total corruption of his nature, to take it all away; to purify his heart and cleanse him from all uncleanness; to fulfil that promise which he make first to his ancient people, and in them to the Israel of God in all ages: “I 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.”

It is not easy to conceive what a difference there is, between that which he experiences now, and that which he experienced before. Till this universal change was wrought in his soul, all his holiness was mixed. He was humble, but not entirely; his humility was mixed with pride: He was meek; but his meekness was frequently interrupted by anger, or some uneasy and turbulent passion. His love of God was frequently damped, by the love of some creature; the love of his neighbour, by evil surmising, or some thought, if not temper, contrary to love. His will was not wholly melted down into the will of God: But although in general he could say, “I come ‘not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me;’” yet now and then nature rebelled, and he could not clearly say, “Lord, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” His whole soul is now consistent with itself; there is no jarring string. All his passions flow in a continual stream, with an even tenor to God. To him that is entered into this rest, you may truly say,

Calm thou ever art within,
All unruffled, all serene!

There is no mixture of any contrary affections: All is peace and harmony after. Being filled with love, there is no more interruption of it, than of the beating of his heart; and continual love bringing continual joy in the Lord, he rejoices evermore. He converses continually with the God whom he loves, unto whom in everything he gives thanks. And as he now loves God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength; so Jesus now reigns alone in his heart, the Lord of every motion there.

11. But it may be inquired, In what manner does God work this entire, this universal change in the soul of a believer? This strange work, which so many will not believe, though we declare it unto them? Does he work it gradually, by slow degrees; or instantaneously, in a moment? How many are the disputes upon this head, even among the children of God! And so there will be, after all that ever was, or ever can be said upon it. For many will still say, with the famous Jew, Non persuades, etiamsi persuaseris: That is, “Thou shalt not persuade me, though thou dost persuade me.” And they will be the more resolute herein, because the Scriptures are silent upon the subject; because the point is not determined, at least not in express terms, in any part of the oracles of God. Every man therefore may abound in his own sense, provided he will allow the same liberty to his neighbour; provided he will not be angry at those who differ from his opinion, nor entertain hard thoughts concerning them. Permit me likewise to add one thing more: Be the change instantaneous or gradual, see that you never rest till it is wrought in your own soul, if you desire to dwell with God in glory.

12. This premised, in order to throw what light I can upon this interesting question, I will simply relate what I have seen myself in the course of many years. Four or five and forty years ago, when I had no distinct views of what the Apostle meant by exhorting us to “leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on to perfection,” two or three persons in London, whom I knew to be truly sincere, desired to give me an account of their experience. It appeared exceeding strange, being different from any that I had heard before; but exactly similar to the preceding account of entire sanctification. The next year, two or three more persons at Bristol, and two or three in Kingswood, coming to me severally, gave me exactly the same account of their experience. A few years after, I desired all those in London who made the same profession, to come to me all together at the Foundery, that I might be thoroughly satisfied. I desired that man of God, Thomas Walsh, to give us the meeting there. When we met, first one of us, and the the other, asked them the most searching questions we could devise. They answered every one without hesitation, and with the utmost simplicity, so that we were fully persuaded, they did not deceive themselves. In the years 1759, 1760, 1761, and 1762, their numbers multiplied exceedingly, not only in
London and Bristol, but in various parts of Ireland as well as England. Not trusting to the testimony of others, I carefully examined most of these myself; and in London alone I found six hundred and fifty-two members of our society who were exceedingly clear in their experience, and of whose testimony I could see no reason to doubt.

I believe no year has passed since that time wherein God has not wrought the same work in many others; but sometimes in one part of England or Ireland, sometimes in another; -- as “the wind bloweth where it listeth;” -- and every one of these (after the most careful inquiry, I have not found one exception either in Great Britain or Ireland) has declared that his deliverance from sin was instantaneous; that the change was wrought in a moment. Had half of these, or one third, or one in twenty, declared it was gradually wrought in them, I should have believed this, with regard to them, and thought that some were gradually sanctified and some instantaneously. But as I have not found, in so long a space of time, a single person speaking thus; as all who believe they are sanctified, declare with one voice, that the change was wrought in a moment, I cannot but believe that sanctification is commonly, if not always, an instantaneous work.

13. But however that question be decided, whether sanctification, in the full sense of the word, be wrought instantaneously or gradually, how my we attain to it? “What shall we do,” said the Jews to our Lord, “that we may work the works of God?” His answer will suit those that ask, What shall we do, that this work of God may be wrought in us? “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” On this one work all the others depend. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and all has wisdom, and power, and faithfulness are engaged on thy side. In this, as in all other instances, “by grace we are saved through faith.” Sanctification too is “not of works, lest any man should boast.” “It is the gift of God,” and is to be received by plain, simple faith. Suppose you are now labouring to “abstain from all appearance of evil,” “zealous of good works,” and walking diligently and carefully in all the ordinances of God; there is then only one point remaining: The voice of God to your soul is, “Believe, and be saved.” [See the Sermon on “The Scripture Way of Salvation.” (editor’s note)] First, believe that God has promised to save you from all sin, and to fill you with all holiness. Secondly, believe that he is able thus “to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through him.” Thirdly, believe that he is willing, as well as able, to save you to the uttermost; to purify you from all sin, and fill up all your heart with love. Believe, Fourthly, that he is not only able, but willing to do it now. Not when you come to die; not at any distant time; not to-morrow, but to-day. He will then enable you to believe, it is done, according to his word: And then “patience shall have its perfect work; that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

14. Ye shall then be perfect. The Apostle seems to mean by this expression, VGNGKQK, ye shall be wholly delivered from every evil work; from every evil word; from every sinful thought; yea, from every evil desire, passion, temper; from all inbred corruption, from all remains of the carnal mind, from the body of sin; and ye shall be renewed in the spirit of your mind, in every right temper, after the image of Him that created you, in righteousness and true holiness. Ye shall be entire, JQNQMNGTQK, (The same word which the Apostle uses to the Christians in Thessalonica: [1 Thess. 5:23]) This seems to refer, not so much to the kind as to the degree of holiness; as if he had said, “Ye shall enjoy as high a degree of holiness as is consistent with your present state of pilgrimage;” -- and ye shall want nothing; the Lord being your Shepherd, your Father, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier, your God, and your all, will feed you with the bread of heaven, and give you meat enough. He will lead you forth beside the waters of comfort, and keep you every moment: So that loving him with all your heart, (which is the sum of all perfection,) you will “rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks,” till “an abundant entrance is ministered unto you into his everlasting kingdom!

John Wesley
SERMON 85
(text from the 1872 edition)

ON WORKING OUT OUR OWN SALVATION

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of
1. Some great truths, as the being and attributes of God, and the difference between moral good and evil, were known, in some measure, to the heathen world. The traces of them are to be found in all nations; So that, in some sense, it may be said to every child of man, “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; even to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” With this truth he has, in some measure, “enlightened every one that cometh into the world.” And hereby they that “have not the law,” that have no written law, “are a law unto themselves.” They show “the work of the law,” -- the substance of it, though not the letter, -- “written in their hearts,” by the same hand which wrote the commandments on the tables of stone; “Their conscience also bearing them witness,” whether they act suitably thereto or not.

2. But there are two grand heads of doctrine, which contain many truths of the most important nature, of which the most enlightened Heathens in the ancient world were totally ignorant; as are also the most intelligent Heathens that are now on the face of the earth; I mean those which relate to the eternal Son of God, and the Spirit of God: To the Son, giving himself to be “a propitiation for the sins of the world;” and to the Spirit of God, renewing men in that image of God wherein they were created. For after all the pains which ingenious and learned men have taken (that great man, the Chevalier Ramsay, in particular) to find some resemblance of these truths in the immense rubbish of heathen authors, the resemblance is so exceeding faint, as not to be discerned but by a very lively imagination. Beside that, even this resemblance, faint as it was, is only to be found in the discourses of a very few; and those were the most improved and deeply-thinking men, in their several generations; while the innumerable multitudes that surrounded them were little better for the knowledge of the philosophers, but remained as totally ignorant even of these capital truths as were the beasts that perish.

3. Certain it is, that these truths were never known to the vulgar, the bulk of mankind, to the generality of men in any nation, till they were brought to light by the gospel. Notwithstanding a spark of knowledge glimmering here and there, the whole earth was covered with darkness, till the Sun of Righteousness arose and scattered the shades of night. Since this day-spring from on high has appeared, a great light hath shined unto those who, till then, sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. And thousands of them in every age have known, “that God so loved the world, as to give his only Son, to the end that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And being entrusted with the oracles of God, they have known that God hath also given us his Holy Spirit, who “worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

4. How remarkable are those words of the Apostle, which precede these! “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God,” -- the incommunicable nature of God from eternity -- “counted it no act of robbery,” -- (that is the precise meaning of the word,) no invasion of any other’s prerogative, but his own unquestionable right, -- “to be equal with God.” The word implies both the fullness and the supreme height of the Godhead; to which are opposed the two words, he emptied and he humbled himself. He “emptied himself” of that divine fullness, veiled his fullness from the eyes of men and angels; “taking,” and by that very act emptying himself, “the form of a servant; being made in the likeness of man,” a real man, like other men. “And being found in fashion as a man,” -- a common man, without any peculiar beauty or excellency, -- “he humbled himself” to a still greater degree, “becoming obedient” to God, though equal with him, “even unto death; yea, the death of the cross:” The greatest instance both of humiliation and obedience. [Phil. 2:5-11]

Having proposed the example of Christ, the Apostle exhorts them to secure the salvation which Christ hath purchased for them: “Therefore, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

In these comprehensive words we may observe,

I. That grand truth, which ought never to be out of our remembrance, “It is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.”

II. The improvement we ought to make of it: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

III. The connexion between them: “It is God that worketh in you;” therefore “work out your own salvation.”

I.

1. First. We are to observe that great and important truth which ought never to be out of our remembrance: “It is
God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The meaning of these words may be made more plain by a small transposition of them: “It is God that of his good pleasure worketh in you both to will and to do.” This position of the words, connecting the phrase, of his good pleasure, with the word worketh, removes all imagination of merit from man, and gives God the whole glory of his own work. Otherwise, we might have had some room for boasting, as if it were our own desert, some goodness in us, or some good thing done by us, which first moved God to work. But this expression cuts off all such vain conceits, and clearly shows his motive to work lay wholly in himself—in his own mere grace, in his unmerited mercy.

2. It is by this alone he is impelled to work in man both to will and to do. The expression is capable of two interpretations; both of which are unquestionably true. First, to will, may include the whole of inward, to do, the whole of outward, religion. And if it be thus understood, it implies, that it is God that worketh both inward and outward holiness. Secondly, to will, may imply every good desire; to do, whatever results therefrom. And then the sentence means, God breathes into us every good desire, and brings every good desire to good effect.

3. The original words, VqýSGNGKP and VqýGPGTIGKP, seem to favor the latter construction: VqýSGNGKP, which we render to will, plainly including every good desire, whether relating to our tempers, words, or actions; to inward or outward holiness. And VqýGPGTIGKP, which we render to do, manifestly implies all that power from on high, all that energy which works in us every right disposition, and then furnishes us for every good word and work.

4. Nothing can so directly tend to hide pride from man as a deep, lasting conviction of this. For if we are thoroughly sensible that we have nothing which we have not received, how can we glory as if we had not received it? If we know and feel that the very first motion of good is from above, as well as the power which conducts it to the end; if it is God that not only infuses every good desire, but that accompanies and follows it, else it vanishes away; then it evidently follows, that “he who glorieth” must “glory in the Lord.”

II.

1. Proceed we now to the Second point: If God worketh in you, then work out your own salvation. The original word rendered, work out, implies the doing a thing thoroughly. Your own; for you yourselves must do this, or it will be left undone forever. Your own salvation: Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) prevenient grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed repentance; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone.

Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, “through grace,” we “are saved by faith;” consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, and restored to the favour of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, and restored to the image of God. All experience, as well as Scripture, shows this salvation to be both instantaneous and gradual. It begins the moment we are justified, in the holy, humble, gentle, patient love of God and man. It gradually increases from that moment, as “a grain of mustard-seed, which, at first, is the least of all seeds,” but afterwards puts forth large branches, and becomes a great tree; till, in another instant, the heart is cleansed, from all sin, and filled with pure love to God and man. But even that love increases more and more, till we “grow up in all things into him that is our Head;” till we attain “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

2. But how are we to work out this salvation? The Apostle answers, “With fear and trembling.” There is another passage of St. Paul wherein the same expression occurs, which may give light to this: “Servants, obey your masters according to the flesh;” -- according to the present state of things, although sensible that in a little time the servant will be free from his master, -- “with fear and trembling.” This is a proverbial expression, which cannot be understood literally. For what master could bear, much less require, his servant to stand trembling and quaking before him? And the following words utterly exclude this meaning: “In singleness of heart;” with a single eye to the will and providence of God; “not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;” doing whatever they do as the will of God, and, therefore, with their might. (Eph. 6:5, &c.) It is easy to see that these strong expressions of the Apostle clearly imply two things: First,
that everything be done with the utmost earnestness of spirit, and with all care and caution: (Perhaps more
directly referring to the former word, OGVCýHQDQW, with fear;) Secondly, that it be done with the utmost
diligence, speed, punctuality, and exactness; not improbably referring to the latter word, OGVCýVTQOQW,
with trembling.

3. How easily may we transfer this to the business of life, the working out our own salvation! With the same
temper, and in the same manner, that Christian servants serve their masters that are upon earth, let other
Christians labour to serve their Master that is in heaven: that is, First, with the utmost earnestness of spirit, with
all possible care and caution; and, secondly, with the utmost diligence, speed, punctuality, and exactness.

4. But what are the steps which the Scripture directs us to take, in the working out of our own salvation? The
Prophet Isaiah gives us a general answer, touching the first steps which we are to take: “Cease to do evil; learn to
do well.” If ever you desire that God should work in you that faith whereof cometh both present and eternal
salvation, by the grace already given, fly from all sin as from the face of a serpent; carefully avoid every evil
word and work; yea, abstain from all appearance of evil. And “learn to do well:” Be zealous of good works, of
works of piety, as well as works of mercy; family prayer, and crying to God in secret. Fast in secret, and “your
Father which seeth in secret, he will reward you openly.” “Search the Scriptures:” Hear them in public, read them
in private, and meditate therein. At every opportunity, be a partaker of the Lord’s Supper. “Do this in
remembrance of him: and he will meet you at his own table. Let your conversation be with the children of God;
and see that it “be in grace, seasoned with salt.” As ye have time, do good unto all men; to their souls and to their
bodies. And herein “be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” It then only remains
that ye deny yourselves and take up your cross daily.

Deny yourselves every pleasure which does not prepare you for taking pleasure in God, and willingly embrace
every means of drawing near to God, though it be a cross, though it be grievous to flesh and blood. Thus when
you have redemption in the blood of Christ, you will “go on to perfection;” till “walking in the light as he is in
the light,” you are enabled to testify, that “he is faithful and just,” not only to “forgive” your “sins,” but to
“cleanse” you from all unrighteousness.” [1 John 1:9]

III.

1. “But,” say some, “what connexion is there between the former and the latter clause of this sentence? Is there not
rather a flat opposition between the one and the other? If it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do, what
need is there of our working? Does not his working thus supersede the necessity of our working at all? Nay, does it
not render our working impracticable, as well as unnecessary? For if we allow that God does all, what is there
left for us to do?”

2. Such is the reasoning of flesh and blood. And, at first hearing, it is exceeding plausible. But it is not solid; as will
evidently appear, if we consider the matter more deeply. We shall then see there is no opposition between these,
“God works; therefore, do we work;” but, on the contrary, the closest connexion; and that in two respects. For,
First, God works; therefore you can work. Secondly, God works, therefore you must work.

3. First. God worketh in you; therefore you can work: Otherwise it would be impossible. If he did not work it would
be impossible for you to work out your own salvation. “With man this is impossible,” saith our Lord, “for a rich
man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Yea, it is impossible for any man, for any that is born of a woman,
unless God work in him. Seeing all men are by nature not only sick, but “dead in trespasses and sins,” it is not
possible for them to do anything well till God raises them from the dead. It was impossible for Lazarus to come
forth, till the Lord had given him life. And it is equally impossible for us to come out of our sins, yea, or to make
the least motion toward it, till He who hath all power in heaven and earth calls our dead souls into life.

4. Yet this is no excuse for those who continue in sin, and lay the blame upon their Maker, by saying, “It is God
only that must quicken us; for we cannot quicken our own souls.” For allowing that all the souls of men are dead
in sin by nature, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless
he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is
vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed prevenient grace. Every man
has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Every one has, sooner or later; good
desires; although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root, or produce any considerable
fruit. Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And every one, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.

5. Therefore inasmuch as God works in you, you are now able to work out your own salvation.

Since he worketh in you of his own good pleasure, without any merit of yours, both to will and to do, it is possible for you to fulfil all righteousness. It is possible for you to “love God, because he hath first loved us;” and to “walk in love,” after the pattern of our great Master. We know, indeed, that word of his to be absolutely true: “Without me ye can do nothing.” But on the other hand, we know, every believer can say “I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.”

6. Meantime let us remember that God has joined these together in the experience of every believer; and therefore we must take care, not to imagine they are ever to be put asunder. We must beware of that mock humility which teacheth us to say, in excuse for our wilful disobedience, “O, I can do nothing!” and stops there, without once naming the grace of God. Pray, think twice.

Consider what you say. I hope you wrong yourself; for if it be really true that you can do nothing, then you have no faith. And if you have not faith, you are in a wretched condition: You are not in a state of salvation. Surely it is not so. You can do something, through Christ strengthening you. Stir up the spark of grace which is now in you, and he will give you more grace.

7. Secondly, God worketh in you; therefore you must work: You must be “workers together with him,” (they are the very words of the Apostle,) otherwise he will cease working. The general rule on which his gracious dispensions invariably proceed is this: “Unto him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not,” -- that does not improve the grace already given, -- “shall be taken away what he assuredly hath.” (So the words ought to be rendered.) Even St. Augustine, who is generally supposed to favour the contrary doctrine, makes that just remark, Qui fecit nos sine nobis, non salvabit nos sine nobis: “He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves.” He will not save us unless we “save ourselves from this untoward generation;” unless we ourselves “fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life;” unless we “agonize to enter in at the strait gate,” “deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily,” and labour by every possible means to “make our own calling and election sure.”

8. ”Labour” then, brethren, “not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life.” Say with our blessed Lord, though in a somewhat different sense, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” In consideration that he still worketh in you, be never “weary of well-doing.” Go on, in virtue of the grace of God, preventing, accompanying, and following you, in “the work of faith, in the patience of hope, and in the labour of love.” “Be ye steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” And “the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep,” (Jesus,) “make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever!”

John Wesley
SERMON 87
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE DANGER OF RICHES

“They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” 1 Tim. 6:9.

1. How innumerable are the ill consequences which have followed from men’s not knowing, or not considering, this great truth! And how few are there even in the Christian world, that either know or duly consider it! Yea,
how small is the number of those, even among real Christians, who understand and lay it to heart! Most of these
too pass it very lightly over, scarce remembering there is such a text in the Bible. And many put such a
construction upon it, as makes it of no manner of effect. “They that will be rich,” say they, “that is, will be rich at
all events, who Will be rich right or wrong; that are resolved to carry their point, to compass this end, whatever
means they use to attain it; they ‘fall into temptation,’ and into all the evils enumerated by the Apostle.” But
truly if this were all the meaning of the text, it might as well have been out of the Bible.

2. This is so far from being the whole meaning of the text, that it is no part of its meaning. The Apostle does not
here speak of gaining riches unjustly, but of quite another thing: His words are to be taken in their plain obvious
sense, without any restriction or qualification whatsoever. St. Paul does not say, “They that will be rich by evil
means, by theft, robbery, oppression, or extortion; they that will be rich by fraud or dishonest art; but simply,
“they that will be rich.” These, allowing, supposing the means they use to be ever so innocent, “fall into
temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and
perdition.”

3. But who believes that? Who receives it as the truth of God? Who is deeply convinced of it? Who preaches this?
Great is the company of preachers at this day, regular and irregular; but who of them all openly and explicitly,
preaches this strange doctrine? It is the keen observation of a great man, “The pulpit is a fearful preacher’s
strong-hold.” But who even in his strong-hold, has the courage to declare so unfashionable a truth? I do not
remember that in threescore years I have heard one sermon preached upon this subject. And what author, within
the same term, has declared it from the press? At least, in the English tongue? I do not know one. I have neither
seen nor heard of any such author. I have seen two or three who just touch upon it; but none that treats of it
professedly.

I have myself frequently touched upon it in preaching, and twice in what I have published to the world: Once in
explaining our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, and once in the discourse on the “Mammon of unrighteousness;”
but I have never yet either published or preached any sermon expressly upon the subject. It is high time I
should;—that I should at length speak as strongly and explicitly as I can, in order to leave a full and clear
testimony behind me, whenever it pleases God to call me hence.

4. O that God would give me to speak right and forcible words; and you to receive them in honest and humble
hearts! Let it not be said, “They sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words; but they will not do them.
Thou art unto them as one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear thy words,
but they do them not!” O that ye may “not be forgetful hearers, but doers of the word,” that ye may be “blessed in
your deed!” In this hope I shall endeavour,

I. To explain the Apostle’s words. And,
II. To apply them.

But O! “who is sufficient for these things?” Who is able to stem the general torrent? To combat all the prejudices,
not only of the vulgar, but of the learned and the religious world? Yet nothing is too hard for God! Still his grace is
sufficient for us. In his name, then, and by his strength I will endeavour.

I. To explain the words of the Apostle.

1. And, First, let us consider, what it is to be rich. What does the Apostle mean by this expression?

The preceding verse fixes the meaning of that: “Having food and raiment,” (literally coverings; for the word
includes lodging as well as clothes) “let us be therewith content.” “But they that will be rich;” that is, who will
have more than these; more than food and coverings. It plainly follows, whatever is more than these is, in the
sense of the Apostle, riches; whatever is above the plain necessaries, or at most conveniences, of life. Whoever
has sufficient food to eat, and raiment to put on, with a place where to lay his head, and something over, is rich.

2. Let us consider, Secondly, What is implied in that expression, “They that will be rich?” And does not this imply,
First, they that desire to be rich, to have more than food and coverings; they that seriously and deliberately desire
more than food to eat, and raiment to put on, and a place where to lay their head, more than the plain necessaries
and conveniences of life? All, at least, who allow themselves in this desire, who see no harm in it, desire to be
rich.
3. And so do, Secondly, all those that calmly, deliberately, and of set purpose endeavour after more than food and coverings; that aim at and endeavour after, not only so much worldly substance as will procure them the necessaries and conveniences of life, but more than this, whether to lay it up, or lay it out in superfluities. All these undeniably prove their “desire to be rich” by their endeavours after it.

4. Must we not, Thirdly, rank among those that desire to be rich, all that, in fact “lay up treasures on earth?” a thing as expressly and clearly forbidden by our Lord as either adultery or murder. It is allowed, (1.) That we are to provide necessaries and conveniences for those of our own household:

(2.) That men in business are to lay up as much as is necessary for the carrying on of that business:

(3.) That we are to leave our children what will supply them with necessaries and conveniences after we have left the world: and (4.) That we are to provide things honest in the sight of all men, so as to “owe no man anything.” But to lay up any more, when this is done, is what our Lord has flatly forbidden. When it is calmly and deliberately done, it is a clear proof of our desiring to be rich. And thus to lay up money is no more consistent with good conscience, than to throw it into the sea.

5. We must rank among them, Fourthly, all who possess more of this world’s goods than they use according to the will of the Donor: I should rather say, of the Proprietor; for He only lends them to us as Stewards; reserving the property of them to himself. And, indeed, he cannot possibly do otherwise, seeing they are the work of his hands; he is, and must be, the possessor of heaven and earth. This is his unalienable right; a right he cannot divest himself of. And together with that portion of his goods which he hath lodged in our hands he has delivered to us a writing, specifying the purposes for which he has intrusted us with them. If therefore we keep more of them in our hands than is necessary for the preceding purposes, we certainly fall under the charge of “desiring to be rich.” Over and above, we are guilty of burying our Lord’s talent in the earth, and on that account are liable to be pronounced wicked, because unprofitable, servants.

6. Under this imputation of “desiring to be rich,” fall, Fifthly, all “lovers of money.” The word properly means, those that delight in money; those that take pleasure in it; those that seek their happiness therein; that brood over their gold and silver, bills or bonds. Such was the man described by the fine Roman painter, who broke out into that natural soliloquy:- . . .

Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo
Ipse domi simul ac nummos contemplor in arca.
[The following is Francis’s translation of these lines from Horace:
“Let them his on,
While, in my own opinion fully blest,
I count my money, and enjoy my chest.” -- Ed.]

If there are any vices which are not natural to man, I should imagine this is one; as money of itself does not seem to gratify any natural desire or appetite of the human mind; and as, during an observation of sixty years, I do not remember one instance of a man given up to the love of money, till he had neglected to employ this precious talent according to the will of his Master. After this, sin was punished by sin; and this evil spirit was permitted to enter into him.

7. But beside this gross sort of covetousness, the love of money, there is a more refined species of covetousness, mentioned by the great Apostle, RNGQPGZKC, -- which literally means a desire of having more; more than we have already. And those also come under the denomination of “they that will be rich.” It is true that this desire, under proper restrictions, is innocent; nay, commendable. But when it exceeds the bounds, (and how difficult is it not to exceed them!) then it comes under the present censure.

8. But who is able to receive these hard sayings? Who can believe that they are the great truths of God? Not many wise not many noble, not many famed for learning; none, indeed, who are not taught of God. And who are they whom God teaches? Let our Lord answer: “If any man be willing to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” Those who are otherwise minded will be so far from receiving it, that they will not be able to understand it. Two as sensible men as most in England sat down together, some time since, to read over and consider that plain discourse on, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.” After much deep consideration, one of them broke out, “Positively, I cannot understand it. Pray, do you understand it, Mr. L.?”
Mr. L. honestly replied, “Indeed, not I. I cannot conceive what Mr. W. means. I can make nothing at all of it.” So utterly blind is our natural understanding touching the truth of God!

9. Having explained the former part of the text, “They that will be rich,” and pointed out in the clearest manner I could, the persons spoken of; I will now endeavour, God being my helper, to explain what is spoken of them: “They fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” “They fall into temptation.” This seems to mean much more than simply, “they are tempted.” They enter into the temptation: They fall plump down into it. The waves of it compass them about, and cover them all over. Of those who thus enter into temptation, very few escape out of it. And the few that do are sorely scorched by it, though not utterly consumed. If they escape at all, it is with the skin of their teeth, and with deep wounds that are not easily healed.

10. They fall, Secondly, “into a snare,” the snare of the devil, which he hath purposely set in their way. I believe the Greek word properly means a gin, a steel trap, which shows no appearance of danger. But as soon as any creature touches the spring it suddenly closes; and either crushes its bones in pieces, or consigns it to inevitable ruin.

11. They fall, Thirdly, “into many foolish and hurtful desires;”—silly, senseless, fantastic; as contrary to reason, to sound understanding, as they are to religion; Hurtful, both to body and soul, tending to weaken, yea, destroy every gracious and heavenly temper: Destructive of that faith which is of the operation of God; of that hope which is full of immortality; of love to God and to our neighbour, and of every good word and work.

12. But what desires are these? This is a most important question, and deserves the deepest consideration.

In general they may all be summed up in one, the desiring happiness out of God. This includes, directly, or remotely, every foolish and hurtful desire. St. Paul expresses it by “loving the creature more than the Creator;” and by being “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” In particular they are (to use the exact and beautiful enumeration of St. John,) “the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life;” all of which the desire of riches naturally tends both to beget and to increase.

13. ”The desire of the flesh” is generally understood in far too narrow a meaning. It does not, as is commonly supposed, refer to one of the senses only, but takes in all the pleasures of sense, the gratification of any of the outward senses. It has reference to the taste in particular. How many thousands do we find at this day, in whom the ruling principle is, the desire to enlarge the pleasure of tasting! Perhaps they do not gratify this desire in a gross manner, so as to incur the imputation of intemperance; much less so as to violate health or impair their understanding by gluttony or drunkenness. But they live in a genteel, regular sensuality; in an elegant epicurism, which does not hurt the body, but only destroys the soul, keeping it at a distance from all true religion.

14. Experience shows that the imagination is gratified chiefly by means of the eye: Therefore, “the desire of the eyes,” in its natural sense, is the desiring and seeking happiness in gratifying the imagination. Now, the imagination is gratified either by grandeur, by beauty, or by novelty: Chiefly by the last; for neither grand nor beautiful objects please any longer than they are new.

15. Seeking happiness in learning, of whatever kind, falls under “the desire of the eyes;” whether it be in history, languages, poetry, or any branch of natural or experimental philosophy: Yea, we must include the several kinds of learning, such as Geometry, Algebra, and Metaphysics. For if our supreme delight be in any of these, we are herein gratifying “the desire of the eyes.”

16. ”The pride of life” (whatever else that very uncommon expression JgýCNCQPGKCýVQWýDKQW, may mean) seems to imply chiefly, the desire of honour, of the esteem, admiration, and applause of men; as nothing more directly tends both to beget and cherish pride than the honour that cometh of men. And as riches attract much admiration, and occasion much applause, they proportionably minister food for pride, and so may also be referred to this head.

17. Desire of ease is another of these foolish and hurtful desires; desire of avoiding every cross, every degree of trouble, danger, difficulty; a desire of slumbering out life, and going to heaven (as the vulgar say) upon a feather-bed. Everyone may observe how riches first beget, and then confirm and increase, this desire, making men more and more soft and delicate; more unwilling, and indeed more unable, to “take up their cross daily;” to “endure
18. Riches, either desired or possessed, naturally lead to some or other of these foolish and hurtful desires; and by affording the means of gratifying them all, naturally tend to increase them. And there is a near connexion between unholy desires, and every other unholy passion and temper. We easily pass from these to pride, anger, bitterness, envy, malice, revengefulness; to an head-strong, unadvisable, unreprovable spirit: Indeed to every temper that is earthly, sensual, or devilish. All these the desire or possession of riches naturally tends to create, strengthen, and increase.

19. And by so doing, in the same proportion as they prevail, they “pierce men through with many sorrows;” sorrows from remorse, from a guilty conscience; sorrows flowing from all the evil tempers which they inspire or increase; sorrows inseparable from those desires themselves, as every unholy desire is an uneasy desire; and sorrows from the contrariety of those desires to each other, whence it is impossible to gratify them all. And, in the end, “they drown” the body in pain, disease, “destruction,” and the soul in everlasting “perdition.”

II.

1. I am, in the Second place, to apply what has been said. And this is the principal point. For what avails the clearest knowledge, even of the most excellent things, even of the things of God, if it go no farther than speculation, if it be not reduced to practice? He that hath ears to hear, let him hear! And what he hears, let him instantly put in practice. O that God would give me the thing which I long for! That, before I go hence and am no more seen, I may see a people wholly devoted to God, crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them; a people truly given up to God, in body, soul, and substance! How cheerfully should I then say, “Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!”

2. I ask, then, in the name of God, Who of you “desire to be rich?” Which of you (ask your own hearts in the sight of God) seriously and deliberately desire (and perhaps applaud yourselves for so doing, as no small instance of your prudence) to have more than food to eat, and raiment to put on, and a house to cover you? Who of you desires to have more than the plain necessaries and conveniences of life? Stop! Consider! What are you doing? Evil is before you! Will you rush upon the point of a sword? By the grace of God, turn and live!

3. By the same authority I ask, Who of you are endeavouring to be rich? To procure for yourselves more than the plain necessaries and conveniences of life? Lay, each of you, your hand to your heart, and seriously inquire, “Am I of that number? Am I labouring, not only for what I want, but for more than I want?” May the Spirit of God say to everyone whom it concerns, “Thou art the man!”

4. I ask, “Thirdly, Who of you are in fact “laying up for yourselves treasures upon earth?” increasing in goods? Adding, as fast as you can, house to house, and field to field! As long as thou thus “dost well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee.” They will call thee a wise, a prudent man! A man that minds the main chance. Such is, and always has been, the wisdom of the world. But God saith unto thee, “‘Thou fool!’ art thou not ‘treasuring up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?’”

5. Perhaps you will ask, “But do not you yourself advise, to gain all we can, and to save all we can? And is it possible to do this without both desiring and endeavouring to be rich? Nay, suppose our endeavours are successful, without actually laying up treasures upon earth?” I answer, It is possible. You may gain all you can without hurting either your soul or body; you may save all you can, by carefully avoiding every needless expense; and yet never lay up treasures on earth, nor either desire or endeavour so to do.

6. Permit me to speak as freely of myself as I would of another man I gain all I can (namely, by writing) without hurting either my soul or body. I save all I can, not unwillingly wasting anything, not a sheet of paper, not a cup of water. I do not lay out anything, not a shilling, unless as a sacrifice to God. Yet by giving all I can, I am effectually secured from “laying up treasures upon earth.” Yea, and I am secured from either desiring or endeavouring, it as long as I give all I can. And that I do this, I call all that know me, both friends and foes, to testify.

7. But some may say, “Whether you endeavour it or no, you are undeniably rich. You have more than the necessaries of life.” I have. But the Apostle does not fix the charge, barely on possessing any quantity of goods,
but on possessing more than we employ according to the will of the Donor.

Two-and-forty years ago, having a desire to furnish poor people with cheaper, shorter, and plainer books than any I had seen, I wrote many small tracts, generally a penny a-piece; and afterwards several larger. Some of these had such a sale as I never thought of; and, by this means, I unawares became rich. But I never desired or endeavoured after it. And now that it is come upon me unawares, I lay up no treasures upon earth: I lay up nothing at all. My desire and endeavour, in this respect is to “wind my bottom round the year.” I cannot help leaving my books behind me whenever God calls me hence; but, in every other respect, my own hands will be my executors.

8. Herein, my brethren, let you that are rich, be even as I am. Do you that possess more than food and raiment ask: “What shall we do? Shall we throw into the sea what God hath given us?” God forbid that you should! It is an excellent talent: It may be employed much to the glory of God. Your way lies plain before your face; if you have courage, walk in it. Having gained, in a right sense, all you can, and saved all you can; in spite of nature, and custom, and worldly prudence, give all you can. I do not say, “Be a good Jew, giving a tenth of all you possess.” I do not say, “Be a good Pharisee, giving a fifth of all your substance.” I dare not advise you to give half of what you have; no, nor three quarters; but all! Lift up your hearts, and you will see clearly, in what sense this is to be done. 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 resumption whenever it pleaseth him, (1.) Provide things needful for yourself; food to eat, raiment to put on; whatever nature moderately requires, for preserving you both in health and strength; (2.) 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.

9. O ye Methodists, hear the word of the Lord! I have a message from God to all men; but to you above all. For above forty years I have been a servant to you and to your fathers. And I have not been as a reed shaken with the wind: I have not varied in my testimony. I have testified to you the very same thing from the first day even until now. But “who hath believed our report?” I fear, not many rich: I fear there is need to apply to some of you those terrible words of the Apostle: “Go to now, ye rich men! Weep and howl for the miseries which shall come upon you. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall witness against you and shall eat your flesh, as it were fire.” Certainly it will, unless ye both save all you can and give all you can. But who of you hath considered this since you first heard the will of the Lord concerning it? Who is now determined to consider and practise it? By the grace of God begin today!

10. O ye lovers of money, hear the word of the Lord! Suppose ye that money, though multiplied as the sand of the sea, can give happiness? Then you are “given up to a strong delusion, to believe a lie;” -- a palpable lie, confuted daily by a thousand experiments. Open your eyes! Look all around you! Are the richest men the happiest? Have those the largest share of content who have the largest possessions? Is not the very reverse true? Is it not a common observation, that the richest of men are, in general, the most discontented, the most miserable? Had not the far greater part of them more content when they had less money? Look into your breasts. If you are increased in goods, are you proportionally increased in happiness? You have more substance; but have you more content? You know that in seeking happiness from riches, you are only striving to drink out of empty cups. And let them be painted and gilded ever so finely, they are empty still.

11. O ye that desire or endeavour to be rich, hear ye the word of the Lord! Why should ye be stricken any more? Will not even experience teach you wisdom? Will ye leap into a pit with your eyes open? Why should you any more “fall into temptation”? It cannot be but temptation, will beset you, as long as you are in the body. But though it should beset you on every side, why will you enter into it? There is no necessity for this: it is your own voluntary act and deed. Why should you any more plunge yourselves into a snare, into the trap Satan has laid for you, that is ready to break your bones in pieces? To crush your soul to death? After fair warning, why should you sink any more into “foolish and hurtful desires?” desires as inconsistent with reason as they are with religion itself; desires that have done you more hurt already than all the treasures upon earth can countervail.
12. Have they not hurt you already, have they not wounded you in the tenderest part, by slackening, if not utterly destroying, your “hunger and thirst after righteousness?” Have you now the same longing that you had once, for the whole image of God? Have you the same vehement desire as you formerly had, of “going on unto perfection?” Have they not hurt you by weakening your faith? Have you now faith’s “abiding impression, realizing things to come?” Do you endure, in all temptations, from pleasure or pain, “seeing Him that is invisible?” Have you every day, and every hour, an uninterrupted sense of his presence? Have they not hurt you with regard to your hope? Have you now a hope full of immortality? Are you still big with earnest expectation of all the great and precious promises? Do you now “taste the powers of the world to come?” Do you “sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus?”

13. Have they not so hurt you, as to stab your religion to the heart? Have they not cooled (if not quenched) your love to God? This is easily determined. Have you the same delight in God which you once had? Can you now say, I nothing want beneath, above; Happy, happy in thy love! I fear not. And if your love of God is in any wise decayed, so is also your love of your neighbour.

You are then hurt in the very life and spirit of your religion! If you lose love, you lose all. You are not so easy to be teachable as you were, not so advisable; you are not so easy to be convinced, not so easy to be persuaded; you have a much better opinion of your own judgment and are more attached to your own will. Formerly one might guide you with a thread; now one cannot turn you with a cart-rope. You were glad to be admonished or reproved; but that time is past. And you now account a man your enemy because he tells you the truth. O let each of you calmly consider this, and see if it be not your own picture!

14. Are you not hurt with regard to your humility? If you are increased in goods, it cannot well be otherwise. Many will think you a better, because you are a richer, man; And how can you help thinking so yourself? Especially considering the commendations which some will give you in simplicity, and many with a design to serve themselves of you.

If you are hurt in your humility it will appear by this token: You are not so easy to be teachable as you were, not so advisable; you are not so easy to be convinced, not so easy to be persuaded; you have a much better opinion of your own judgment and are more attached to your own will. Formerly one might guide you with a thread; now one cannot turn you with a cart-rope. You were glad to be admonished or reproved; but that time is past. And you now account a man your enemy because he tells you the truth. O let each of you calmly consider this, and see if it be not your own picture!

15. Are you not equally hurt with regard to your meekness? You had once learned an excellent lesson of him that was meek as well as lowly in heart. When you were reviled, you reviled not again. You did not return railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing. Your love was not provoked, but enabled you on all occasions to overcome evil with good. Is this your case now? I am afraid not. I fear you cannot “bear all things.” Alas, it may rather be said, you can bear nothing; no injury, nor even affront! How quickly are you ruffled! How readily does that occur, “What! To use me so! What insolence is this! How did he dare to do it! I am not now what I was once. Let him know, I am now able to defend myself.” You mean, to revenge yourself. And it is much if you are not willing, as well as able; if you do not take your fellow servant by the throat.

16. And are you not hurt in your patience too? Does your love now “endure all things?” Do you still “in patience possess your soul,” as when you first believed? O what a change is here! You have again learnt to be frequently out of humour. You are often fretful; you feel, nay, and give way to peevishness. You find abundance of things go so cross that you cannot tell how to bear them. Many years ago I was sitting with a gentleman in London, who feared God greatly, and generally gave away, year by year, nine tenths of his yearly income. A servant came in and threw some coals on the fire. A puff of smoke came out. The baronet threw himself back in his chair and cried out, “O Mr. Wesley, these are the crosses I meet with daily!” Would he not have been less impatient, if he had had fifty, instead of five thousand, pounds a year?

17. But to return. Are not you who have been successful in your endeavours to increase in substance, insensibly sunk into softness of mind, if not of body too? You no longer rejoice to “endure hardship, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.” You no longer “rush into the kingdom of heaven, and take it as by storm.” You do not cheerfully and gladly “deny yourselves, and take up your cross daily.” You cannot deny yourself the poor pleasure of a little sleep, or of a soft bed, in order to hear the word that is able to save your souls! Indeed, you “cannot go out so early in the morning: besides it is dark, nay, cold, perhaps rainy too. Cold, darkness, rain, all these together, -- I
can never think of it.” You did not say so when you were a poor man. You then regarded none of these things. It is the change of circumstances which has occasioned this melancholy change in your body and mind; You are but the shadow of what you were! What have riches done for you? “But it cannot be expected I should do as I have done. For I am now grown old.” Am not I grown old as well as you? Am not I in my seventy-eighth year? Yet by the grace of God, I do not slack my pace yet. Neither would you, if you were a poor man still.

18. You are so deeply hurt that you have well nigh lost your zeal for works of mercy, as well as of piety. You once pushed on through cold or rain, or whatever cross lay in your way, to see the poor, the sick, the distressed. You went about doing good, and found out those who were not able to find you. You cheerfully crept down into their cellars, and climbed up into their garrets, To supply all their wants,

And spend and be spent in assisting his saints.

You found out every scene of human misery, and assisted according to your power:
Each form of woe your generous pity moved;
Your Saviour’s face you saw, and, seeing, loved.

Do you now tread in the same steps? What hinders? Do you fear spoiling your silken coat? Or is there another lion in the way? Are you afraid of catching vermin? And are you not afraid lest the roaring lion should catch you? Are you not afraid of Him that hath said, “Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto the least of these, ye have not done it unto me?” What will follow? “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!”

19. In time past how mindful were you of that word: “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: Thou shalt in any wise reprove thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him!” You did reprove directly or indirectly, all those that sinned in your sight. And happy consequences quickly followed. How good was a word spoken in season! It was often as an arrow from the hand of a giant. Many a heart was pierced. Many of the stout-hearted, who scorned to hear a sermon, Fell down before his cross subdued,

And felt his arrows dipped in blood.

But which of you now has that compassion for the ignorant, and for them that are out of the way? They may wander on for you, and plunge into the lake of fire, without let or hindrance. Gold hath steeled your hearts. You have something else to do.

Unhelp’d, unpitied let the wretches fall.

20. Thus have I given you, O ye gainers, lovers, possessors of riches, one more (it may be the last) warning. O that it may not be in vain! May God write it upon all your hearts! Though “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven,” yet the things impossible with men are possible with God.” Lord, speak! And even the rich men that hear these words shall enter thy kingdom, shall “take the kingdom of heaven by violence,” shall “sell all for the pearl of great price:” shall be “crucified to the world, and count all things dung, that they may win Christ!”

John Wesley
SERMON 89
(text from 1872 edition)

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

“Covet earnestly the best gifts; And yet I show to you a more excellent way.” 1 Cor. 12:31.

1. In the preceding verses, St. Paul has been speaking of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost; such as healing the sick, prophesying (in the proper sense of the word; that is, foretelling things to come), speaking with strange tongues, such as the speaker had never learned, and the miraculous interpretation of tongues. And these gifts the
Apostle allows to be desirable; yea, he exhorts the Corinthians, at least the teachers among them (to whom chiefly, if not solely, they were wont to be given in the first ages of the Church,) to covet them earnestly, that thereby they might be qualified to be more useful either to Christians or heathens. “And yet,” says he, “I show unto you a more excellent way;” far more desirable than all these put together, inasmuch as it will infallibly lead you to happiness both in this world and in the world to come; whereas you might have all those gifts, yea, in the highest degree, and yet be miserable both in time and eternity.

2. It does not appear that these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were common in the church for more than two or three centuries. We seldom hear of them after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian, and from a vain imagination of promoting the Christian cause thereby heaped riches, and power, and honour, upon the Christians in general; but in particular upon the Christian clergy. From this time they almost totally ceased; very few instances of the kind were found. The cause of this was not (as has been vulgarly supposed,) “because there was no more occasion for them,” because all the world was become Christian. This is a miserable mistake; not a twentieth part of it was then nominally Christian. The real cause was, “the love of many,” almost of all Christians, so called, was “waxed cold.” The Christians had no more of the Spirit of Christ than the other Heathens. The Son of Man, when he came to examine his Church, could hardly “find faith upon earth.” This was the real cause why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian Church – because the Christians were turned Heathens again, and had only a dead form left.

3. However, I would not at present speak of these, of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, but of the ordinary; and these likewise we may “covet earnestly,” in order to be more useful in our generation. With this view we may covet “the gift of convincing speech,” in order to “sound the unbelieving heart;” and the gift of persuasion, to move the affections, as well as enlighten the understanding. We may covet knowledge, both of the word and of the works of God, whether of providence or grace. We may desire a measure of that faith which, on particular occasions, wherein the glory of God or the happiness of men is nearly concerned, goes far beyond the power of natural causes. We may desire an easy elocution, a pleasing address, with resignation to the will of our Lord; yea, whatever would enable us, as we have opportunity, to be useful wherever we are. These gifts we may innocently desire: but there is “a more excellent way.”

4. The way of love, -- of loving all men for God’s sake, of humble gentle, patient love, -- is that which the Apostle so admirably describes in the ensuing chapter. And without this, he assures us, all eloquence, all knowledge, all faith, all works, and all sufferings, are of no more value in the sight of God than sounding brass or a rumbling cymbal, and are not of the least avail toward our eternal salvation. Without this, all we know, all we believe, all we do, all we suffer, will profit us nothing in the great day of accounts.

5. But at present I would take a different view of the text, and point out “a more excellent way” in another sense. It is the observation of an ancient writer, that there have been from the beginning two orders of Christians. The one lived an innocent life, conforming in all things, not sinful, to the customs and fashions of the world; doing many good works, abstaining from gross evils, and attending the ordinances of God. They endeavoured, in general, to have a conscience void of offence in their outward behaviour, but did not aim at any particular strictness, being in most things like their neighbours. The other sort of Christians not only abstained from all appearance of evil, were zealous of good works in every kind, and attended all the ordinances of God, but likewise used all diligence to attain the whole mind that was in Christ, and labored to walk, in every point, as their beloved Master. In order to this they walked in a constant course of universal self-denial, trampling on every pleasure which they were not divinely conscious prepared them for taking pleasure in God. They took up their cross daily. They strove, they agonized without intermission, to enter in at the strait gate. This one thing they did, they spared no pains to arrive at the summit of Christian holiness; “leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, to go on to perfection;” to “know all that love of God which passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fulness of God.”

6. From long experience and observation I am inclined to think, that whoever finds redemption in the blood of Jesus, whoever is justified, has then the choice of walking in the higher or the lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time sets before him “the more excellent way,” and incites him to walk therein, to choose the narrowest path in the narrow way, to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness, -- after the entire image of God. But if he does not accept this offer, he insensibly declines into the lower order of Christians. He still goes on in what may be called a good way, serving God in his degree, and finds mercy in the close of life, through the
blood of the covenant.

7. I would be far from quenching the smoking flax, -- from discouraging those that serve God in a low degree. But I could not wish them to stop here: I would encourage them to come up higher, without thundering hell and damnation in their ears, without condemning the way wherein they were, telling them it is the way that leads to destruction, I will endeavour to point out to them what is in every respect “a more excellent way.”

8. Let it be well remembered, I do not affirm that all who do not walk in this way are in the high road to hell. But this much I must affirm, they will not have so high a place in heaven as they would have had if they had chosen the better part. And will this be a small loss, -- the having so many fewer stars in your crown of glory? Will it be a little thing to have a lower place than you might have had in the kingdom of your Father? Certainly there will be no sorrow in heaven; there all tears will be wiped from our eyes; but if it were possible grief could enter there, we should grieve at that irreparable loss. Irreparable then, but not now. Now, by the grace of God, we may choose the “more excellent way.” Let us now compare this, in a few particulars, with the way wherein most Christians walk.

I. To begin at the beginning of the day. It is the manner of the generality of Christians, if they are not obliged to work for their living, to rise, particularly in winter, at eight or nine in the morning after having lain in bed eight or nine, if not more hours. I do not say now (as I should have been very apt to do fifty years ago,) that all who indulge themselves in this manner are in the way to hell. But neither can I say they are in the way to heaven, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily.

Sure I am, there is “a more excellent way” to promote health both of body and mind. From an observation of more than sixty years, I have learned, that men in health require, at an average, from six to seven hours’ sleep, and healthy women a little more, from seven to eight, in four-and-twenty hours. I know this quantity of sleep to be most advantageous to the body as well as the soul. It is preferable to any medicine which I have known, both for preventing and removing nervous disorders.

It is, therefore, undoubtedly the most excellent way, in defiance of fashion and custom, to take just so much sleep as experience proves our nature to require; seeing this is indisputably most conducive both to bodily and spiritual health. And why should not you walk in this way? Because it is difficult? Nay, with men it is impossible. But all things are possible with God; and by his grace all things will be possible to you. Only continue instant in prayer, and you will find this not only possible, but easy: Yea, and it will be far easier to rise early constantly, than to do it sometimes. But then you must begin at the right end; if you rise early, you must sleep early. Impose it upon yourself, unless when something extraordinary occurs, to go to bed at a fixed hour. Then the difficulty of it will soon be over; but the advantage of it will remain for ever.

II. The generality of Christians, as soon as they rise, are accustomed to use some kind of prayer; and probably to use the same form still which they learned when they were eight or ten years old.

Now I do not condemn those who proceed thus (though many do,) as mocking God; though they have used the same form, without any variation, for twenty or thirty years together. But surely there is “a more excellent way” of ordering our private devotions. What if you were to follow the advice given by that great and good man, Mr. Law, on this subject? Consider both your outward and inward state, and vary your prayers accordingly. For instance: Suppose your outward state is prosperous; suppose you are in a state of health, ease, and plenty, having your lot cast among kind relations, good neighbours, and agreeable friends, that love you and you them; then your outward state manifestly calls for praise and thanksgiving to God. On the other hand, if you are in a state of adversity; if God has laid trouble upon your loins; if you are in poverty, in want, in outward distress; if you are in any imminent danger; if you are in pain and sickness; then you are clearly called to pour out your soul before God in such prayer as is suited to your circumstances. In like manner you may suit your devotions to your inward state, the present state of your mind. Is your soul in heaviness, either from a sense of sin, or through manifold temptations? Then let your prayer consist of such confessions, petitions, and supplications, as are agreeable to your distressed situation of mind. On the contrary, is your soul in peace? Are you rejoicing in God? Are his consolations not small with you? Then say, with the Psalmist: “Thou art my God, and I will love thee: Thou art my God, and I will praise thee.” You may, likewise, when you have time, add to your other devotions a little reading and meditation, and perhaps a psalm of praise, -- the natural effusion of a thankful heart. You must
certainly see that this is “a more excellent way” than the poor dry form which you used before.

III.

1. The generality of Christians, after using some prayer, usually apply themselves to the business of their calling. Every man that has any pretence to be a Christian will not fail to do this; seeing it is impossible that an idle man can be a good man, -- sloth being inconsistent with religion.

   But with what view? For what end do you undertake and follow your worldly business? “To provide things necessary for myself and my family.” It is a good answer as far as it goes; but it does not go far enough. For a Turk or a Heathen goes so far, -- does his work for the very same ends. But a Christian may go abundantly farther: His end in all his labour is, to please God; to do, not his own will, but the will of him that sent him into the world, -- for this very purpose, to do the will of God on earth as angels do in heaven. He works for eternity. He “labours not for the meat that perisheth,” (this is the smallest part of his motive,) “but for that which endureth to everlasting life.” And is not this “a more excellent way?”

2. Again: In what manner do you transact your worldly business? I trust, with diligence, whatever your hand findeth to do, doing it with all our might; in justice, rendering to all their due, in every circumstance of life; yea, and in mercy, doing unto every man what you would he should do unto you. This is well: But a Christian is called to go still farther, -- to add piety to justice; to intermix prayer, especially the prayer of the heart, with all the labour of his hands. Without this all his diligence and justice only show him to be an honest Heathen; and many there are who profess the Christian religion, that go no farther than honest Heathenism.

3. Yet again: in what spirit do you go through your business? In the spirit of the world, or the Spirit of Christ? I am afraid thousands of those who are called good Christians do not understand the question. If you act in the Spirit of Christ you carry the end you at first proposed through all your work from first to last. You do everything in the spirit of sacrifice, giving up your will to the will of God; and continually aiming, not at ease, pleasure, or riches; not at anything “this short enduring world can give;” but merely at the glory of God. Now can anyone deny that this is the most excellent way of pursuing worldly business?

IV.

1. But these tenements of clay which we bear about us require constant reparation, or they will sink into the earth from which they were taken, even sooner than nature requires. Daily food is necessary to prevent this, to repair the constant decays of nature. It was common in the heathen world when they were about to use this, to take meat or even drink, libare pateram Jovi; “to pour out a little to the honour of their god;” although the gods of the Heathens were but devils, as the Apostle justly observes. “It seems,” says a late writer, “there was once some such custom as this in our own country. For we still frequently see a gentleman before he sits down to dinner in his own house, holding his hat before his face, and perhaps seeming to say something; though he generally does it in such a manner that no one can tell what he says.” Now what if instead of this, every head of a family, before he sat down to eat and drink, either morning, noon, or night, (for the reason of the thing is the same at every hour of the day,) was seriously to ask a blessing from God on what he was about to take? Yea, and afterward, seriously to return thanks to the Giver of all his blessings? Would not this be “a more excellent way” than to use that dull farce which is worse than nothing; being, in reality, no other than mockery both of God and man?

2. As to the quantity of their food, good sort of men do not usually eat to excess. At least not so far as to make themselves sick with meat, or to intoxicate themselves with drink. And as to the manner of taking it, it is usually innocent, mixed with a little mirth, which is said to help digestion.

So far, so good. And provided they take only that measure of plain, cheap, wholesome food, which most promotes health both of body and mind, there will be no cause of blame. Neither can I require you to take that advice of Mr. Herbert, though he was a good man: -

Take thy meat; think it dust; then eat a bit
And say with all, Earth to earth I commit.

This is too melancholy: it does not suit with that cheerfulness which is highly proper at a Christian meal. Permit me to illustrate this subject with a little story. The King of France one day, pursuing the chase, outrode all his company, who after seeking him some time found him sitting in a cottage eating bread and cheese. Seeing them,
he cried out: “Where have I lived all my time? I never before tasted so good food in my life!” “Sire,” said one of them, “you never had so good sauce before; for you were never hungry.” Now it is true, hunger is a good sauce; but there is one that is better still; that is, thankfulness. Sure that is the most agreeable food which is seasoned with this. And why should not yours at every meal? You need not then cast your eye on death, but receive every morsel as a pledge of life eternal. The Author of your being gives you in this food, not only a reprieve from death, but an earnest that in a little time “death shall be swallowed up in victory.”

3. The time of taking our food is usually a time of conversation also, as it is natural to refresh our minds while we refresh our bodies. Let us consider a little in what manner the generality of Christians usually converse together. What are the ordinary subjects of their conversation? If it is harmless (as one would hope it is), if there be nothing in it profane, nothing immodest, nothing untrue, or unkind; if there be no talebearing, backbiting, or evil-speaking, they have reason to praise God for his restraining grace. But there is more than this implied in “ordering our conversation aright.” In order to this it is needful, First, that “your communication,” that is, discourse or conversation, “be good;” that it be materially good, on good subjects; not fluttering about anything that occurs; for what have you to do with courts and kings? It is not your business to Fight over the wars, reform the state; unless when some remarkable event calls for the acknowledgment of the justice or mercy of God.

We must indeed sometimes talk of worldly things; otherwise we may as well go out of the world.

But it should only be as far as is needful: Then we should return to a better subject. Secondly, let your conversation be “to the use of edifying;” calculated to edify either the speaker or the hearers, or both; to build them up, as each has particular need, either in faith, or love, or holiness. Thirdly, see that it not only gives entertainment, but, in one kind or other, “ministers grace to the hearers.” Now, is not this “a more excellent way” of conversing than the harmless way above-mentioned?

V.

1. We have seen what is the “more excellent way” of ordering our conversation, as well as our business. But we cannot be always intent upon business: Both our bodies and minds require some relaxation. We need intervals of diversion from business. It will be necessary to be very explicit upon this head, as it is a point which has been much misunderstood.

2. Diversions are of various kinds. Some are almost peculiar to men, as the sports of the field -hunting, shooting, fishing, wherein not many women (I should say, ladies) are concerned.

Others are indifferently used by persons of both sexes; some of which are of a more public nature, as races, masquerades, plays, assemblies, balls. Others are chiefly used in private houses, as cards, dancing, and music; to which we may add the reading of plays, novels, romances, newspapers, and fashionable poetry.

3. Some diversions indeed which were formerly in great request, are now fallen into disrepute.

The nobility and gentry (in England at least) seem totally to disregard the once fashionable diversion of hawking; and the vulgar themselves are no longer diverted by men hacking and hewing each other in pieces at broad-sword. The noble game of quarter-staff, likewise, is now exercised by very few.

Yea, cudgelling has lost its honour, even in Wales itself. Bear-baiting also is now very seldom seen, and bull-baiting not very often. And it seems cock-fighting would totally cease in England, were it not for two or three right honourable patrons.

4. It is not needful to say anything more of these foul remains of Gothic barbarity, than that they are a reproach, not only to all religion, but even to human nature. One would not pass so severe censure on the sports of the field. Let those who have nothing better to do, still run foxes and hares out of breath. Neither need much be said about horse-races, till some man of sense will undertake to defend them. It seems a great deal more may be said in defence of seeing a serious tragedy. I could not do it with a clear conscience; at least not in an English theatre, the sink of all profaneness and debauchery; but possibly others can. I cannot say quite so much for balls or assemblies, which are more reputable than masquerades, but must be allowed by all impartial persons to have exactly the same tendency. So undoubtedly have all public dancings. And the same tendency they must have, unless the same caution obtained among modern Christians which was observed among the ancient Heathens.
With them men and women never danced together, but always in separate rooms. This was always observed in ancient Greece, and for several ages at Rome, where a woman dancing in company with men would have at once been set down for a prostitute. Of playing at cards I say the same as of seeing plays. I could not do it with a clear conscience. But I am not obliged to pass sentences on those that are otherwise minded. I leave them to their own Master: to him let them stand or fall.

5. But supposing these, as well as the reading of plays, novels, newspapers, and the like, to be quite innocent diversions; yet are there not more excellent ways of diverting themselves for those that love or fear God? Would men of fortune divert themselves in the open air? They may do it by cultivating and improving their lands, by planting their grounds, by laying out, carrying on, and perfecting their gardens and orchards. At other times they may visit and converse with the most serious and sensible of their neighbours; or they may visit the sick, the poor, the widows, and fatherless in their affliction. Do they desire to divert themselves in the house? They may read useful history, pious and elegant poetry, or several branches of natural philosophy. If you have time, you may divert yourself by music, and perhaps by philosophical experiments. But above all, when you have once learned the use of prayer, you will find that as

That which yields or fills
All space, the ambient air, wide interfused
Embraces round this florid earth;

so will this, till through every space of life it be interfused with all your employments, and wherever you are, whatever you do, embrace you on every side. Then you will be able to say boldly: --

With me no melancholy void,
No moment lingers unemploy’d,
Or unimproved below:
My weariness of life is gone,
Who live to serve my God alone,
And only Jesus know.

VI. One point only remains to be considered; that is, the use of money. What is the way wherein the generality of Christians employ this? And is there not “a more excellent way?”

1. The generality of Christians usually set apart something yearly – perhaps a tenth or even one-eighth part of their income, whether it arise from yearly revenue, or from trade, -- for charitable uses. Few I have known who said like Zaccheus, “Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.” O that it would please God to multiply these friends of mankind, these general benefactors! But,

2. Besides those who have a stated rule, there are thousands who give large sums to the poor; especially when any striking instance of distress is represented to them in lively colours.

3. I praise God for all of you who act in this manner. May you never be weary of well-doing! May God restore what you give sevenfold into your own bosom! But yet I show unto you a more excellent way.

4. You may consider yourself as one in whose hands the Proprietor of heaven and earth and all things therein has lodged a part of his goods, to be disposed of according to his direction. And his direction is, that you should look upon yourself as one of a certain number of indigent persons who are to be provided for out of that portion of His goods wherewith you are entrusted. You have two advantages over the rest: The one, that “it is more blessed to give than to receive;” the other, that you are to serve yourself first, and others afterwards. This is the light wherein you are to see yourself and them. But to be more particular: First, if you have no family, after you have provided for yourself, give away all that remains; so that

Each Christmas your accounts may clear,
And wind your bottom round the year.

This was the practice of all the young men at Oxford who were called Methodists. For example: One of them had thirty pounds a year. He lived on twenty-eight and gave away forty shillings. The next year receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave away two-and-thirty. The third year he received ninety pounds, and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received a hundred and twenty pounds. Still he lived as before on twenty-eight; and gave to the poor ninety-two. Was not this a more excellent way? Secondly, if you have a
family, seriously consider before God, how much each member of it wants, in order to have what is needful for life and godliness. And in general, do not allow them less, nor much more, than you allow yourself. Thirdly, this being done, fix your purpose, to “gain no more.” I charge you in the name of God, do not increase your substance! As it comes daily or yearly, so let it go: Otherwise you “lay up treasures upon earth.” And this our Lord as flatly forbids as murder and adultery. By doing it, therefore, you would “treasure up to yourselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

5. But suppose it were not forbidden, how can you on principles of reason spend your money in a way which God may possibly forgive, instead of spending it in a manner which he will certainly reward? You will have no reward in heaven for what you lay up; you will, for what you lay out.

Every pound you put into the earthly bank is sunk: it brings no interest above. But every pound you give to the poor is put into the bank of heaven. And it will bring glorious interest; yea, and such as will be accumulating to all eternity.

6. Who then is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him resolve this day, this hour, this moment, the Lord assisting him, to choose in all the preceding particulars the “more excellent way:” And let him steadily keep it, both with regard to sleep, prayer, work, food, conversation, and diversions; and particularly with regard to the employment of that important talent, money. Let your heart answer to the call of God, “From this moment, God being my helper, I will lay up no more treasure upon earth: This one thing I will do, I will lay up treasure in heaven; I will render unto God the things that are God’s: I will give him all my goods, and all my heart.”

John Wesley
SERMON 90
(text from the 1872 edition)

AN ISRAELITE INDEED

“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.” John 1:47.

1. Some years ago a very ingenious man, Professor Hutcheson of Glasgow, published two treatises, The Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue. In the latter of these he maintains that the very essence of virtue is, the love of our fellow-creatures. He endeavours to prove, that virtue and benevolence are one and the same thing; that every temper is only so far virtuous, as it partakes of the nature of benevolence; and that all our words and actions are then only virtuous, when they spring from the same principle. “But does he not suppose gratitude, or the love of God to be the foundation of this benevolence?” By no means: Such a supposition as this never entered into his mind. Nay, he supposes just the contrary: He does not make the least scruple to aver, that if any temper or action be produced by any regard to God, or any view to a reward from him, it is not virtuous at all; and that if an action spring partly from benevolence and partly from a view to God, the more there is in it of a view to God, the less there is of virtue.

2. I cannot see this beautiful essay of Mr. Hutcheson’s in any other light than as a decent, and therefore more dangerous, attack upon the whole of the Christian Revelation: Seeing this asserts the love of God to be the true foundation, both of the love of neighbour, and all other virtues; and, accordingly, places this as “the first and great commandment,” on which all the rest depend, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God will all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.” So that, according to the Bible, benevolence, or the love of our neighbour, is only the second commandment. And suppose the Scripture be of God, it is so far from being true, that benevolence alone is both the foundation and the essence of all virtue, that benevolence itself is no virtue at all, unless it spring from the love of God.

3. Yet it cannot be denied, that this writer himself has a marginal note in favour of Christianity.
“Who would not wish,” says he, “that the Christian Revelation could be proved to be of God? Seeing it is, unquestionably, the most benevolent institution that ever appeared in the world!” But is not this, if it be considered thoroughly, another blow at the very root of that Revelation? Is it more or less than to say: “I wish it could; but in truth it cannot be proved.”

4. Another ingenious writer advances an hypothesis totally different from this. Mr. Wollaston, in the book which he entitles, “The Religion of Nature Delineated,” endeavours to prove, that truth is the essence of virtue, or conformableness to truth. But it seems, Mr. Wollaston goes farther from the Bible than Mr. Hutcheson himself. For Mr. Hutcheson’s scheme sets aside only one of the two great commandments, namely, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;” whereas Mr. Wollaston sets aside both: For his hypothesis does not place the essence of virtue in either the love of God or of our neighbour.

5. However, both of these authors agree, though in different ways, to put asunder what God has joined. But St. Paul unites them together in teaching us to “speak the truth in love.” And undoubtedly, both truth and love were united in him to whom He who knows the hearts of all men gives this amiable character, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”

6. But who is it, concerning whom our blessed Lord gives this glorious testimony? Who is this Nathanael, of whom so remarkable an account is given in the latter part of the chapter before us? [John 1] Is it not strange that he is not mentioned again in any part of the New Testament? He is not mentioned again under this name; but probably he had another, whereby he was more commonly called. It was generally believed by the ancients, that he is the same person who is elsewhere termed Bartholomew; one of our Lord’s Apostles, and one that, in the enumeration of them, both by St. Matthew and St. Mark, is placed immediately after St. Philip, who first brought him to his Master.

It is very probable, that his proper name was Nathanael, -- a name common among the Jews; and that his other name, Bartholomew, meaning only the son of Ptolemy, was derived from his father, a custom which was then exceeding common among the Jews, as well as the Heathens.

7. By what little is said of him in the context he appears to have been a man of an excellent spirit; not hasty of belief, and yet open to conviction, and willing to receive the truth, from whencesoever it came. So we read, (John 1:45,) “Philip findeth Nathanael,” (probably by what we term accident,) “and saith unto him, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth.” “Nathanael saith unto him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Has Moses spoke, or did the Prophets write, of any prophet to come from thence? “Philip saith unto him, Come and see;” and thou wilt soon be able to judge for thyself. Nathanael took his advice, without staying to confer with flesh and blood. “Jesus saw Nathanael coming, and saith, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” “Nathanael saith,” doubtless with surprise enough, “Whence knowest thou me?” Jesus saith, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee.” “Nathanael answered and said unto him,” -- so soon was all prejudice gone! -- “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.”

But what is implied in our Lord’s character of him? “In whom is no guile.” It may include all that is contained in that advice, -

Still let thy heart be true to God,
Thy words to it, thy actions to them both.

I.

1. We may, First, observe what is implied in having our hearts true to God. Does this imply any less than is included in that gracious command, “My son, give me thy heart?” Then only is our heart true to God, when we give it to him. We give him our heart, in the lowest degree, when we seek our happiness in him; when we do not seek it in gratifying “the desire of the flesh,” -- in any of the pleasures of sense; nor in gratifying “the desire of the eye,” -- in any of the pleasures of the imagination, arising from grand, or new, or beautiful objects, whether of nature or art; neither in “the pride of life,” -- in “the honour that cometh of men,” in being beloved, esteemed, and applauded by them; no, nor yet in what some term, with equal impudence and ignorance, the main chance, the “laying up treasures on earth.” When we seek happiness in none of these, but in God alone, then we, in some sense give him our heart.
2. But in a more proper sense, we give God our heart, when we not only seek but find happiness in him. This happiness undoubtedly begins, when we begin to know him by the teaching of his own Spirit; when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts, so that we can humbly say, “My Lord and my God;” and when the Son is pleased to reveal his Father in us, by “the Spirit of adoption, crying in our hearts, Abba Father,” and “bearing his testimony to our spirits, that we are the children of God.” Then it is that “the love of God also is shed abroad in our hearts.” And according to the degree of our love, is the degree of our happiness.

3. But it has been questioned, whether it is the design of God, that the happiness which is at first enjoyed by all that know and love him, should continue any longer than, as it were, the day of their espousals. In very many, we must allow, it does not; but in a few months, perhaps weeks, or even days, the joy and peace either vanishes at once, or gradually decays. Now, if God is willing that their happiness should continue, how is this to be accounted for?

4. I believe, very easily: St. Jude’s exhortation, “Keep yourselves in the love of God,” certainly implies that something is to be done on our part in order to its continuance. And is not this agreeable to that general declaration of our Lord, concerning this and every gift of God? “Unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: But from him that hath not,” that is, uses it not, improves it not, “shall be taken away even that which he hath.” (Luke 8:18.)

5. Indeed, part of this verse is translated in our version, “That which he seemeth to have.” But it is difficult to make sense of this. For if he only seemeth to have this, or any other gift of God, he really hath it not. And if so, it cannot be taken away: For no man can lose what he never had. It is plain, therefore, JqyFQMGKYGEGKP, ought to be rendered, what he assuredly hath. And it may be observed, that the word FQMGY in various places of the New Testament does not lessen, but strengthens the sense of the word joined with it. Accordingly, whoever improves the grace he has already received, whoever increases in the love of God, will surely retain it. God will continue, yea, will give it more abundantly; Whereas, whoever does not improve this talent, cannot possibly retain it. Notwithstanding all he can do, it will infallibly be taken away from him.

II.

1. Meantime, as the heart of him that is “an Israelite indeed” is true to God, so his words are suitable thereto: And as there is no guile lodged in his heart, so there is none found in his lips. The first thing implied herein, is veracity, -- the speaking the truth from his heart, -- the putting away all wilful lying, in every kind and degree. A lie, according to a well-known definition of it, is, falsum testimonium, cum intentione fallendi: “A falsehood, known to be such by the speaker, and uttered with an intention to deceive.” But even the speaking a falsehood is not a lie, if it be not spoken with an intent to deceive.

2. Most casuists, particularly those of the Church of Rome, distinguish lies into three sorts: The First sort is malicious lies; the Second, harmless lies; the Third, officious lies: Concerning which they pass a very different judgment. I know not any that are so hardy as even to excuse, much less defend, malicious lies; that is, such as are told with a design to hurt any one: These are condemned by all parties. Men are more divided in their judgment with regard to harmless lies, such as are supposed to do neither good nor harm. The generality of men, even in the Christian world, utter them without any scruple, and openly maintain, that, if they do no harm to anyone else, they do none to the speaker. Whether they do or no, they have certainly no place in the mouth of him that is “an Israelite indeed.” He cannot tell lies in jest, am more than in earnest. Nothing but truth is heard from his mouth. He remembers the express command of God to the Ephesian Christians: “Putting away lying, speak every man truth to his neighbour.” (Eph. 4:25.)

3. Concerning officious lies, those that are spoken with a design to do good, there have been numerous controversies in the Christian Church. Abundance of writers, and those men of renown, for piety as well as learning, have published whole volumes upon the subject, and, in despite of all opposers, not only maintained them to be innocent, but commended them as meritorious. But what saith the Scripture? One passage is so express that there does not need any other. It occurs in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where the very words of the Apostle are: (Rom. 3: 7, 8,) “If the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why am I yet judged as a sinner?” (Will not that lie be excused from blame, for the good effect of it?) “And not rather, as we are slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, Let us do evil, that good may
come? Whose damnation is just.” Here the Apostle plainly declares, (1.) That the good effect of a lie is no excuse for it. (2.) That it is a mere slander upon Christians to say, “They teach men to do evil that good may come.” (3.) That if any, in fact, do this; either teach men to do evil that good may come, or do so themselves; their damnation is just. This is peculiarly applicable to those who tell lies in order to do good thereby. It follows, that officious lies, as well as all others, are an abomination to the God of truth. Therefore, there is no absurdity, however strange it may sound, in that saying of the ancient Father, “I would not tell a wilful lie, to save the souls of the whole world.”

4. The second thing which is implied in the character of “an Israelite indeed,” is, sincerity. As veracity is opposite to lying, so sincerity is to cunning. But it is not opposite to wisdom, or discretion, which are well consistent with it. “But what is the difference between wisdom and cunning? Are they not almost, if not quite, the same thing?” By no means. The difference between them is exceeding great. Wisdom is the faculty of discerning the best ends, and the fittest means of attaining them. The end of every rational creature is God: the enjoying him in time and in eternity.

The best, indeed the only, means of attaining this end, is “the faith that worketh by love.” True prudence, in the general sense of the word, is the same thing with wisdom. Discretion is but another name for prudence, -- if it be not rather a part of it, as it sometimes is referred to our outward behaviour, -- and means, the ordering our words and actions right. On the contrary, cunning (so it is usually termed amongst common men, but policy among the great) is, in plain terms, neither better nor worse than the art of deceiving. If therefore, it be any wisdom at all, it is “the wisdom from beneath;” springing from the bottomless pit, and leading down to the place from whence it came.

5. The two great means which cunning uses in order to deceive, are, simulation and dissimulation.

Simulation is the seeming to be what we are not; dissimulation, the seeming not to be what we are; according to the old verse, Quod non est simulò: Dissimuloque quod est. Both the one and the other we commonly term, the “hanging out of false colours.” Innumerable are the shapes that simulation puts on in order to deceive. And almost as many are used by dissimulation for the same purpose. But the man of sincerity shuns them both, and always appears exactly what he is.

6. "But suppose we are engaged with artful men, may we not use silence or reserve, especially if they ask insidious questions, without falling under the imputation of cunning?" Undoubtedly we may: Nay, we ought on many occasions either wholly to keep silence, or to speak with more or less reserve, as circumstances may require. To say nothing at all, is, in many cases, consistent with the highest sincerity. And so it is, to speak with reserve, to say only a part, perhaps a small part, of what we know. But were we to pretend it to be the whole, this would be contrary to sincerity.

7. A more difficult question than this is, “May we not speak the truth in order to deceive? Like him of old, who broke out into that exclamation applauding his own ingenuity, Hoc ego mihi puto palmarium, ut vera dicendo eos ambos fallam. “This I take to be my master-piece, to deceive them both by speaking the truth!” I answer, A Heathen might pique himself upon this; but a Christian could not. For although this is not contrary to veracity, yet it certainly is to sincerity. It is therefore the most excellent way, if we judge it proper to speak at all, to put away both simulation and dissimulation, and to speak the naked truth from our heart.

8. Perhaps this is properly termed, simplicity. It goes a little farther than sincerity itself. It implies not only, First, the speaking no known falsehood; and, Secondly, the not designedly deceiving any one; but, Thirdly, the speaking plainly and artlessly to everyone when we speak at all; the speaking as little children, in a childlike, though not a childish, manner. Does not this utterly exclude the using any compliments? A vile word, the very sound of which I abhor; quite agreeing with our poet: -

It never was a good day
Since lowly fawning was call’d compliment.

I advise men of sincerity and simplicity never to take that silly word in their mouth; but labour to keep at the utmost distance both from the name and the thing.

9. Not long before that remarkable time,
When Statesmen sent a Prelate ‘cross the seas,
By long-famed Act of pains and penalties,
several Bishops attacked Bishop Atterbury at once, then Bishop of Rochester, and asked, “My Lord, why will you not suffer your servants to deny you, when you do not care to see company? It is not a lie for them to say your lordship is not at home; for it deceives no one: Every one knows it means only, your lordship is busy.” He replied, “My Lords, if it is (which I doubt) consistent with sincerity, yet I am sure it is not consistent with that simplicity which becomes a Christian Bishop.”

10. But to return. The sincerity and simplicity of him in whom is no guile have likewise an influence on his whole behaviour: They give a colour to his whole outward conversation; which, though it be far remote from everything of clownishness and ill-breeding, of roughness and surliness, yet is plain and artless, and free from all disguise, being the very picture of his heart. The truth and love which continually reign there, produce an open front, and a serene countenance; such as leave no pretence to say, with that arrogant King of Castile, “When God made man, he left one capital defect: He ought to have set a window in his breast;” -- for he opens a window in his own breast, by the whole tenor of his words and actions.

11. This then is real, genuine, solid virtue. Not truth alone, nor conformity to truth. This is a property of real virtue, not the essence of it. Not love alone; though this comes nearer the mark: For love, in one sense, “is the fulfilling of the law.” No: Truth and love united together, are the essence of virtue or holiness. God indispensably requires “truth in the inward parts,” influencing all our words and actions. Yet truth itself, separate from love, is nothing in his sight. But let the humble, gentle, patient love of all mankind, be fixed on its right foundation, namely, the love of God springing from faith, from a full conviction that God hath given his only Son to die for my sins; and then the whole will resolve into that grand conclusion, worthy of all men to be received: “Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by love.”

John Wesley
SERMON 92

(TEXT FROM THE 1872 EDITION)

ON ZEAL

“It is good to be always zealously affected in a good thing.” Gal. 4:18.

1. There are few subjects in the whole compass of religion, that are of greater importance than this. For without zeal it is impossible, either to make any considerable progress in religion ourselves, or to do any considerable service to our neighbour, whether in temporal or spiritual things. And yet nothing has done more disservice to religion, or more mischief to mankind, than a sort of zeal which has for several ages prevailed, both in Pagan, Mahometan, and Christian nations. Insomuch that it may truly be said, pride, covetousness, ambition, revenge, have in all parts of the world slain their thousands; but zeal its ten thousands. Terrible instances of this have occurred in ancient times, in the most civilized heathen nations. To this chiefly were owing the inhuman persecutions of the primitive Christians; and, in later ages, the no less inhuman persecutions of the Protestants by the Church of Rome. It was zeal that kindled fires in our nation during the reign of bloody Queen Mary. It was zeal that soon after made so many provinces of France a field of blood. It was zeal that murdered so many thousand unresisting Protestants, in the never-to-be-forgotten massacre of Paris. It was zeal that occasioned the still more horrid massacre in Ireland – the like whereof, both with regard to the number of the murdered, and the shocking circumstances wherewith many of those murders were perpetrated, I verily believe never occurred before since the world began. As to the other parts of Europe, an eminent German writer has taken immense pains to search both the records in various places and the most authentic histories, in order to gain some competent knowledge of the blood which has been shed since the Reformation, and computes that, partly by private persecution, partly by religious wars, in the course of forty years, reckoning from the year 1520, above forty millions of persons have been destroyed!
2. But is it not possible to distinguish right zeal from wrong? Undoubtedly it is possible. But it is difficult; such is the deceitfulness of the human heart; so skilfully do the passions justify themselves. And there are exceeding few treatises on the subject; at least, in the English language.

To this day I have seen or heard of only one sermon; and that was wrote above a hundred years ago, by Dr. Sprat, then Bishop of Rochester; so that it is now exceeding scarce.

3. I would gladly cast in my mite, by God’s assistance toward the clearing up this important question, in order to enable well-meaning men, who are desirous of pleasing God, to distinguish true Christian zeal from its various counterfeits. And this is more necessary at this time than it has been for many years. Sixty years ago there seemed to be scarce any such thing as religious zeal left in the nation. People in general were wonderfully cool and undisturbed about that trifle, religion. But since then, it is easy to observe, there has been a very considerable alteration. Many thousands, almost in every part of the nation, have felt a real desire to save their souls. And I am persuaded there is at this day more religious zeal in England, than there has been for a century past.

4. But has this zeal been of the right or the wrong kind? Probably both the one and the other. Let us see if we cannot separate these, that we may avoid the latter, and cleave to the former. In order to this. I would first inquire,

I. What is the nature of true Christian zeal?
II. What are the properties of it? And,
III. Draw some practical inferences.

I. And, First, What is the nature of zeal in general, and of true Christian zeal in particular?

1. The original word, in its primary signification, means heat; such as the heat of boiling water. When it is figuratively applied to the mind, it means any warm emotion or affection. Sometimes it is taken for envy. So we render it, Acts 5:17, where we read, “The High Priest, and all that were with him, were filled with envy,” GRNJSJUCP\JNW, although it might as well be rendered, were filled with zeal. Sometimes, it is taken for anger and indignation; sometimes, for vehement desire. And when any of our passions are strongly moved on a religious account, whether for any thing good, or against any thing which we conceive to be evil, this we term religious zeal.

2. But it is not all that is called religious zeal which is worthy of that name. It is not properly religious or Christian zeal, if it be not joined with charity. A fine writer (Bishop Sprat) carries the matter farther still. “It has been affirmed,” says that great man, “no zeal is right, which is not charitable, but is mostly so. Charity, or love, is not only one ingredient, but the chief ingredient in its composition.” May we not go further still? May we not say, that true zeal is not mostly charitable, but wholly so? That is, if we take charity, in St. Paul’s sense, for love; the love of God and man fills up its whole nature.

3. Yet it is not every degree of that love to which this appellation is given. There may be some love, a small degree of it, where there is no zeal. But it is, properly, love in a higher degree. It is fervent love. True Christian zeal is no other than the flame of love. This is the nature, the inmost essence, of it.

II. From hence it follows, that the properties of love are the properties of zeal also. Now, one of the chief properties of love is humility: “Love is not puffed up.” Accordingly, this is a property of true zeal: humility is inseparable from it. As is the degree of zeal, such is the degree of humility: they must rise and fall together. The same love which fills a man with zeal for God, makes him little, and poor, and vile in his own eyes.

2. Another of the properties of love is meekness: consequently, it is one of the properties of zeal.

It teaches us to be meek, as well as lowly; to be equally superior to anger or pride. Like as the wax melteth at the fire, so before this sacred flame all turbulent passions melt away, and leave the soul unruffled and serene.

3. Yet another property of love, and consequently of zeal, is unwearied patience: for “love endureth all things.” It
arms the soul with entire resignation to all the dispositions of divine Providence, and teaches us to say, in every occurrence, “It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.” It enables us, in whatever state, therewith to be content; to repine at nothing, to murmur at nothing, “but in every thing to give thanks.”

4. There is a Fourth property of Christian zeal, which deserves to be more particularly considered.

This we learn from the very words of the Apostle, “It is good to be jealously affected always” (not to have transient touches of zeal, but a steady, rooted disposition) “in a good thing: ‘in that which is good: for the proper object of zeal is, good in general; that is, everything that is good, really such, in the sight of God.

5. But what is good in the sight of God? What is that religion, wherewith God is always well pleased? How do the parts of this rise one above another? And what is the comparative value of them?

This is a point exceeding little considered, and therefore little understood. Positive divinity, many have some knowledge of. But few know anything of comparative divinity. I never saw but one tract upon this head; a sketch of which it may be of use to subjoin.

In a Christian believer love sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers; — longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, fidelity, temperance; and if any other were comprised in “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.” In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers - by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety — reading and hearing the word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord’s supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one body, the church, dispersed all over the earth - a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.

6. This is that religion which our Lord has established upon earth, ever since the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. This is the entire, connected system of Christianity: and thus the several parts of it rise one above another, from that lowest point, the assembling ourselves together, to the highest, - love enthroned in the heart. And hence it is easy to learn the comparative value of every branch of religion. Hence also we learn a Fifth property of true zeal. That as it is always exercised on that which is good, so it is always proportioned to that good, to the degree of goodness that is in its object.

7. For example. Every Christian ought, undoubtedly, to be zealous for the church, bearing a strong affection to it, and earnestly desiring its prosperity and increase. He ought to be thus zealous, as for the church universal, praying for it continually, so especially for that particular church or Christian society whereof he himself is a member. For this he ought to wrestle with God in prayer; meantime using every means in his power to enlarge its borders, and to strengthen his brethren, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

8. But he should be more zealous for the ordinances of Christ than for the church itself; for prayer in public and private; for the Lord’s supper, for reading, hearing, and meditating on his word; and for the much-neglected duty of fasting. These he should earnestly recommend; first, by his example; and then by advice, by argument, persuasion, and exhortation, as often as occasion offers.

9. Thus should he show his zeal for works of piety; but much more for works of mercy; seeing “God will have mercy and not sacrifice,” that is, rather than sacrifice. Whenever, therefore, one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred. Even reading, hearing, prayer are to be omitted, or to be postponed, “at charity’s almighty call;” when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbour, whether in body or soul.

10. But as zealous as we are for all good works, we should still be more zealous for holy tempers; for planting and promoting, both in our own souls, and in all we have any intercourse with, lowliness of mind, meekness, Gentleness, longsuffering, contentedness, resignation unto the will of God, deadness to the world and the things of the world, as the only means of being truly alive to God. For these proofs and fruits of living faith we cannot be too zealous. We should “talk of them as we sit in our house,” and “when we walk by the way,” and “when we lie down,” and “when we rise up.” We should make them continual matter of prayer; as being far more excellent than any outward works whatever: seeing those will fail when the body drops off; but these will accompany us
But our choicest zeal should be reserved for love itself, - the end of the commandment, the fulfilling of the law. The church, the ordinances, outward works of every kind, yea, all other holy tempers, are inferior to this, and rise in value only as they approach nearer and nearer to it. Here then is the great object of Christian zeal. Let every true believer in Christ apply, with all fervency of spirit, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that his heart may be more and more enlarged in love to God and to all mankind. This one thing let him do: let him “press on to this prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

III. It remains only to draw some practical inferences from the preceding observations.

1. And, First, if zeal, true Christian zeal, be nothing but the flame of love, then hatred, in every kind and degree, then every sort of bitterness toward them that oppose us, is so far from deserving the name of zeal, that it is directly opposite to it. If zeal be only fervent love, then it stands at the utmost distance from prejudice, jealousy, evil surmising; seeing “love thinketh no evil.” Then bigotry of every sort, and, above all, the spirit of persecution, are totally inconsistent with it. Let not, therefore, any of these unholy tempers screen themselves under that sacred name. As all these are the works of the devil, let them appear in their own shape, and no longer under that specious disguise deceive the unwary children of God.

2. Secondly. If lowliness be a property of zeal, then pride is inconsistent with it. It is true, some degree of pride may remain after the love of God is shed abroad in the heart; as this is one of the last evils that is rooted out, when God creates all things new; but it cannot reign, nor retain any considerable power, where fervent love is found. Yea, were we to give way to it but a little, it would damp that holy fervour, and, if we did not immediately fly back to Christ. Would utterly quench the Spirit.

3. Thirdly. If meekness be an inseparable property of zeal, what shall we say of those who call their auger by that name? Why, that they mistake the truth totally; that they, in the fullest sense, put darkness for light, and light for darkness. We cannot be too watchful against this delusion, because it spreads over the whole Christian world. Almost in all places, zeal and anger pass for equivalent terms; and exceeding few persons are convinced, that there is any difference between them. How commonly do we hear it said, “See how zealous the man is!” Nay, he cannot be zealous; that is impossible, for he is in a passion; and passion is as inconsistent with zeal, as light with darkness, or heaven with hell!

It were well that this point were thoroughly understood. Let us consider it a little farther. We frequently observe one that bears the character of a religious man vehemently angry at his neighbour. Perhaps he calls his brother Raca, or Thou fool. He brings a railing accusation against him. You mildly admonish him of his warmth. He answers, “It is my zeal!” No: it is your sin, and, unless you repent of it, will sink you lower than the grave. There is much such zeal as this in the bottomless pit. Thence all zeal of this kind comes; and thither it will go, and you with it, unless you are saved from it before you go hence!

4. Fourthly. If patience, contentedness, and resignation are the properties of zeal, then murmuring, fretfulness, discontent, impatience are wholly inconsistent with it. And yet how ignorant are mankind of this! How often do we see men fretting at the ungodly, or telling you they are out of patience with such or such things, and terming all this their zeal! O spare no pains to undeceive them! If it be possible, show them what zeal is; and convince them that all murmuring, or fretting at sin, is a species of sin, and has no resemblance of, or connexion with, the true zeal of the Gospel.

5. Fifthly. If the object of zeal be that which is good, then fervour for any evil thing is not Christian zeal. I instance in idolatry, worshipping of angels, saints, images, the cross. Although, therefore, a man were so earnestly attached to any kind of idolatrous worship, that he would even “give his body to be burned,” rather than refrain from it, call this bigotry or superstition, if you please, but call it not zeal; that is quite another thing.

From the same premises it follows, that fervour for indifferent things is not Christian zeal. But how exceedingly common is this mistake too! Indeed one would think that men of understanding could not be capable of such weakness. But, alas! The history of all ages proves the contrary. Who were men of stronger understandings than
Bishop Ridley and Bishop Hooper? And how warmly did these, and other great men of that age, dispute about the sacerdotal vestments! How eager was the contention for almost a hundred years, for and against wearing a surplice! O shame to man! I would as soon have disputed about a straw or a barley-corn. And this, indeed, shall be called zeal! And why was it not rather called wisdom or holiness?

6. It follows also, from the same premises, that fervour for opinions is not Christian zeal. But how few are sensible of this! And how innumerable are the mischiefs which even this species of false zeal has occasioned in the Christian world! How many thousand lives have been cast away by those who were zealous for the Romish opinions! How many of the excellent ones of the earth have been cut off by zealots, for the senseless opinion of transubstantiation! But does not every unprejudiced person see, that this zeal is "earthly, sensual, devilish;" and that it stands at the utmost contrariety to that zeal which is here recommended by the Apostle?

What an excess of charity is it then which our great poet expresses, in his "Poem on the Last Day," where he talks of meeting in heaven

Those who by mutual wounds expired,
By zeal for their distinct persuasions fired!

Zeal indeed! What manner of zeal was this, which led them to cut one another’s throats? Those who were fired with this spirit, and died therein, will undoubtedly have their portion, not in heaven, (only love is there,) but in the "fire that never shall be quenched."

7. Lastly. If true zeal be always proportioned to the degree of goodness which is in its object, then should it rise higher and higher according to the scale mentioned above; according to the comparative value of the several parts of religion. For instance, all that truly fear God should be zealous for the Church; both for the catholic or universal church, and for that part of it whereof they are members. This is not the appointment of men, but of God. He saw it was "not good for men to be alone," even in this sense. But that the whole body of his children should be "knit together, and strengthened, by that which every joint supplieth." At the same time they should be more zealous for the ordinances of God; for public and private prayer, for hearing and reading the word of God, and for fasting and the Lord’s supper. But they should be more zealous for works of mercy, than even for works of piety. Yet ought they to be more zealous still for all holy tempers, lowliness, meekness, resignation: but most zealous of all, for that which is the sum and the perfection of religion, the love of God and man.

8. It remains only to make a close and honest application of these things to our own souls. We all know the general truth, that “it is good to be always zealously affected in a good thing.” Let us now, every one of us, apply it to his own soul in particular.

9. Those, indeed, who are still dead in trespasses and sins have neither part nor lot in this matter; nor those that live in any open sin, such as drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, or profane swearing.

These have nothing to do with zeal; they have no business at all even to take the word in their mouth.

It is utter folly and impertinence for any to talk of zeal for God, while he is doing the works of the devil. But if you have renounced the devil and all his works, and have settled it in your heart, I will “worship the Lord my God, and him only will I serve,” then beware of being neither cold nor hot; then be zealous for God. You may begin at the lowest step. Be zealous for the Church, more especially for that particular branch thereof wherein your lot is cast. Study the welfare of this, and carefully observe all the rules of it, for conscience’ sake. But, in the mean time, take heed that you do not neglect any of the ordinances of God; for the sake of which, in a great measure, the church itself was constituted: so that it would be highly absurd to talk of zeal for the church, if you were not more zealous for them. But are you more zealous for works of mercy, than even for works of piety?

Do you follow the example of your Lord, and prefer mercy even before sacrifice? Do you use all diligence in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting them that are sick and in prison? And, above all, do you use every means in your power to save souls from death? If, as you have time, “you do good unto all men,” though “especially to them that are of the household of faith,” your zeal for the church is pleasing to God: but if not, if you are not “careful to maintain good works,” what have you to do with the church? If you have not “compassion on your fellow-servants,” neither will your Lord have pity on you. “Bring no more vain oblations.” All your service is “an abomination to the Lord.”
10. Are you better instructed than to put asunder what God has joined? Than to separate works of piety from works of mercy? Are you uniformly zealous of both? So far you walk acceptably to God; that is, if you continually bear in mind, that God “searcheth the heart and reins;” that “he is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth;” that, consequently, no outward works are acceptable to him, unless they spring from holy tempers, without which no man can have a place in the kingdom of Christ and God.

11. But of all holy tempers, and above all others, see that you be most zealous for love. Count all things loss in comparison of this, - the love of God and all mankind. It is most sure, that if you give all your goods to feed the poor, yea, and your body to be burned, and have not humble, gentle, patient love, it profiteth you nothing. O let this be deep engraved upon your heart: “All is nothing without love!”

12. Take then the whole of religion together, just as God has revealed it in his word; and be uniformly zealous for every part of it, according to its degree of excellence. Grounding all your zeal on the one foundation, “Jesus Christ and him crucified;” holding fast this one principle, “The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved ME, and gave himself for ME;” proportion your zeal to the value of its object. Be calmly zealous, therefore, first, for the Church; “the whole state of Christ’s Church militant here on earth;” and in particular for that branch thereof with which you are more immediately connected. Be more zealous for all those ordinances which our blessed Lord hath appointed, to continue therein to the end of the world. Be more zealous for those works of mercy, those “sacrifices wherewith God is well pleased,” those marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know his sheep at the last day. Be more zealous still for holy tempers, for long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, lowliness, and resignation; but be most zealous of all for love, the queen of all graces, the highest perfection in earth or heaven, the very image of the invisible God, as in men below, so in angels above. For “God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

John Wesley
SERMON 93
(text from the 1872 edition)

ON REDEEMING THE TIME

“Redeeming the time.” Eph. 5:16.

1. ”See that ye walk circumspectly,” says the Apostle in the preceding verse, “not as fools, but as wise men, redeeming the time;” saving all the time you can for the best purposes; buying up every fleeting moment out of the hands of sin and Satan, out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure, worldly business; the more diligently, because the present “are evil days,” days of the grossest ignorance, immorality, and profaneness.

2. This seems to be the general meaning of the words. But I purpose, at present, to consider only one particular way of redeeming the time,” namely, from sleep.

3. This appears to have been exceeding little considered, even by pious men. Many that have been eminently conscientious in other respects, have not been so in this. They seemed to think it an indifferent thing, whether they slept more or less; and never saw it in the true point of view, as an important branch of Christian temperance.

That we may have a more just conception hereof, I will endeavour to show,

I. What it is to “redeem the time” from sleep.
II. The evil of not redeeming it. And
III. The most effectual manner of doing it.

1. And, First, What is it to “redeem the time” from sleep? It is, in general, to take that measure of sleep every night which nature requires, and no more; that measure which is the most conducive to the health and vigour both of
the body and mind.

2. But it is objected, “One measure will not suit all men; -- some require considerably more than others. Neither will the same measure suffice even the same persons at one time as at another. When a person is sick, or, if not actually so, yet weakened by preceding sickness, he certainly wants more of this natural restorative, than he did when in perfect health. And so he will when his strength and spirits are exhausted by hard or long-continued labour.”

3. All this is unquestionably true, and confirmed by a thousand experiments. Whoever, therefore, they are that have attempted to fix one measure of sleep for all persons did not understand the nature of the human body, so widely different in different persons; as neither did they who imagined that the same measure would suit even the same person at all times. One would wonder, therefore, that so great a man as Bishop Taylor should have formed this strange imagination; much more, that the measure which he has assigned for the general standard should be only three hours in four-and-twenty. That good and sensible man, Mr. Baxter, was not much nearer the truth; who supposes four hours in four and twenty will suffice for any man. I knew an extremely sensible man, who was absolutely persuaded that no one living needed to sleep above five hours in twenty-four. But when he made the experiment himself, he quickly relinquished the opinion. And I am fully convinced, by an observation continued for more than fifty years, that whatever may be done by extraordinary persons, or in some extraordinary cases (wherein persons have subsisted with very little sleep for some weeks, or even months,) a human body can scarce continue in health and vigour, without at least, six hours’ sleep in four-and-twenty. Sure I am, I never met with such an instance: I never found either man or woman that retained vigorous health for one year, with a less quantity of sleep than this.

4. And I have long observed, that women, in general, want a little more sleep than men; perhaps, because they are, in common of a weaker, as well as a moister, habit of body. If, therefore, one might venture to name one standard, (though liable to many exceptions and occasional alterations,) I am inclined to think this would come near to the mark: Healthy men, in general, need a little above six hours’ sleep, healthy women, a little above seven, in four-and-twenty. I myself want six hours and a half, and I cannot well subsist with less.

5. If anyone desires to know exactly what quantity of sleep his own constitution requires, he may very easily make the experiment which I made about sixty years ago: I then waked every night about twelve or one, and lay awake for some time. I readily concluded that this arose from my lying longer in bed than nature required. To be satisfied, I procured an alarum, which waked me the next morning at seven; (near an hour earlier than I rose the day before,) yet I lay awake again at night. The second morning I rose at six; but, notwithstanding this, I lay awake the second night. The third morning I rose at five; but, nevertheless, I lay awake the third night. The fourth morning I rose at four; (as, by the grace of God, I have done ever since;) and I lay awake no more. And I do not now lie awake (taking the year round) a quarter of an hour together in a month. By the same experiment, rising earlier and earlier every morning, may anyone find how much sleep he really wants.

II.

1. “But why should anyone be at so much pains? What need is there of being so scrupulous? Why should we make ourselves so particular? What harm is there in doing as our neighbours do? -- suppose in lying from ten till six or seven in summer, and till eight or nine in winter?”

2. If you would consider this question fairly, you will need a good deal of candour and impartiality; as what I am about to say will probably be quite new; different from anything you ever heard in your life; different from the judgment, at least from the example, of your parents and your nearest relations; nay, and perhaps of the most religious persons you ever were acquainted with. Lift up, therefore, your heart to the Spirit of truth, and beg of him to shine upon it, that without respecting any man’s person, you may see and follow the truth as it in Jesus.

3. Do you really desire to know what harm there is in not redeeming all the time you can from sleep? Suppose in spending therein an hour a day more than nature requires? Why, First, it hurts your substance; it is throwing away six hours a week which might turn to some temporal account. If you can do any work, you might earn something in that time, were it ever so small. And you have no need to throw even this away. If you do not want it yourself, give it to them that do; you know some of them that are not far off. If you are of no trade, still you may so employ the time that it will bring money, or money’s worth, to yourself, or others.
4. The not redeeming all the time you can from sleep, the spending more time therein than your constitution necessarily requires, in the Second place, hurts your health. Nothing can be more certain than this, though it is not commonly observed, because the evil steals on you by slow and insensible degrees. In this gradual and almost imperceptible manner it lays the foundation of many diseases.

It is the chief real (though unsuspected) cause of all nervous diseases in particular. Many inquiries have been made, why nervous disorders are so much more common among us than among our ancestors. Other causes may frequently concur; but the chief is, we lie longer in bed. Instead of rising at four, most of us who are not obliged to work for our bread lie till seven, eight, or nine. We need inquire no farther. This sufficiently accounts for the large increase of these painful disorders.

5. It may be observed, that most of these arise, not barely from sleeping too long, but even from what we imagine to be quite harmless, the lying too long in bed. By soaking (as it is emphatically called) so long between warm sheets, the flesh is, as it were, parboiled, and becomes soft and flabby.” The nerves, in the mean time, are quite unstrung, and all the train of melancholy symptoms – faintness, tremors, lowness of spirits, (so called,) come on, till life itself is a burden.

6. One common effect of either sleeping too long, or lying too long in bed, is weakness of sight, particularly that weakness which is of the nervous kind. When I was young, my sight was remarkably weak. Why is it stronger now than it was forty years ago? I impute this principally to the blessing of God, who fits us for whatever he calls us to. But undoubtedly the outward means which he has been pleased to bless was the rising early in the morning.

7. A still greater objection to the not rising early, the not redeeming all the time we can from sleep, is, it hurts the soul, as well as the body; it is a sin against God. And this indeed it must necessarily be, on both the preceding accounts. For we cannot waste, or (which comes to the same thing) not improve, any part of our worldly substance, neither can we impair our own health, without sinning against Him.

8. But this fashionable intemperance does also hurt the soul in a more direct manner. It sows the seeds of foolish and hurtful desires; it dangerously inflames our natural appetites; which a person stretching and yawning in bed is just prepared to gratify. It breeds and continually increases sloth, so often objected to the English nation. It opens the way, and prepares the soul, for every other kind of intemperance. It breeds an universal softness and faintness of spirit, making us afraid of every little inconvenience, unwilling to deny ourselves any pleasure, or to take up or bear any cross. And how then shall we be able (without which we must drop into hell) to “take the kingdom of heaven by violence?” It totally unfit us for “enduring hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ;” and, consequently, for “fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold on eternal life.”

9. In how beautiful a manner does that great man, Mr. [William] Law treat this important subject! [Viz., Redeeming time from Sleep] Part of his words I cannot but here subjoin, for the use of every sensible reader.

“Take it for granted that every Christian who is in health is up early in the morning. For it is much more reasonable to suppose a person is up early because he is a Christian, than because he is a labourer, or a tradesman, or a servant.

“We conceive an abhorrence of a man that is in bed when he should be at his labour. We cannot think good of him, who is such a slave to drowsiness as to neglect his business for it.

“Let this, therefore, teach us to conceive how odious we must appear to God, if we are in bed, shut up in sleep, when we should be praising God; and are such slaves to drowsiness as to neglect our devotions for it.

“Sleep is such a dull, stupid state of existence, that, even among mere animals, we despise them most which are most drowsy. He, therefore, that chooses to enlarge the slothful indolence of sleep, rather than be early at his devotions, chooses the dullest refreshment of the body, before the noblest enjoyments of the soul. He chooses that state which is a reproach to mere animals, before that exercise which is the glory of angels.

10. Besides, he that cannot deny himself this drowsy indulgence, is no more prepared for prayer when he is up, than he is prepared for fasting or any other act of self-denial. He may indeed more easily read over a form of prayer, than he can perform these duties; but he is no more disposed for the spirit of prayer, than he is disposed
for fasting. For sleep thus indulged gives a softness to all our tempers, and makes us unable to relish any thing but what suits an idle state of mind, as sleep does.

So that a person who is a slave to this idleness is in the same temper when he is up. Every thing that is idle or sensual pleases him. And every thing that requires trouble or self-denial, is hateful to him, for the same reason that he hates to rise.

11. "It is not possible for an epicure to be truly devout. He must renounce his sensuality, before he can relish the happiness of devotion. Now, he that turns sleep into an idle indulgence, does as much to corrupt his soul, to make it a slave to bodily appetites, as an epicure does. It does not disorder his life, as notorious acts of intemperance do; but, like any more moderate course of indulgence, it silently, and by smaller degrees, wears away the spirit of religion, and sinks the soul into dullness and sensuality.

"Self-denial of all kinds is the very life and soul of piety; but he that has not so much of it as to be able to be early at his prayers cannot think that he has taken up his cross, and is following Christ.

"What conquest has he got over himself? What right hand has he cut off? What trials is he prepared for? What sacrifice is he ready to offer to God, who cannot be so cruel to himself as to rise to prayer at such a time as the drudging part of the world are content to rise to their labour?

12. "Some people will not scruple to tell you, that they indulge themselves in sleep because they have nothing to do; and that if they had any business to rise to they would not lose so much of their time in sleep. But they must be told that they mistake the matter; that they have a great deal of business to do; they have a hardened heart to change; they have the whole spirit of religion to get.

For surely he that thinks he has nothing to do, because nothing but his prayers want him, may justly be said to have the whole spirit of religion to seek.

"You must not therefore consider how small a fault it is to rise late; but how great a misery it is to want the spirit of religion, and to live in such softness and idleness as make you incapable of the fundamental duties of Christianity.

"If I was to desire you not to study the gratification of your palate, I would not insist upon the sin of wasting your money, though it is a great one; but I would desire you to renounce such a way of life, because it supports you in such a state of sensuality as renders you incapable of relishing the most essential doctrines of religion.

"For the same reason, I do not insist much upon the sin of wasting your time in sleep, though it be a great one; but I desire you to renounce this indulgence, because it gives a softness and idleness to your soul, and is so contrary to that lively, zealous, watchful, self-denying spirit, which was not only the spirit of Christ and his Apostles, and the spirit of all the saints and martyrs that have ever been among men, but must be the spirit of all those who would not sink in the common corruption of the world.

13. "Here, therefore, we must fix our charge against this practice. We must blame it, not as having this or that particular evil, but as a general habit that extends itself through our whole spirit, and supports a state of mind that is wholly wrong.

"It is contrary to piety; not as accidental slips or mistakes in life are contrary to it; but in such a manner as an ill state of body is contrary to health.

"On the other hand, if you was to rise early every morning, as an instance of self-denial, as a method of renouncing indulgence, as a means of redeeming your time and fitting your spirit for prayer, you would soon find the advantage. This method, though it seems but a small circumstance, might be a means of great piety. It would constantly keep it in your mind, that softness and idleness the bane of religion. It would teach you to exercise power over yourself, and to renounce other pleasures and tempers that war against the soul. And what is so planted and watered, will certainly have an increase from God."

III.

1. It now only remains to inquire, in the Third place, how we may redeem the time, how we may proceed in this important affair. In what manner shall we most effectually practise this important branch of temperance?
I advise all of you who are thoroughly convinced of the unspeakable importance of it, suffer not that conviction to die away, but instantly begin to act suitably to it. Only do not depend on your own strength; if you do, you will be utterly baffled. Be deeply sensible that as you are not able to do anything good of yourselves, so here, in particular, all your strength, all your resolution, will avail nothing. Whoever trusts in himself will be confounded. I never found an exception. I never knew one who trusted in his own strength that could keep this resolution for a twelve-month.

2. I advise you, Secondly, cry to the Strong for strength. Call upon Him that hath all power in heaven and earth, and believe that he will answer the prayer that goeth not out of feigned lips. As you cannot have too little confidence in yourself, so you cannot have too much in him. Then set out in faith; and surely his strength shall be made perfect in your weakness.

3. I advise you, Thirdly, add to your faith, prudence: Use the most rational means to attain your purpose. Particularly begin at the right end, otherwise you will lose your labour. If you desire to rise early, sleep early; secure this point at all events. In spite of the most dear and agreeable companions, in spite of their most earnest solicitations, in spite of entreaties, railleries, or reproaches, rigorously keep your hour. Rise up precisely at your time, and retire without ceremony. Keep your hour, notwithstanding the most pressing business: Lay all things by till the morning. Be it ever so great a cross, ever so great self-denial, keep your hour, or all is over.

4. I advise you, Fourthly, be steady. Keep your hour of rising without intermission. Do not rise two mornings, and lie in bed the third; but what you do once, do always. “But my head aches.” Do not regard that. It will soon be over. “But I am uncommonly drowsy; my eyes are quite heavy.” Then you must not parley; otherwise it is a lost case; but start up at once. And if your drowsiness does not go off, lie down for awhile an hour or two after. But let nothing make a breach upon this rule, rise and dress yourself at your hour.

5. Perhaps you will say, “The advice is good; but it comes too late! I have made a breach already. I did rise constantly and for a season, nothing hindered me. But I gave way by little and little, and I have now left it off for a considerable time.” Then, in the name of God, begin again! Begin to-morrow; or rather to-night, by going to bed early, in spite of either company or business. Begin with more self-diffidence than before, but with more confidence in God. Only follow these few rules, and, my soul for yours, God will give you the victory. In a little time the difficulty will be over; but the benefit will last for ever.

6. If you say, “But I cannot do now as I did then; for I am not what I was: I have many disorders, my spirits are low, my hands shake; I am all relaxed,” -- I answer: All these are nervous symptoms; and they all partly arise from your taking too much sleep: Nor is it probable they will ever be removed, unless you remove the cause. Therefore, on this very account, (not only to punish yourself for your folly and unfaithfulness, but,) in order to recover your health and strength, resume your early rising. You have no other possible means of recovering, in any tolerable degree, your health both of body and mind. Do not murder yourself outright. Do not run on in the path that leads to the gates of death! As I said before, so I say again, In the name of God, this very day, set out anew. True, it will be more difficult than it was at the beginning. But bear the difficulty which you have brought upon yourself, and it will not last long. The Sun of Righteousness will soon arise again, and will heal both your soul and your body.

7. But do not imagine that this single point, rising early, will suffice to make you a Christian. No: Although that single point, the not rising, may keep you a Heathen, void of the whole Christian spirit; although this alone (especially if you had once conquered it) will keep you cold, formal, heartless, dead, and make it impossible for you to get one step forward in vital holiness, yet this alone will go but a little way to make you a real Christian. It is but one step out of many; but it is one. And having taken this, go forward. Go on to universal self-denial, to temperance in all things, to a firm resolution of taking up daily every cross whereto you are called. Go on, in a full pursuit of all the mind that was in Christ, of inward and then outward holiness; so shall you be not almost but altogether, a Christian; so shall you finish your course with joy: You shall awake up after his likeness, and be satisfied.

[Jan. 20, 1782]
ON FAMILY RELIGION

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Josh. 24:15.

1. In the foregoing verses we read that Joshua, now grown old, “gathered the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges and officers; and they presented themselves before the Lord.” (Josh. 15:1.) And Joshua rehearsed to them the great things which God had done for their fathers; (Josh. 15:2-13;) concluding with that strong exhortation: “Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side the flood, (Jordan,) and in Egypt.” (Josh. 15:14.) Can anything be more astonishing than this? That even in Egypt, yea, and in the wilderness, where they were daily fed, and both day and night guided by miracle, the Israelites, in general, should worship idols, in flat defiance of the Lord their God! He proceeds: “If it seemeth evil to you to serve the Lord, choose ye this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell: But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

2. A resolution this worthy of a hoary-headed saint, who had had large experience, from his youth up, of the goodness of the Master to whom he had devoted himself, and the advantages of his service. How much is it to be wished that all who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, all whom he has brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the bondage of sin, -- those especially who are united together in Christian fellowship, -- would adopt this wise resolution! Then would the work of the Lord prosper in our land; then would his word run and be glorified. Then would multitudes of sinners in every place stretch out their hands unto God, until “the glory of the Lord covered the land, as the waters cover the sea.”

3. On the contrary, what will the consequence be, if they do not adopt this resolution? -- if family religion be neglected? -- if care be not taken of the rising generation? Will not the present revival of religion in a short time die away? Will it not be as the historian speaks of the Roman state in its infancy, --res unius aetatis? -- “an event that has its beginning and end within the space of one generation?” Will it not be a confirmation of that melancholy remark of Luther’s, that “a revival of religion never lasts longer than one generation?” By a generation, (as he explains himself,) he means thirty years. But, blessed be God, this remark does not hold with regard to the present instance; seeing this revival, from its rise in the year 1729, has already lasted above fifty years.

4. Have we not already seen some of the unhappy consequences of good men’s not adopting this resolution? Is there not a generation arisen, even within this period, yea, and from pious parents, that know not the Lord? That have neither his love in their hearts, nor his fear before their eyes? How many of them already “despise their fathers, and mock at the counsel of their mothers!” How many are utter strangers to real religion, to the life and power of it! And not a few have shaken off all religion, and abandoned themselves to all manner of wickedness! Now, although this may sometimes be the case, even of children educated in a pious manner, yet this case is very rare: I have met with some, but not many, instances of it. The wickedness of the children is generally owing to the fault or neglect of their parents. For it is a general, though not universal rule, though is admits of some exceptions, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

5. But what is the purport of this resolution, “I and my house will serve the Lord?” In order to understand and practice this, let us, First, inquire, what it is to “serve the Lord.” Secondly, Who are included in that expression, “my house.” And, Thirdly, What can we do, that we and our house my serve the Lord.

I.

1. We may inquire, First, what it is to “serve the Lord,” not as a Jew, but as a Christian; not only with an outward service, (though some of the Jews undoubtedly went farther than this,) but with inward, with the service of the
heart, “worshipping him in spirit in truth.” The First thing implies in this service is faith; believing in the name of the Son of God. We cannot perform an acceptable service to God, till we believe on Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Here the spiritual worship of God begins. As soon as any one had the witness in himself; as soon as he can say, “The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me;” he is able truly to “serve the Lord.”

2. As soon as he believes, he loves God, which is another thing implied in “serving the Lord.” “We love him because he first loved us;” of which faith is the evidence. The love of a pardoning God is “shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Indeed this love may admit of a thousand degrees: But still every one, as long as he believes, may truly declare before God, “Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.” Thou knowest that `my desire is unto thee, and unto the remembrance of thy name.’”

3. And if any man truly love God, he cannot but love his brother also. Gratitude to our Creator will surely produce benevolence to our fellow-creatures. If we love Him, we cannot but love one another, as Christ loved us. We feel our souls enlarged in love toward every child of man. And toward all the children of God we put on “bowels of kindness, gentleness, longsuffering, forgiving one another,” if we have a complaint against any, “even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven us.”

4. One thing more is implied in “serving the Lord,” namely, the obeying him; the steadily walking in all his ways, the doing his will from the heart. Like those, “his servants” above, “who do his pleasure, who keep his commandments, carefully avoid whatever he has forbidden, and zealously do whatever he has enjoined; studying always to have conscience void of offense toward God and toward man.

II. “I and my house will serve the Lord,” will every real Christian say. But who are included in that expression, “my house?” This is the next point to be considered.

1. The person in your house that claims your first and nearest attention, is, undoubtedly, your wife; seeing you are to love her, even as Christ hath loved the Church, when he laid down his life for it, that he might “purify it unto himself, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” The same end is every husband to pursue, in all his intercourse with his wife; to use every possible means that she may be freed from every spot, and may walk unblamable in love.

2. Next to your wife are your children; immortal spirits whom God hath, for a time, entrusted to your care, that you may train them up in all holiness, and fit them for the enjoyment of God in eternity. This is a glorious and important trust; seeing on soul is of more value than all the world beside. Every child, therefore, you are to watch over with the utmost care, that, when you are called to give an account of each to the Father of Spirits, you may give your accounts with joy and not with grief.

3. Your servants, of whatever kind, you are to look upon as a kind of secondary children: These, likewise, God has committed to your charge, as one that must give account. For every one under your roof that has a soul to be saved is under every one under your roof that has a soul to be saved is under your care; not only indented servants, who are legally engaged to remain with you for a term of years; not only hired servants, whether they voluntarily contract for a longer or shorter time; but also those who serve you by the week of day: For these too are, in a measure, delivered into you hands.

And it is not the will of your Master who is in heaven, that any of these should go out of your hands before they have received from you something more valuable than gold or silver. Yea, and you are in a degree accountable even for “the stranger that is within your gates.” As you are particularly required to see that he does “no manner of work” on the Lord’s day, while he is within your gates; so, by parity of reason, you are required to do all that is in your power to prevent his sinning against God in any other instance.

III. Let us inquire, in the Third place, What can we do that all these may “serve the Lord?”

1. May we not endeavour, First, to restrain them from all outward sin; from profane swearing; from taking the name of God in vain; from doing any needless work, or taking any pastime, on the Lord’s day? This labour of love you owe even to your visitants; much more to your wife, children, and servants. The former, over whom you have the least influence, you may restrain by argument or mild persuasion. If you find that, after repeated trials, they will not yield either to one or the other, it is your bounden duty to set ceremony aside, and to dismiss them from your
2. But you cannot dismiss your wife, unless for the cause of fornication, that is adultery. What can then be done, if she is habituated to any other open sin? I cannot find in the Bible that a husband has authority to strike his wife on any account, even suppose she struck him first, unless his life were in imminent danger. I never have known one instance yet of a wife that was mended thereby. I have heard, indeed, of some such instances; but as I did not see them, I do not believe them. It seems to me, all that can be done in this case is to be done partly by example, partly by argument of persuasion, each applied in such a manner as is dictated by Christian prudence. If evil can ever be overcome, it must be overcome by good. It cannot by overcome by evil: We cannot beat the devil with his own weapons. Therefore, if this evil cannot be overcome by good, we are called to suffer it. We are then called to say, “This is the cross which God hath chosen for me. He surely permits it for wise ends; ‘let him do what seemeth him good.’ Whenever he sees it to be best, he will remove this cup from me.” Meanwhile continue in earnest prayer, knowing that with God no word is impossible; and that he will either in due time take the temptation away, or make it a blessing to your soul.

3. Your children, while they are young, you may restrain from evil, not only by advice, persuasion, and reproof, but also by correction; only remembering, that this means is to be used last, -- not till all other have been tried, and found to be ineffectual. And even then you should take the utmost care to avoid the very appearance of passion. Whatever is done should be done with mildness; nay, indeed, with kindness too. Otherwise your own spirit will suffer loss, and the child will reap little advantage.

4. But some will tell you, “All this is lost labour: A child need not be corrected at all. Instruction, persuasion, and advice, will be sufficient for any child without correction; especially if gentle reproof be added, as occasion may require.” I answer, There may be particular instances, wherein this method may be successful. But you must not, in anywise, lay this down as an universal rule; unless you suppose yourself wiser than Solomon, or, to speak more properly wiser than God. For it is God himself, who best knoweth his own creatures, that has told us expressly, “He that spareth the rod, hateth his son: But he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” (Prov. 13:24.) And upon this is grounded that plain commandment, directed to all that fear God, “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” (Prov. 19:18.)

5. May we not endeavour, Secondly, to instruct them? To take care that every person who is under our roof have all such knowledge as is necessary to salvation? To see that our wife, servants, and children be taught all those things which belong to their eternal peace? In order to this you should provide that no only your wife, but your servants also, may enjoy all the public means of instruction.

On the Lord’s day in particular, you should so forecast what is necessary to be done at home, that they may have an opportunity of attending all the ordinances of God. Yea, and you should take care that they have some time every day for reading, meditation, and prayer; and you should inquire whether they do actually employ that time in the exercises for which it is allowed. Neither should any day pass without family prayer, seriously and solemnly performed.

6. You should particularly endeavour to instruct your children, early, plainly, frequently, and patiently. Instruct them early, from the first hour that you perceive reason begins to dawn. Truth may then begin to shine upon the mind far earlier than we are apt to suppose. And whoever watches the first openings of the understanding, may, by little and little, supply fit matter for it to work upon, and may turn the eye of the son, toward good things, as well as toward bad or trifling ones. Whenever a child begins to speak, you may be assured reason begins to work. I know no cause why a parent should not just then begin to speak of the best things, the things of God. And from that time no opportunity should be lost, of instilling all truths as they are capable of receiving.

7. But the speaking to them early will not avail, unless you likewise speak to the plainly. Use such words as little children may understand, just such as they use themselves. Carefully observe the few ideas which they have already, and endeavour to graft what you say upon them. To take a little example: Bid the child look up; and ask, “What do you see there?” “The sun.” “See, how bright it is! Feel how warm it shines upon you hand! Look, how it makes the grass green! But God, though you cannot see him, is above the sky, and is a deal brighter than the house.
sun! It is he, it is God that makes the grass and the flowers grow; that makes the trees green, and the fruit to come upon them! Think what he can do! He can do whatever he pleases. He can strike me or you dead in a moment! But he loves you; he loves to do you good. He loves to make you happy. Should not you then love him? And he will teach you how to love him."

8. While you are speaking in this, or some such manner, you should be continually lifting up your heart to God, beseeching him to open the eyes of their understanding, and to pour his light upon them. He, and he alone, can make them to differ herein from the beasts that perish. He alone can apply your words to their hearts; without which all your labour will be in vain. But whenever the Holy Ghost teaches, there is no delay in learning.

9. But if you would see the fruit of your labour, you must teach them not only early and plainly, but frequently too. It would be of little or no service to so it only once or twice a week. How often do you feed their bodies? Not less than three times a day. And is the soul of less value than the body? Will you not then feed this as often? If you find this a tiresome task, there is certainly something wrong in your own mind. You do not love them enough; or you do not love Him who is your Father and their Father. Humble yourself before him! Beg that he would give you more love; and love will make the labour light.

10. But it will not avail to teach them both early, plainly, and frequently, unless you persevere therein. Never leave off, never intermit your labour of love, till you see the fruit of it. But in order to this, you will find the absolute need of being endued with power from on high; without which, I am persuaded, none ever had, or will have, patience sufficient for the work. Otherwise, the inconceivable dullness of some children, and the giddiness or perverseness of others, would induce them to give up the irksome task, and let them follow their own imagination.

11. And suppose, after you have done this, after you have taught you children from their early infancy, in the plainest manner you could, omitting no opportunity, and persevering therein, you did not presently see any fruit of your labour, you must not conclude that there will be none. Possibly the “bread” which you have “cast upon the waters” may be “found after many days.” The seed which has long remained in the ground may, at length, spring up into a plentiful harvest. Especially if you do not restrain prayer before God, if you continue instant herein with all supplication. Meantime, whatever the effect of this be upon others, your reward is with the Most High.

12. Many parents, on the other hand, presently see the fruit of the seed they have sown, and have the comfort of observing that their children grow in grace in the same proportion as they grow in years. Yet they have not done all. They have still upon their hands another task, sometimes of no small difficulty. Their children are now old enough to go to school. But to what school is it advisable to send them?

13. Let it be remembered, that I do not speak to the wild, giddy, thoughtless world, but to those that fear God. I ask, then, for what end do you send you children to school? “Why, that they may be fit to live in the world.” In which world do you mean, -- this or the next? Perhaps you thought of this world only; and had forgot that there is a world to come; yea, and one that will last for ever! Pray take this into your account, and send them to such masters as will keep it always before their eyes.

Otherwise, to send them to school (permit me to speak plainly) is little better than sending them to the devil. At all events, then, send your boys, if you have any concern for their souls, not to any of the large public schools, (for they are nurseries of all manner of wickedness,) but private school, kept by some pious man, who endeavours to instruct a small number of children in religion and learning together.

14. ”But what shall I so with my girls?” By no means send them to a large boarding-school. In these seminaries too the children teach one another pride, vanity, affectation, intrigue, artifice, and, in short, everything which a Christian woman ought not to learn. Suppose a girl were well inclined, yet what would she do in a crowd of children, not one of whom has any thought of saving her soul in such company? Especially as their whole conversation points another way, and turns upon things which one would wish she would never think of. I never yet knew a pious, sensible woman that had been bred at a large boarding-school, who did not aver, one might as well send a young maid to be bred in Drury-Lane.

15. ”But where, then, shall I send my girls?” If you cannot breed them up yourself, (as my mother did, who bred up
seven daughters to years of maturity,) send them to some mistress that truly fears God; one whose life is a pattern
to her scholars, and who has only so many that she can watch over each as one that must give account to God.
Forty years ago I did not know such a mistress in England; but you may now find several; you may find such a
mistress, and such a school, at Highgate, at Deptford, near Bristol, in Chester, or near Leeds.

16. We may suppose your sons have now been long enough at school, and you are thinking of some business for
them. Before you determine anything on this head, see that your eye be single. Is it so? Is it your view to please
God herein? It is well if you take him into your account! But surely, if you live or fear God yourself, this will be
your first consideration, -- “In what business will your son be most likely to love and serve God? In what
employment will he have the greatest advantage for laying up treasure in heaven?” I have been shocked above
measure in observing how little this is attended to, even by pious parents! Even these consider only how he may
catch most money; not how he may get most holiness! Even these, upon this glorious motive, send him to a
heathen master, and into family where there is not the very form, much less the power of religion! Upon this
motive they fix him in a business which will necessarily expose him to such temptations as will leave him not a
probability, if a possibility, of serving God. O savage parents! Unnatural, diabolical cruelty. -- if you believe
there is another world.

“But what shall I do?” Set God before your eyes, and do all things with a view to please him. Then you will find
a master, of whatever profession, that loves, or at least fears, God; and you will find a family wherein is the form
of religion, if not the power also. Your son may nevertheless serve the devil if he will; but it is probable he will
not. And do not regard, if he get less money, provided he get more holiness. It is enough, though he have less of
earthly goods, if he secure the possession of heaven.

17. There is one circumstance more wherein you will have great need of the wisdom from above.

Your son or your daughter is now of age to marry, and desires your advice relative to it. Now you know what the
world calls a good match, -- one whereby much money is gained. Undoubtedly it is so, if it be true that money
always brings happiness: But I doubt it is not true; money seldom brings happiness, either in this world or the
world to come. Then let no man deceive you with vain words; riches and happiness seldom dwell together.
Therefore, if you are wise, you will not seek riches for your children by their marriage. See that your eye be
single in this also: Aim simply at the glory of God., and the real happiness of your children, both in time and
eternity. It is a melancholy thing to see how Christian parents rejoice in selling their son or their daughter to a
wealthy Heathen! And do you seriously call this a good match? Thou fool, by parity of reason, thou mayest call
hell a good lodging, and the devil a good master. O learn a better lesson from a better Master! “Seek ye first the
kingdom of God and his righteousness,” both for thyself and thy children; “and all other things shall be added
unto you.”

18. It is undoubtedly true, that if you are steadily determined to walk in this path; to endeavour by every possible
means, that you and your house may thus serve the Lord; that every member of you family may worship him, not
only in form, but in spirit and in truth; you will have need to use all the grace, all the courage, all the wisdom
which God has given you; for you will find such hinderances in the way, as only the mighty power of God can
enable you to break through. You will have all the saints of the world to grapple with, who will think you carry
tings too far. You will have all the powers of darkness against you, employing both force and fraud; and, above
all, the deceitfulness of your own heart; which, if you will hearken to it, will supply you with many reasons why
you should be a little more conformable to the world. But as you have begun, go on in the name of the Lord, and
in the power of his might! Set the smiling and the frowning world, with the prince thereof, at defiance. Follow
reason and the oracles of God; not the fashions and customs of men. “Keep thyself pure.” Whatever others do, let
you and your house “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.” Let you, your yoke-fellow, your children, and your
servants, be all on the Lord’s side; sweetly drawing together in one yoke, walking in all his commandments and
ordinances, till every one of you “shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour!”
THE DUTY OF CONSTANT COMMUNION

The following discourse was written above five-and-fifty years ago, for the use of my pupils at Oxford. I have added very little, but retrenched much; as I then used more words than I do now. But, I thank God, I have not yet seen cause to alter my sentiments in any point which is therein delivered. 1788. J.W.


It is no wonder that men who have no fear of God should never think of doing this. But it is strange that it should be neglected by any that do fear God, and desire to save their souls; And yet nothing is more common. One reason why many neglect it is, they are so much afraid of “eating and drinking unworthily,” that they never think how much greater the danger is when they do not eat or drink it at all. That I may do what I can to bring these well-meaning men to a more just way of thinking, I shall,

I. Show that it is the duty of every Christian to receive the Lord’s Supper as often as he can; and,
II. Answer some objections.
I. I am to show that it is the duty of every Christian to receive the Lord’s Supper as often as he can.

1. The First reason why it is the duty of every Christian so to do is, because it is a plain command of Christ. That this is his command, appears from the words of the text, “Do this in remembrance of me;” By which, as the Apostles were obliged to bless, break, and give the bread to all that joined with them in holy things; so were all Christians obliged to receive those sign of Christ’s body and blood. Here, therefore, the bread and wine are commanded to be received, in remembrance of his death, to the end of the world. Observe, too, that this command was given by our Lord when he was just laying down his life for our sakes. They are, therefore, as it were, his dying words to all his followers.

2. A Second reason why every Christian should do this as often as he can, is, because the benefits of doing it are so great to all that do it in obedience to him; viz., the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls. In this world we are never free from temptations. Whatever way of life we are in, whatever our condition be, whether we are sick or well, in trouble or at ease, the enemies of our souls are watching to lead us into sin. And too often they prevail over us. Now, when we are convinced of having sinned against God, what surer way have we of procuring pardon from him, than the “showing forth the Lord’s death;” and beseeching him, for the sake of his Son’s sufferings, to blot out all our sins?

3. The grace of God given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins, by enabling us to leave them. As our bodies are strengthened by bread and wine, so are our souls by these tokens of the body and blood of Christ. This is the food of our souls: This gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection. If, therefore, we have any regard for the plain command of Christ, if we desire the pardon of our sins, if we wish for strength to believe, to love and obey God, then we should neglect no opportunity of receiving the Lord’s Supper; then we must never turn our backs on the feast which our Lord has prepared for us. We must neglect no occasion which the good providence of God affords us for this purpose. This is the true rule: So often are we to receive as God gives us opportunity. Whoever, therefore, does not receive, but goes from the holy table, when all things are prepared, either does not understand his duty, or does not care for the dying command of his Saviour, the forgiveness of his sins, the strengthening of his soul, and the refreshing it with the hope of glory.

4. Let every one, therefore, who has either any desire to please God, or any love of his own soul, obey God, and consult the good of his own soul, by communicating every time he can; like the first Christians, with whom the Christian sacrifice was a constant part of the Lord’s day service. And for several centuries they received it almost every day: Four times a week always, and every saint’s day beside. Accordingly, those that joined in the prayers of the faithful never failed to partake of the blessed sacrament. What opinion they had of any who turned his back upon it, we may learn from that ancient canon: “If any believer join in the prayers of the faithful, and go away without receiving the Lord’s Supper, let him be excommunicated, as bringing confusion into the church of God.”
5. In order to understand the nature of the Lord’s Supper, it would be useful carefully to read over those passages in the Gospel, and in the first Epistle to the Corinthians [1 Cor. 11], which speak of the institution of it. Hence we learn that the design of this sacrament is, the continual remembrance of the death of Christ, by eating bread and drinking wine, which are the outward signs of the inward grace, the body and blood of Christ.

6. It is highly expedient for those who purpose to receive this, whenever their time will permit, to prepare themselves for this solemn ordinance by self-examination and prayer. But this is not absolutely necessary. And when we have not time for it, we should see that we have the habitual preparation which is absolutely necessary, and can never be dispensed with on any account or any occasion whatever. This is, First, a full purpose of heart to keep all the commandments of God; and, Secondly, a sincere desire to receive all his promises.

II. I am, in the Second place, to answer the common objections against constantly receiving the Lord’s Supper.

1. I say constantly receiving; for as to the phrase of frequent communion, it is absurd to the last degree. If it means anything less than constant, it means more than can be proved to be the duty of any man. For if we are not obliged to communicate constantly, by what argument can it be proved that we are obliged to communicate frequently? Yea, more than once a year, or once in seven years, or once before we die? Every argument brought for this, either proves that we ought to do it constantly, or proves nothing at all. Therefore, that indeterminate, unmeaning way of speaking ought to be laid aside by all men of understanding.

2. In order to prove that it is our duty to communicate constantly, we may observe that the holy communion is to be considered either, (1.), as a command of God, or, (2.) As a mercy to man.

   First. As a command of God. God our Mediator and Governor, from whom we have received our life and all things, on whose will it depends whether we shall be perfectly happy or perfectly miserable from this moment to eternity, declares to us that all who obey his commands shall be eternally happy; all who not, shall be eternally miserable. Now, one of these commands is, “Do this in remembrance of me.” I ask then, Why do you not do this, when you can do it if you will? When you have an opportunity before you, why do not you obey the command of God?

   3. Perhaps you will say, “God does not command me to do this as often as I can:” That is, the words “as often as you can,” are not added in this particular place. What then? Are we not to obey every command of God as often as we can? Are not all the promises of God made to those, and those only, who “give all diligence;” that is, to those who do all they can to obey his commandments? Our power is the one rule of our duty. Whatever we can do, that we ought. With respect either to this or any other command, he that, when he may obey it if he will, does not, will have no place in the kingdom of heaven.

4. And this great truth, that we are obliged to keep every command as far as we can, is clearly proved from the absurdity of the contrary opinion; for were we to allow that we are not obliged to obey every commandment of God as often as we can, we have no argument left to prove that any man is bound to obey any command at any time. For instance: Should I ask a man why he does not obey one of the plainest commands of God, why, for instance, he does not help his parents, he might answer, “I will not do it now, but I will at another time.” When that time comes, put him in mind of God’s command again; and he will say, “I will obey it some time or other.” Nor is it possible ever to prove that he ought to do it now, unless by proving that he ought to do it as often as he can; and therefore he ought to do it now, because he can if he will.

5. Consider the Lord’s Supper, Secondly, as a mercy from God to man. As God, whose mercy is over all his works, and particularly over the children of men, knew there was but one way for man to be happy like himself; namely, by being like him in holiness; as he knew we could do nothing toward this of ourselves, he has given us certain means of obtaining his help. One of these is the Lord’s Supper, which, of his infinite mercy, he hath given for this very end; that through this means we may be assisted to attain those blessings which he hath prepared for us; that we may obtain holiness on earth, and everlasting glory in heaven.

   I ask, then, Why do you not accept of his mercy as often as ever you can? God now offers you his blessing; -- why do you refuse it? You have now an opportunity of receiving his mercy; -- why do you not receive it? You are weak: -- why do not you seize every opportunity of increasing your strength? In a word: Considering this as a command of God, he that does not communicate as often as he can has no piety; considering it as a mercy, he...
that does not communicate as often as he can has no wisdom.

6. These two considerations will yield a full answer to all the common objections which have been made against constant communion; indeed to all that ever were or can be made. In truth, nothing can be objected against it, but upon supposition that, [at] this particular time, either the communion would be no mercy, or I am not commanded to receive it. Nay, should we grant it would be no mercy, that is not enough; for still the other reason would hold: Whether it does you any good or none, you are to obey the command of God.

7. However, let us see the particular excuses which men commonly make for not obeying it. The most common is, “I am unworthy; and `he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.’ Therefore I dare not communicate, lest I should eat and drink my own damnation.”

The case is this: God offers you one of the greatest mercies on this side heaven, and commands you to accept it. Why do not you accept this mercy, in obedience to his command? You say, “I am unworthy to receive it.” And what then? You are unworthy to receive any mercy from God. But is that a reason for refusing all mercy? God offers you a pardon for all your sins. You are unworthy of it, it is sure, and he knows it; but since he is pleased to offer it nevertheless, will not you accept of it? He offers to deliver your soul from death: You are unworthy to live; but will you therefore refuse life? He offers to endue your soul with new strength; because you are unworthy of it, will you deny to take it? What can God himself do for us farther, if we refuse his mercy because we are unworthy of it?

8. But suppose this were no mercy to us; (to suppose which is indeed giving God the lie; saying, that is not good for man which he purposely ordered for his good;) still I ask, Why do not you obey God’s command? He says, “Do this.” Why do you not? You answer, “I am unworthy to do it.” What! Unworthy to obey God? Unworthy to do what God bids you do? Unworthy to obey God’s command? What do you mean by this? That those who are unworthy to obey God ought not to obey him? Who told you so? If he were even “an angel from heaven, let him be accursed.” If you think God himself has told you so by St. Paul, let us hear his words. They are these: “He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.”

Why, this is quite another thing. Here is not a word said of being unworthy to eat and drink.

Indeed he does speak of eating and drinking unworthily; but that is quite a different thing; so he has told us himself. In this very chapter we are told that by eating and drinking unworthily is meant, taking the holy sacrament in such a rude and disorderly way, that one was “hungry and another drunken.” But what is that to you? Is there any danger of your doing so,—of your eating and drinking thus unworthily? However unworthy you are to communicate, there is no fear of your communicating thus. Therefore, whatever the punishment is, of doing it thus unworthily, it does not concern you. You have no more reason from this text to disobey God, than if there was no such text in the Bible. If you speak of “eating and drinking unworthily” in the sense St. Paul uses the words, you may as well say, “I dare not communicate, for fear the church should fall,” as “for fear I should eat and drink unworthily.”

9. If then you fear bringing damnation on yourself by this, you fear where no fear is. Fear it not for eating and drinking unworthily; for that, in St. Paul’s sense, ye cannot do. But I will tell you for what you shall fear damnation;—for not eating and drinking at all; for not obeying your Maker and Redeemer; for disobeying his plain command; for thus setting at nought both his mercy and authority. Fear ye this; for hear what his Apostle saith: “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all.” (James 2:10.)

10. We see then how weak the objection is, “I dare not receive [The Lord’s Supper], because I am unworthy.” Nor is it any stronger, though the reason why you think yourself unworthy is, that you have lately fallen into sin. It is true, our Church forbids those “who have done any grievous crime” to receive without repentance. But all that follows from this is, that we should repent before we come; not that we should neglect to come at all.

To say, therefore, that “a man may turn his back upon the altar because he has lately fallen into sin, that he may impose this penance upon himself,” is talking without any warrant from Scripture.

For where does the Bible teach to atone for breaking one commandment of God by breaking another? What advice is this, -- “Commit a new act of disobedience, and God will more easily forgive the past!”
11. Others there are who, to excuse their disobedience plead that they are unworthy in another sense, that they “cannot live up to it; they cannot pretend to lead so holy a life as constantly communicating would oblige them to do.” Put this into plain words. I ask, Why do not you accept the mercy which God commands you to accept? You answer, “Because I cannot live up to the profession I must make when I receive it.” Then it is plain you ought never to receive it at all. For it is no more lawful to promise once what you know you cannot perform, than to promise it a thousand times. You know too, that it is one and the same promise, whether you make it every year or every day. You promise to do just as much, whether you promise ever so often or ever so seldom.

If, therefore, you cannot live up to the profession they make who communicate once a week, neither can you come up to the profession you make who communicate once a year. But cannot you, indeed? Then it had been good for you that you had never been born. For all that you profess at the Lord’s table, you must both profess and keep, or you cannot be saved. For you profess nothing there but this,—that you will diligently keep his commandments. And cannot you keep up to this profession? Then you cannot enter into life.

12. Think then what you say, before you say you cannot live up to what is required of constant communicants. This is no more than is required of any communicants; yea, of everyone that has a soul to be saved. So that to say, you cannot live up to this, is neither better nor worse than renouncing Christianity. It is, in effect, renouncing your baptism, wherein you solemnly promised to keep all his commandments. You now fly from that profession. You wilfully break one of his commandments, and, to excuse yourself, say, you cannot keep his commandments: Then you cannot expect to receive the promises, which are made only to those that keep them.

13. What has been said on this pretence against constant communion, is applicable to those who say the same thing in other words: “We dare not do it, because it requires so perfect an obedience afterwards as we cannot promise to perform.” Nay, it requires neither more nor less perfect obedience than you promised in your baptism. You then undertook to keep the commandments of God by his help; and you promise no more when you communicate.

14. A Second objection which is often made against constant communion, is, the having so much business as will not allow time for such a preparation as is necessary thereto. I answer: All the preparation that is absolutely necessary is contained in those words: “Repent you truly of your sins past; have faith in Christ our Saviour;” (and observe, that word is not here taken in its highest sense:) “amend your lives, and be in charity with all men; so shall ye be meet partakers of these holy mysteries.” All who are thus prepared may draw near without fear, and receive the sacrament to their comfort. Now, what business can hinder you from being thus prepared? -- from repenting of your past sins, from believing that Christ died to save sinners, from amending your lives, and being in charity with all men? No business can hinder you from this, unless it be such as hinders you from being in a state of salvation. If you resolve and design to follow Christ, you are fit to approach the Lord’s table. If you do not design this, you are only fit for the table and company of devils.

15. No business, therefore, can hinder any man from having that preparation which alone is necessary, unless it be such as unprepares him for heaven, as puts him out of a state of salvation.

Indeed every prudent man will, when he has time, examine himself before he receives the Lord’s Supper. Whether he repents him truly of his former sins; whether he believes the promises of God; whether he fully designs to walk in His ways, and be in charity with all men. In this, and in private prayer, he will doubtless spend all the time he conveniently can. But what is this to you who have not time? What excuse is this for not obeying God? He commands you to come, and prepare yourself by prayer, if you have time; if you have not, however, come. Make not reverence to God’s command a pretence for breaking it. Do not rebel against him for fear of offending him. Whatever you do or leave undone besides, be sure to do what God bids you do. Examining yourself, and using private prayer, especially before the Lord’s Supper, is good; But behold! “to obey is better than” self-examination; “and to hearken,” than the prayer of an angel.

16. A Third objection against constant communion is, that it abates our reverence for the sacrament. Suppose it did? What then? Will you thence conclude that you are not to receive it constantly? This does not follow. God commands you, “Do this.” You may do it now, but will not, and, to excuse yourself say, “If I do it so often, it will abate the reverence with which I do it now.” Suppose it did; has God ever told you, that when the obeying his command abates your reverence to it, then you may disobey it? If he has, you are guiltless; if not, what you
say is just nothing to the purpose. The law is clear. Either show that the lawgiver makes this exception, or you are guilty before him.

17. Reverence for the sacrament may be of two sorts: Either such as is owing purely to the newness of the thing, such as men naturally have for anything they are not used to; or such as is owing to our faith, or to the love or fear of God. Now, the former of these is not properly a religious reverence, but purely natural. And this sort of reverence for the Lord’s Supper, the constantly receiving of it must lessen. But it will not lessen the true religious reverence, but rather confirm and increase it.

18. A Fourth objection is, “I have communicated constantly so long, but I have not found the benefit I expected.” This has been the case with many well-meaning persons, and therefore deserves to be particularly considered. And consider this: First, whatever God commands us to do, we are to do because he commands, whether we feel any benefit thereby or no. Now, God commands, “Do this in remembrance of me.” This, therefore, we are to do because he commands, whether we find present benefit thereby or not. But undoubtedly we shall find benefit sooner or later, though perhaps insensibly. We shall be insensibly strengthened, made more fit for the service of God, and more constant in it. At least, we are kept from falling back, and preserved from many sins and temptations: And surely this should be enough to make us receive this food as often as we can; though we do not presently feel the happy effects of it, as some have done, and we ourselves may when God sees best.

19. But suppose a man has often been at the sacrament, and yet received no benefit. Was it not his own fault? Either he was not rightly prepared, willing to obey all the commands and to receive all the promises of God, or he did not receive it aright, trusting in God. Only see that you are duly prepared for it, and the oftener you come to the Lord’s table, the greater benefit you will find there.

20. A Fifth objection which some have made against constant communion is, that “the Church enjoins it only three times a year.” The words of the Church are, “Note, that every parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year.” To this I answer, First, What, if the Church had not enjoined it at all, Is it not enough that God enjoins it? We obey the Church only for God’s sake.

And shall we not obey God himself? If; then, you receive three times a year because the Church commands it, receive every time you can because God commands it. Else your doing the one will be so far from excusing you for not doing the other, that your own practice will prove your folly and sin, and leave you without excuse.

But, Secondly, we cannot conclude from these words, that the Church excuses him who receives only thrice a year. The plain sense of them is, that he who does not receive thrice at least, shall be cast out of the Church: But they by no means excuse him who communicates no oftener. This never was the judgment of our Church: On the contrary, she takes all possible care that the sacrament be duly administered, wherever the Common Prayer is read, every Sunday and holiday in the year.

The Church gives a particular direction with regard to those that are in Holy Orders: “In all cathedral and collegiate Churches and Colleges, where there are many Priests and Deacons, they shall all receive the communion with the Priest, every Sunday at the least.”

21. It has been shown, First, that if we consider the Lord’s Supper as a command of Christ, no man can have any pretence to Christian piety, who does not receive it (not once a month, but) as often as he can. Secondly, that if we consider the institution of it, as a mercy to ourselves, no man who does not receive it as often as he can has any pretence to Christian prudence. Thirdly, that none of the objections usually made, can be any excuse for that man who does not, at every opportunity obey this command and accept this mercy.

22. It has been particularly shown, First, that unworthiness is no excuse; because though in one sense we are all unworthy, yet none of us need be afraid of being unworthy in St. Paul’s sense, of “eating and drinking unworthily.” Secondly, that the not having time enough for preparation can be no excuse; since the only preparation which is absolutely necessary, is that which no business can hinder, nor indeed anything on earth, unless so far as it hinders our being in a state of salvation.

Thirdly, that its abating our reverence is no excuse; since he who gave the command, “Do this,” nowhere adds, “unless it abates your reverence.” Fourthly, that our not profiting by it is no excuse;
since it is our own fault, in neglecting that necessary preparation which is in our own power. Lastly, that the judgment of our own Church is quite in favour of constant communion. If those who have hitherto neglected it on any of these pretences, will lay these things to heart, they will, by the grace of God, come to a better mind, and never forsake their own mercies.

John Wesley

SERMON 103

WHAT IS MAN?

“When I consider thy heaven, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man?” Psalm 8:3, 4.

How often has it been observed, that the Book of Psalms is a rich treasury of devotion, which the wisdom of God has provided to supply the wants of his children in all generations! In all ages the Psalms have been of singular use to those that loved or feared God; not only to the pious Israelites, but to the children of God in all nations. And this book has been of sovereign use to the Church of God, not only while it was in its state of infancy, (so beautifully described by St. Paul in the former part to the fourth chapter to the Galatians,) but also since, in the fullness of time, “life and immortality were brought to the light by the gospel.” The Christians in every age and nation have availed themselves of this divine treasure, which has richly supplied the wants, not only of the “babes in Christ,” of those who were just setting out in the ways of God, but of those also who had made good progress therein; yea, of such as were swiftly advancing toward “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

The subject of this psalm is beautifully proposed in the beginning of it: “O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the earth; who hast set thy glory above the heavens!” It celebrates the glorious wisdom and love of God, as the Creator and Governor of all things. It is not an improbable conjecture, that David wrote this psalm in a bright star-light night, while he observed the moon also “walking in her brightness;” that while he surveyed

This fair half-round, the ample azure sky,
Terribly large, and beautifully bright,
With stars unnumber’d, and measured light, --

he broke out, from the fullness of his heart, into the natural exultation, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man?” How is it possible that the Creator of these, the innumerable armies of heaven and earth, should have any regard to this speck of creation, whose time “passeth away like a shadow?”

Thy frame but dust, thy stature but a span,
A moment thy duration, foolish man!

“What is man?” I would consider this, First, with regard to his magnitude; and, Secondly, with regard to his duration.

I.

1. Consider we, First, What is man, with regard to his magnitude? And, in this respect, what is any one individual, compared to all the inhabitants of Great Britain? He shrinks into nothing in the comparison. How inconceivably little is one compared to eight or ten millions of people! Is he not “Lost like a drop in the unbounded (ocean)”?

2. But what are all the inhabitants of Great Britain, compared to all the inhabitants of the earth? These have frequently been supposed to amount to about four hundred millions. But will this computation be allowed to be just, by those who maintain China alone to contain fifty-eight millions? If it be true, that this one empire contains little less than sixty millions, we may easily suppose that the inhabitants of the whole terraqueous globe amount to four thousand millions of inhabitants, rather than four hundred. And what is any single individual, in comparison of this number?
3. But what is the magnitude of the earth itself, compared to that of the solar system? Including, beside that vast body, the sun, so immensely larger that the earth, the whole train of primary and secondary planets; several of which (I mean, of the secondary planets, suppose that satellites or moons of Jupiter and Saturn) are abundantly larger than the whole earth?

4. And yet, what is the whole quantity of matter contained in the sun, and all those primary and secondary planets, with all the spaces comprised in the solar system, in comparison of that which is pervaded by those amazing bodies, the comets? Who but the Creator himself can “tell the number of these, and call them all by their names?” Yet what is even the orbit of a comet, and the space contained therein, to the space which is occupied by the fixed stars; which are at so immense a distance from the earth, that they appear, when they are viewed through the largest telescope, just as they do to the naked eye?

5. Whether the bounds of the creation do or do not extend beyond the region of the fixed stars, who can tell? Only the morning-stars, who sang together when the foundations thereof were laid. But it is finite, that the bounds of it are fixed, we have no reason to doubt. We cannot doubt, but when the Son of God had finished all the work which he created and made, he said, These be thy bounds,

This be thy just circumference, O world!  
But what is man to this?

6. We may take one step, and only one step, farther still: What is the space of the whole creation, what is all finite space that is, or can be conceived, in comparison of infinite? What is it but a point, a cipher, compared to that which is filled by him that is All in all? Think of this, and then ask, “What is man?”

7. What is man, that the great God who filleth heaven and earth, “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,” should stoop so inconceivably low as to “be mindful of him?” Would not reason suggest to us, that so diminutive a creature would be overlooked by him in immensity of his works? Especially when we consider,

II. Secondly, What is man, with regard to his duration?

1. The days of man, since the last reduction of human life, which seems to have taken place in the time of Moses, (and not improbably was revealed to the man of God at the time that he made this declaration,) “are threescore years and ten.” This is the general standard which God hath now appointed. “And if men be so strong,” perhaps one in a hundred, “that they come to fourscore years, yet then is their strength but labour and sorrow: So soon passeth it away, and we are gone!”

2. Now, what a poor pittance of duration is this, compared to the life of Methuselah! “And Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty and nine years.” But what are these nine hundred and sixty and nine years to the duration of an angel, which began “or ever the mountains were brought forth,” or the foundations of the earth were laid? And what is the duration which has passed since the creation of angels, that which passed before they were created, to unbeginning eternity? -- to that half of eternity (if one may so speak) which had then elapsed? And what three scores years and ten to this?

3. Indeed, what proportion can there possibly be between any finite and infinite duration? What proportion is there between a thousand or ten thousand years, or ten thousand time ten thousand ages, and eternity? I know not that the inexpressible disproportion between any conceivable part of time and eternity can be illustrated in a more striking manner than it is in the well-known passage of St. Cyprian: “Suppose there was a ball of sand as large as the globe of earth, and suppose one grain of this were to be annihilated in a thousand years; yet that whole space of time wherein this ball would be annihilating, at the rate of one grain in a thousand years, would bear less, yea, unspeakably, infinitely less, proportion to eternity, than a single grain of sand would bear to that whole mass.”

What, then, are the seventy years of human life, in comparison of eternity? In what terms can the proportion between these be expressed? It is nothing, yea, infinitely less than nothing!

4. If, then, we add to the littleness of man the inexpressible shortness of his duration, it is any wonder that a man of reflection should sometimes feel a kind of fear, lest the great, eternal, infinite Governor of the universe should disregard so diminutive a creature as man? -- a creature so every way inconsiderable, when compared either with immensity or eternity? Did not both these reflections glance through, if not dwell upon, the mind of the royal Psalmist? Thus, in contemplation of the former, he breaks out into the strong words of the text: “When I consider
the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained. What is man, that thou shouldst be mindful; or the son of man, that thou shouldst regard him?” He is, indeed, (to use St. Augustine’s words,) aliqua portio creaturæ tueæ, “some portion of thy creation;” but quantula portio, “how amazingly small a portion!” How utterly beneath thy notice! It seems to be in contemplation of the latter, that he cries out in the hundred and forty-fourth Psalm, “Lord, what is man, that thou hast such respect unto him; or the son of man, that though shouldst so regard him?” “Man is like a thing of naught.” Why? “His time passeth away like a shadow.” In this, although in a very few places,) the new translation of the Psalms – that bound up in our Bibles – is perhaps more proper than the old, -- that which we have in the Common Prayer Book. It runs thus: “Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him; or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?” According to the former translation, David seems to be amazed that the eternal God, considering the littleness of man, should have so much respect unto him, and should so much regard him: But in the latter, he seems to wonder, seeing the life of man “passeth away like a shadow,” that God should take any knowledge of him at all, or make any account of him.

And it is natural for us to make the same reflection, and to entertain the same fear. But how may we prevent this uneasy reflection, and effectually cure this fear? First. By considering what David does not appear to have taken at all into his account; namely, that the body is not the man; that man is not only a house of clay, but an immortal spirit; a spirit made in the image of God; an incorruptible picture of the God of glory; a spirit that is of infinitely more value than the whole earth; of more value than the sun, moon, and stars, put together; yea, than the whole material creation.

Consider that the spirit of man is not only of a higher order, of a more excellent nature, than any part of the visible world, but also more durable; not liable either to dissolution or decay. We know all the things “which are seen are temporal;” -- of a changing, transient nature; -- but “the things which are not seen” (such as is the soul of man in particular) “are eternal.” “They shall perish,” but the soul remaineth. “They all shall wax old as a garment;” but when heaven and earth shall pass away, the soul shall not pass away.

Consider, Secondly, that declaration which the Father of spirits hath made to us by the Prophet Hosea: “I am God, and not man: Therefore my compassions fail not.” As if he had said, “If I were only a man, or an angel, or any finite being, my knowledge might admit of bounds, and my mercy might be limited. But `my thoughts are not as your thoughts,’ and my mercy is not as your mercy. `As the heavens are higher than earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts;’ and `my mercy,’ my compassion, my ways of showing it, `higher than your ways.’”

That no shadow of fear might remain, no possibility of doubting; to show what manner of regard the great eternal God bears to little, short-lived man, but especially to his immortal part; God gave his Son, “his only Son, to the end that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” See how God loved the world! The Son of God, that was “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,” in glory equal with the Father, in majesty co-eternal, “emptied himself, took upon him the form of a servant; and, being found in fashion as a man, was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” And all this he suffered not for himself, but “for us men and for our salvation.” “He bore” all “our sins in his own body upon the tree,” that “by his stripes we” might be “healed.” After this demonstration of his love, is it possible to doubt any longer of God’s tender regard for man; even though he was “dead in trespasses and sins?” Even when he saw us in our sins and in our blood, he said unto us. “Live!” Let us then fear no more! Let us doubt no more! “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, shall he not with freely give us all things?”

"Nay,” says the philosopher, “if God so loved the world, did he not love a thousand other worlds, as well as he did this? It is now allowed that there are thousands, if not millions, of worlds, besides this in which we live. And can any reasonable man believe that the Creator of all these, many of which are probably as large, yea, far larger than ours, would show such astonishingly greater regard to one than to all the rest?” I answer, Suppose there were millions of worlds, yet God may see, in the abyss of his infinite wisdom, reasons that do not appear to us, why he saw good to show this mercy to ours, in preference to thousands or millions of other worlds.

I speak this even upon the common supposition of the plurality of worlds, -- a very favourite notion with all those who deny the Christian Revelation; and for this reason, because it affords them a foundation for so plausible an objection to it. But the more I consider that supposition, the more I doubt of it: Insomuch that, if it
were allowed by all the philosophers in Europe, still I could not allow it without stronger proof than any I have met with yet.

10. "Nay, but is not the argument of the grey Huygens sufficient to put it beyond all doubt? - `When we view,' says that able astronomer, 'the moon through a good telescope, we clearly discover rivers and mountains on her spotted globe. Now, where rivers are, there are doubtless plants and vegetables of various kinds: And where vegetables are, there are undoubtedly animals; yea, rational ones, as on earth. It follows, then, that the moon has its inhabitants, we may easily suppose, so are all the secondary planets; and, in particular, all the satellites or moons of Jupiter and Saturn. And if the secondary planets are inhabited, why not the primary? Why should we doubt it of Jupiter and Saturn themselves, as well as Mars, Venus, and Mercury?"

11. But do not you know, that Mr. Huygens himself, before he died, doubted of this whole hypotheses? For upon further observation he found reason to believe that the moon has no atmosphere. He observed, that in a total eclipse of the sun, on the removal of the shade from any part of the earth, the sun immediately shines bright upon it; whereas if the moon had atmosphere, would appear dim and dusky. Thus, after an eclipse of the moon, first a dusky light appears on that part of it from which the shadow of the earth removes, while that light passes that the moon has no atmosphere. Consequently, it has no clouds, no rain, no springs, no rivers; and therefore no plants or animals. But there is no proof or probability that the moon is inhabited; neither have we any proof that the other planets are. Consequently, the foundation being removed, the whole fabric falls to the ground.

12. But, you will say, "Suppose this argument fails, we may infer the same conclusion, the plurality of worlds, from the unbounded wisdom, and power, and goodness of the Creator. It was full as easy to him to create thousands or millions of worlds as one. Can any one then believe that he would exert all his power and wisdom in creating a single world? What proportion is there between this speck of creation, and the Great God that filleth the heaven and earth, while “We know, the power of his almighty hand

   Could form another world from every sand?”

13. To this boasted proof, this argumentum palmarium of the learned infidels, I answer, Do you expect to find any proportion between finite and infinite? Suppose God had created a thousand more worlds than there are grains of sand in the universe; what proportion would all these together beat to the infinite Creator? Still, in comparison of Him, they would be, not a thousand times, but infinitely, less than a mite compared to the universe. Have done, then, with this childish prattle about the proportion of creatures to their Creator; and leave it to the all-wise God to create what and when he pleases. For who, besides himself, “hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor?”

14. Suffice it then for us to know this plain and comfortable truth, -- that the almighty Creator hath shown that regard to this poor little creature of a day, which he hath not shown even to the inhabitants of heaven “who kept not their first estate.” He hath given us his Son, his only Son, both to live and to die for us! O let us live unto him, that we may die unto him, and live with him ever!

John Wesley
SERMON 106
(text from the 1872 edition)

ON FAITH

“Without faith it is impossible to please him.” Heb. 11:6.

1. But what is Faith? It is a divine “evidence and conviction of things not seen;” of things which are not seen now, whether they are visible or invisible in their own nature. Particularly, it is a divine evidence and conviction of God, and of the things of God. This is the most comprehensive definition of faith that ever was or can be given; as including every species of faith, from the lowest to the highest. And yet I do not remember any eminent writer that has given a full and clear account of the several sorts of it, among all the verbose and tedious treatises which
have been published upon the subject.

2. Something indeed of a similar kind has been written by that great and good man, Mr. Fletcher, in his “Treatise on the various Dispensations of the Grace of God.” Herein he observes, that there are four dispensations that are distinguished from each other by the degree of light which God vouchsafes to them that are under each. A small degree of light is given to those that are under the heathen dispensation. These generally believed, “that there was a God, and that he was a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” But a far more considerable degree of light was vouchsafed to the Jewish nation; insomuch as to them “were entrusted” the grand means of light, “the oracles of God.” Hence many of these had clear and exalted views of the nature and attributes of God; of their duty to God and man; yea, and of the great promise made to our first parents, and transmitted by them to their posterity, that “the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head.”

3. But above both the heathen and Jewish dispensation was that of John the Baptist. To him a still clearer light was given; and he himself “a burning and shining light.” To him it was given to “behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.” Accordingly our Lord himself affirms, that “of all which had been born of women,” there had not till that time arisen “a greater than John the Baptist.” But nevertheless he informs us, “He that is least in the kingdom of God,” the Christian dispensation, “is greater than he.” By one that is under the Christian dispensation, Mr. Fletcher means one that has received the Spirit of adoption; that has the Spirit of God witnessing “with his spirit, that he is a child of God.”

In order to explain this still farther, I will endeavour, by the help of God,

First. To point out the several sorts of faith: And, Secondly, to draw some practical inferences.

I. In the First place, I will endeavour to point out the several sorts of faith. It would be easy, either to reduce these to a smaller number, or to divide them into a greater. But it does not appear that this would answer any valuable purpose.

1. The lowest sort of faith if it be any faith at all, is that of a Materialist, -- a man who, like the late Lord Kames, believes there is nothing but matter in the universe. I say, if it be any faith at all: for, properly speaking, it is not. It is not “an evidence or conviction of God,” for they do not believe there is any; neither is it “a conviction of things not seen,” for they deny the existence of such. Or if, for decency’s sake, they allow there is a God, yet they suppose even him to be material. For one of their maxims is, Jupiter est quodcumque vides. “Whatever you see, is God.” Whatever you see! A visible, tangible god! Excellent divinity! Exquisite nonsense!

2. The Second sort of faith, if you allow a Materialist to have any, is the faith of a Deist. I mean, one who believes there is a God, distinct from matter; but does not believe the Bible. Of these we may observe two sorts. One sort are mere beasts in human shape, wholly under the power of the basest passions, and having “a downright appetite to mix with mud.” Other Deists are, in most respects, rational creatures, though unhappily prejudiced against Christianity: Most of these believe the being and attributes of God; they believe that God made and governs the world; and that the soul does not die with the body, but will remain for ever in a state of happiness or misery.

3. The next sort of faith is the faith of Heathens, with which I join that of Mahometans. I cannot but prefer this before the faith of the Deists; because, though it embraces nearly the same objects, yet they are rather to be pitied than blamed for the narrowness of their faith. And their not believing the whole truth, is not owing to want of sincerity, but merely to want of light. When one asked Chicali, an old Indian Chief, “Why do not you red men know as much as us white men?” he readily answered, “Because you have the great Word, and we have not.”

4. It cannot be doubted, but this plea will avail for millions of modern Heathens. Inasmuch as to them little is given, of them little will be required. As to the ancient Heathens, millions of them, likewise were savages. No more therefore will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had. But many of them, especially in the civilized nations, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by His inward voice, all the essentials of true religion. Yea, and so was that Mahometan, and Arabian, who, a century or two ago, wrote the Life of Hai Ebn Yokdan. The story seems to be feigned; but it contains all the principles of pure religion and undefiled.

5. But, in general, we may surely place the faith of a Jew above that of a Heathen or Mahometan.
By Jewish faith, I mean, the faith of those who lived between the giving of the law and the coming of Christ. These, that is, those that were serious and sincere among them, believed all that is written in the Old Testament. In particular, they believed that, in the fulness of time, the Messiah would appear, “to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness.”

6. It is not so easy to pass any judgment concerning the faith of our modern Jews. It is plain, “the veil is still upon their hearts” when Moses and the Prophets are read. The god of this world still hardens their hearts, and still blinds their eyes, “lest at any time the light of the glorious gospel” should break in upon them. So that we may say of this people, as the Holy Ghost said to their forefathers, “The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” (Acts 28:27.) Yet it is not our part to pass sentence upon them, but to leave them to their own Master.

7. I need not dwell upon the faith of John the Baptist, any more than the dispensation which he was under; because these, as Mr. Fletcher well describes them, were peculiar to himself. Setting him aside, the faith of the Roman Catholics, in general, seems to be above that of the ancient Jews. If most of these are volunteers in faith, believing more than God has revealed, it cannot be denied that they believe all which God has revealed, as necessary to salvation. In this we rejoice on their behalf: We are glad that none of those new Articles, which they added, at the Council of Trent, “to the faith once delivered to the saints, does so materially contradict any of the ancient Articles, as to render them of no effect.

8. The faith of the Protestants, in general, embraces only those truths as necessary to salvation, which are clearly revealed in the oracles of God. Whatever is plainly declared in the Old and New Testament is the object of their faith. They believe neither more nor less than what is manifestly contained in, and provable by, the Holy Scriptures. The word of God is “a lantern to their feet, and a light in all their paths.” They dare not, on any pretence, go from it, to the right hand or to the left.

The written word is the whole and sole rule of their faith, as well as practice. They believe whatsoever he hath commanded. This is the proper faith of Protestants: By this they will abide, and no other.

9. Hitherto faith has been considered chiefly as an evidence and conviction of such or such truths.

And this is the sense wherein it is taken at this day in every part of the Christian world. But, in the mean time, let it be carefully observed, (for eternity depends upon it,) that neither the faith of a Roman Catholic, nor that of a Protestant, if it contains no more than this, no more than the embracing such and such truths, will avail any more before God, than the faith of a Mahometan or a Heathen; yea, of a Deist or Materialist. For can this “faith save him?” Can it save any man either from sin or from hell? No more than it could cave Judas Iscariot: No more than it could save the devil and his angels; all of whom are convinced that every title of Holy Scripture is true.

10. But what is the faith which is properly saving; which brings eternal salvation to all those that keep it to the end? It is such a divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, even in its infant state, enables every one that possesses it to “fear God and work righteousness.” And whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far, the Apostle declares, is “accepted of him.” He actually is, at that very moment, in a state of acceptance. But he is at present only a servant of God, not properly a son.

Meantime, let it be well observed, that “the wrath of God” no longer “abideth on him.”

11. Indeed, nearly fifty years ago, when the Preachers, commonly called Methodists, began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith, they were not sufficiently apprized of the difference between a servant and a child of God. They did not clearly understand, that even one “who feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.” In consequence of this, they were apt to make sad the hearts of those whom God had not made sad. For they frequently asked those who feared God, “Do you know that your sins are forgiven?” And upon their answering, “No,” immediately replied, “Then you are a child of time devil.” No; this does not follow. It might have been said, (and it is all that can be said with propriety,) “Hitherto you are only a servant, you are not a child of God. You have already great reason to praise God that he has called you to his honourable service. Fear not. Continue crying unto him, `and you shall see greater things than these.'”
12. And, indeed, unless the servants of God halt by the way, they will receive the adoption of sons. They will receive the faith of the children of God, by his revealing his only begotten Son in their hearts. Thus, the faith of a child is, properly and directly, a divine conviction, whereby every child of God is enabled to testify, “The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” And whosoever hath this, the Spirit of God testifieth with his spirit, that he is a child of God. So the Apostle writes to the Galatians: “Ye are the sons of God by faith. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father;” that is, giving you a childlike confidence in him, together with a kind affection toward him. This then it is, that (if St. Paul was taught of God, and wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost) properly constitutes the difference between a servant of God, and a child of God. “He that believeth,” as a child of God, “hath the witness in himself.” This the servant hath not. Yet let no man discourage him; rather, lovingly exhort him to expect it every moment.

13. It is easy to observe, that all the sort of faith which we can conceive are reducible to one or other of the preceding. But let us covet the best gifts, and follow the most excellent way. There is no reason why you should be satisfied with the faith of a Materialist, a Heathen, or a Deist; nor, indeed, with that of a servant. I do not know that God requires it at your hands. Indeed, if you have received this, you ought not to cast it away; you ought not in anywise to undervalue it but to be truly thankful for it. Yet, in the mean time, beware how you rest here: Press on till you receive the Spirit of adoption: Rest not, till that Spirit clearly witnesses with your spirit, that you are a child of God.

II. I proceed, in the Second place, to draw a few inferences from the preceding observations.

1. And I would, First, infer, in how dreadful a state, if there be a God, is a Materialist one who denies not only the “Lord that bought him,” but also the Lord that made him. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” But it is impossible he should have any faith at all; -- any conviction of any invisible world; for he believes there is no such thing; -- any conviction the being of a God; for a material God is no God at all. For you cannot possibly suppose the sun or skies to be God, any more than you can suppose a God of wood or stone. And, farther, whosoever believes all things to be mere matter must, of course, believe that all things are governed by dire necessity – necessity that is as inexorable as the winds; as ruthless as the rocks; as merciless as the waves that dash upon them, or the poor shipwrecked mariners! Who then shall help thee, thou poor desolate wretch, when thou art most in need of help? Winds, and seas, and rocks, and storms! Such are the best helpers which the Materialists can hope for!

2. Almost equally desolate is the case of the poor Deist, how learned, yea, how moral, soever he be. For you, likewise, though you may not advert it, are really “without God in the world.” See your religion, the “Religion of nature, delineated” by ingenious Mr. Wollaston; whom I remember to have seen when I was at school, attending the public service at the Charter-house chapel. Does he found his religion upon God? Nothing less. He founds it upon truth, abstract truth. But does he not by that expression mean God? No; he sets him out of the question, and builds a beautiful castle in the air, without being beholden either to Him or his word. See your smooth-tongued orator of Glasgow, one of the most pleasing writers of the age! Has he any more to do with God, on his system, than Mr. Wollaston.? Does he deduce his “Idea of Virtue” from him, as the Father of Lights, the Source of all good? Just the contrary. He not only plans his whole theory without taking the least notice of God, but toward the close of it proposes that question, “Does the having an eye to God in an action enhance the virtue of it?” He answers, “No; it is so far from this, that if in doing a virtuous, that is, a benevolent, action, a man mingles a desire to please God, the more there is of this desire, the less virtue there is in that action?” Never before did I meet with either Jew, Turk, or Heathen who so flatly renounced God as this Christian Professor!

3. But with Heathens, Mahometans, and Jews we have at present nothing to do; only we may wish that their lives did not shame many of us that are called Christians. We have not much more to do with the members of the Church of Rome. But we cannot doubt, that many of them, like the excellent Archbishop of Cambray, still retain (notwithstanding many mistakes) that faith that worketh by love.

And how many of the Protestants enjoy this, whether members of the Church of England, or of other congregations? We have reason to believe a considerable number, both of one and the other, (and, blessed be God, an increasing number,) in every part of the land.
4. One more, I exhort you that fear God and work righteousness, you that are servants of God. First, flee from all sin, as from the face of a serpent; being Quick as the apple of an eye, the slightest touch of sin to feel; and to work righteousness, to the utmost of the power you now have to abound in works both of piety and mercy: And, Secondly, continually to cry to God, that he would reveal his Son in your hearts, to the intent you may be no more servants but sons; having his love shed abroad in your hearts, and walking in “the glorious liberty of the, children of God.”

5. I exhort you, Lastly, who already feel the Spirit of God witnessing with your spirit that you are the children of God, follow the advice of the Apostle: Walk in all the good works whereunto ye are created in Christ Jesus. And then, “leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,” go on to perfection.

Yea, and when ye have attained a measure of perfect love, when God has circumcised your hearts, and enabled you to love him with all your heart and with all your soul, think not of resting there.

That is impossible. You cannot stand still; you must either rise or fall; rise higher or fail lower.

Therefore the voice of God to the children of Israel, to the children of God, is, “Go forward!” “Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward unto those that are before, press on to the mark, for the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus!”

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John Wesley
SERMON 109
(text from the 1872 edition)

**WHAT IS MAN?**

“What is man?” Psa. 8:4.

1. Nay, what am I? With God’s assistance, I would consider myself. Here is a curious machine, “fearfully and wonderfully made.” It is a little portion of earth, the particles of which cohering, I know not how, lengthen into innumerable fibres, a thousand times finer than hairs. These, crossing each other in all directions, are strangely wrought into membranes; and these membranes are as strangely wrought into arteries, veins, nerves, and glands; all of which contain various fluids, constantly circulating through the whole machine.

2. In order to the continuance of this circulation, a considerable quantity of air is necessary. And this is continually taken into the habit, by an engine fitted for that very purpose. But as a particle of ethereal fire is connected with every particle of air, (and a particle of water too,) so both air, water, and fire are received into the lungs together; where the fire is separated from the air and water, both of which are continually thrown out; while the fire, extracted from them, is received into, and mingled with, the blood. Thus the human body is composed of all the four elements, duly proportioned and mixed together; the last of which constitutes the vital flame, whence flows the animal heat.

3. Let me consider this yet a little farther. Is not the primary use of the lungs to administer fire to the body, which is continually extracted from the air by that curious fire-pump? By inspiration it takes in the air, water, and fire together. In its numerous cells, (commonly called air-vessels,) it detaches the fire from the air and water. This then mixes with the blood; as every air-vessel has a blood-vessel connected with it: And as soon as the fire is extracted from it, the air and water air thrown out by expiration.

4. Without this spring of life, this vital fire, there could be no circulation of the blood; consequently, no motion of any of the fluids, of the nervous fluid in particular (if it be not rather, as is highly probable, this very fire we are speaking of). Therefore there could not be any sensation, nor any muscular motion. I say, there could be no circulation; for the cause usually assigned for this, namely, the force of the heart, is altogether inadequate to the
supposed effect. No one supposes the force of the heart, in a strong man, to be more than equal to the weight of three thousand pounds.

Whereas it would require a force equal to the weight of a hundred thousand pounds, to propel the blood from the heart through all the arteries. This can only be effected by the ethereal fire contained in the blood itself, assisted by the elastic force of the arteries through which it circulates.

5. But beside this strange compound of the four elements, -- earth, water, air, and fire, -- I find something in me of a quite different nature, nothing akin to any of these. I find something in me that thinks; which neither earth, water, air, fire, nor any mixture of them, can possibly do: Something which sees, and hears, and smells, and tastes, and feels; all which are so many modes of thinking.

It goes farther: Having perceived objects by any of these senses, it forms inward ideas of them. It judges concerning them; it sees whether they agree or disagree with each other. It reasons concerning them: that is, infers one proposition from another. It reflects upon its own operations; it is endued with) imagination and memory; and any of its operations, judgment in particular, may be subdivided into many others.

6. But by what means shall I learn in what part of my body this thinking principle is lodged? Some eminent men have affirmed, that it is “all in all, and all in every part.” But I learn nothing from this: They seem to be words that have no determinate meaning. Let us then appeal, in the best manner we can, to our own experience. From this I learn, that this thinking principle is not lodged in my hands, or feet, or legs, or arms. It is not lodged in the trunk of my body. Any one may be assured of this by a little reflection. I cannot conceive that it is situated in my bones, or in any part of my flesh. So far as I can judge, it seems to be situated in some part of my head; but whether in the pineal gland, or in any part of the brain, I am not able to determine.

7. But farther: This inward principle, wherever it is lodged, is capable, not only of thinking, but likewise of love, hatred, joy, sorrow, desire, fear, hope, &c., and a whole train of other inward emotions, which are commonly called passions or affections. They are styled, by a general appellation, the will; and are mixed and diversified a thousand ways. And they seem to be the only spring of action in that inward principle I call the soul.

8. But what is my soul? It is an important question, and not easy to be resolved.

Hear’st thou submissive, but a lowly birth,
Some separate particles of finer earth?
A plain effect which nature must beget,
As motion dictates, and as atoms meet?

I cannot in anywise believe this. My reason recoils at it. I cannot reconcile myself to the thought, that the soul is either earth, water, or fire; or a composition of all of them put together; were it only for this plain reason: -- All these, whether separate or compounded in any possible way, are purely passive still. None of them has the least power of self-motion; none of them can move itself. “But,” says one, “does not that ship move?” Yes; but not of itself; it is moved by the water on which it swims. “But then the water moves.” True; but the water is moved by the wind, the current of air. “But the air moves.” It is moved by the ethereal fire, which is attached to every particle of it; and this fire itself is moved by the almighty Spirit, the source of all the motion in the universe. But my soul has from Him an inward principle of motion, whereby it governs at pleasure every part of the body.

9. It governs every motion of the body; only with this exception, which is a marvellous instance of the wise and gracious providence of the great Creator: There are some motions of the body, which are absolutely needful for the continuance of life; such as the dilation and contraction of the lungs, the systole and diastole of the heart, the pulsation of the arteries, and the circulation of the blood.

These are not governed by me at pleasure: They do not wait the direction of my will. And it is well they do not. It is highly proper, that all the vital motions should be involuntary; going on, whether we advert to them or not. Were it otherwise, grievous inconveniences might follow. A man might put an end to his own life whenever he pleased, by suspending the motion of his heart, or of his lungs; or he might lose his life by mere inattention, -- by not remembering, not adverting to, the circulation of his blood. But these vital motions being excepted, I direct the motion of my whole body. By a single act of my will, I put my head, eyes, hands, or any part of my body into motion: Although I no more comprehend how I do this, than I can
comprehend how the “THREE that bear record in heaven are ONE.”

10. But what am I? Unquestionably I am something distinct from my body. It seems evident that my body is not necessarily included therein. For when my body dies, I shall not die: I shall exist as really as I did before. And I cannot but believe, this self-moving, thinking principle, with all its passions and affections, will continue to exist, although the body be mouldered into dust. Indeed at present this body is so intimately connected with the soul. That I seem to consist of both. In my present state of existence, I undoubtedly consist both of soul and body: And so I shall again, after the resurrection, to all eternity.

11. I am conscious to myself of one more property, commonly called liberty. This is very frequently confounded with the will; but is of a very different nature. Neither is it a property of the will, but a distinct property of the soul; capable of being exerted with regard to all the faculties of the soul, as well as all the motions of the body. It is a power of self-determination; which, although it does not extend to all our thoughts and imaginations, yet extends to our words and actions in general, and not with many exceptions. I am full as certain of this, that I am free, with respect to these, to speak or not to speak, to act or not to act, to do this or the contrary, as I am of my own existence. I have not only what is termed, a “liberty of contradiction,” -- power to do or not to do; but what is termed, a “liberty of contrariety,” -- a power to act one way, or the contrary. To deny this would be to deny the constant experience of all human kind. Every one feels that he has an inherent power to move this or that part of his body, to move it or not, and to move this way or the contrary, just as he pleases. I can, as I choose, (and so can every one that is born of a woman,) open or shut my eyes; speak, or be silent; rise or sit down; stretch out my hand, or draw it in; and use any of my limbs according to my pleasure, as well as my whole body. And although I have not an absolute power over my own mind, because of the corruption of my own nature; yet, through the grace of God assisting me, I have a power to choose and do good, as well as evil. I am free to choose whom I will serve; and if I choose the better part, to continue therein even unto death.

12.

But tell me, frighted nature, what is death?
Blood only stopp’d, and interrupted breath?
The utmost limit of a narrow span?
And even of motion, which with life began?

Death is properly the separation of the soul from the body. Of this we are certain. But we are not certain (at least in many cases) of the time when this separation is made. Is it when respiration ceases? According to the well-known maxim, Nullus spiritus, nulla vita: “Where there is no breath, there is no life.” Nay, we cannot absolutely affirm this: For many instances have been known, of those whose breath was totally lost, and yet their lives have been recovered. Is it when the heart no longer beats, or when the circulation of the blood ceases? Not so. For the heart may beat anew; and the circulation of the blood, after it is quite interrupted, may begin again. Is the soul separated from the body, when the whole body is stiff and cold as a piece of ice? But there have been several instances lately, of persons who were thus cold and stiff, and had no symptoms of life remaining, who, nevertheless, upon proper application, recovered both life and health. Therefore we can say no more, than that death is the separation of the soul and body; but in many cases God only can tell the moment of that separation.

13. But what we are much concerned to know, and deeply to consider, is, the end of life. For what end is life bestowed upon the children of me? Why were we sent into the world? For one sole end, and for no other, to prepare for eternity. For this alone we live. For this, and no other purpose, is our life either given or continued. It pleased the all-wise God, at the season which he saw best, to arise in the greatness of his strength, and create the heavens and the earth, and all things that are therein.

Having prepared all things for him, He “created man in his own image, after his own likeness.” And what was the end of his creation? It was one, and no other, -- that he might know, and love, and enjoy, and serve his great Creator to all eternity.

14. But “man, being in honour, continued not,” but became lower than even the beasts that perish.

He wilfully and openly rebelled against God, and cast off his allegiance to the Majesty of heaven.

Hereby he instantly lost both the favour of God, and the image of God wherein he was created. As he was then incapable of obtaining happiness by the old, God established a new covenant with man; the terms of which were
no longer, “Do this and live,” but, “Believe, and thou shalt be saved.” But still the end of man is one and the same; only it stands on another foundation. For the plain tenor of it is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God hath given to be the propitiation for thy sins, and thou shalt be saved;” first, from the guilt of sin, having redemption through his blood; then from the power, which shall have no more dominion over thee; and then from the root of it, into the whole image of God. And being restored both to the favour and image of God, thou shalt know, love, and serve him to all eternity. So that still the end of his life, the life of every man born into the world is to know, love, and serve his great Creator.

15. And let it be observed, as thus is the end, so it is the whole and sole end, for which every man upon the face of the earth, for which every one of you, were brought into the world, and endued with a living soul. Remember! You were born for nothing else. You live for nothing else. Your life is continued to you upon earth, for no other purpose than this, that you may know, love, and serve God on earth, and enjoy him to all eternity. Consider! You were not created to please your senses, to gratify your imagination, to gain money, or the praise of men; to seek happiness in any created good, in anything under the sun. All this is “walking in a vain shadow;” it is leading a restless, miserable life, in order to a miserable eternity. On the contrary, you were created for this, and for no other purpose, by seeking and finding happiness in God on earth, to secure the glory of God in heaven.

Therefore, let your heart continually say, “This one thing I do;” -- having one thing in view, remembering why I was born, and why I am continued in life, -- “I press on to the mark.” I aim at the one end of my being, God; even at “God in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” He shall be my God for ever and ever, and my guide even unto death! Bradford, May 2, 1788.

John Wesley
SERMON 115
(text of the 1872 Edition)

THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE
(a.k.a. PROPHETS AND PRIESTS)
(Sermon 121 in the Bicentennial Edition)

[Respecting this Sermon the following information is given by Mr. Moore, in his “Life of Mr. Wesley,” vol. ii., p. 339: -- “I was with Mr. Wesley in London when he published that Sermon. He had encouraged me to be a man of one book; and he had repeatedly invited me to speak fully whatever objection I had to any thing which he published. I thought that some things in that discourse were not to be found in THE BOOK; and I resolved to tell him so the first opportunity. It soon occurred. I respectfully observed that I agreed with him, that the Lord had always sent by whom He would send, instruction, reproof, and correction in righteousness, to mankind; and that there was a real distinction between the prophetic and priestly office in the Old Testament, and the prophetic and pastoral office in the New; (where no priesthood is mentioned but that of our Lord;) but I could not think that what he had said concerning the Evangelists and the Pastors, or Bishops, was agreeable to what we read there; viz., that the latter had a right to administer the sacraments, which the former did not possess. I observed, ‘Sir, you know that the Evangelists Timothy and Titus were ordered by the Apostle to ordain Bishops in every place; and surely they could not impart to them an authority which they did not themselves possess.’ He looked earnestly at me for some time, but not with displeasure. He made no reply, and soon introduced another subject. I said no more. The man of one book would not dispute against it. I believe, he saw, his love to the Church, from which he never deviated unnecessarily, had, in this instance, led him a little too far.” -- Ed.]

“No man taketh this honour unto himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” Hebrews 5:4.

1. There are exceeding few texts of Holy Scripture which have been more frequently urged than this against laymen, that are neither Priests nor Deacons, and yet take upon them to preach. Many have asked, “How dare any take this honour to himself, unless he be called of God, as was Aaron?” And a pious and sensible clergyman some years ago published a sermon on these words, wherein he endeavours to show that it is not enough to be inwardly called of God to preach, as many imagine themselves to be, unless they are outwardly called by men
sent of God for that purpose, as Aaron was called of God by Moses.

2. But there is one grievous flaw in this argument, as often as it has been urged. “Called of God, as was Aaron!” But Aaron did not preach at all: He was not called to it either by God or man. Aaron was called to minister in holy things; -- to offer up prayers and sacrifices; to execute the office of a Priest. But he was never called to be a Preacher.

3. In ancient times the office of a Priest and that of a Preacher were known to be entirely distinct.

And so everyone will be convinced that impartially traces the matter from the beginning. From Adam to Noah it is allowed by all that the first-born in every family was of course the priest in that family, by virtue of his primogeniture. But this gave him no right to be a Preacher, or (in the scriptural language) a Prophet. This office not unfrequently belonged to the youngest branch of the family. For in this respect God always asserted his right to send by whom he would send.

4. From the time of Noah to that of Moses the same observation may be made. The eldest of the family was the Priest, but any other might be the Prophet. This, the office of Priest, we find Esau inherited by virtue of his birth-right, till he profanely sold it to Jacob for a mess of pottage. And this it was which he could never recover, “though he sought it carefully with tears.”

5. Indeed in the time of Moses a very considerable change was made with regard to the priesthood. God then appointed that instead of the first-born in every house a whole tribe should be dedicated to him; and that all that afterwards ministered unto him as priests should be of that tribe.

Thus Aaron was of the tribe of Levi. And so likewise was Moses. But he was not a Priest, though he was the greatest Prophet that ever lived before God brought his First-begotten into the world.

Meantime, not many of the Levites were Prophets. And if any were, it was a mere accidental thing.

They were not such as being of that tribe. Many, if not most of the Prophets (as we are informed by the ancient Jewish writers), were of the tribe of Simeon. And some were of the tribe of Benjamin or Judah, and probably of other tribes also.

6. But we have reason to believe there were, in every age, two sorts of Prophets. The extraordinary, such as Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many others, on whom the Holy Ghost came in an extraordinary manner. Such was Amos in particular, who saith of himself: “I was no Prophet, neither a Prophet’s son; but I was an herdman: And the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.” The ordinary were those who were educated in the “schools of the Prophets,” one of which was at Ramah, over which Samuel presided. (1 Sam. 19:18.) These were trained up to instruct the people, and were the ordinary preachers in their synagogues. In the New Testament they are usually termed scribes, or PQOKMQK, “expounders of the law.” But few, if any of them, were Priests.

These were all along a different order.

7. Many learned men have shown at large that our Lord himself, and all his Apostles, built the Christian Church as nearly as possible on the plan of the Jewish. So, the great High-Priest of our profession sent apostles and evangelists to proclaim glad tidings to all the world; and then Pastors, Preachers, and Teachers, to build up in the faith the congregations that should be found. But I do not find that ever the office of an Evangelist was the same with that of a Pastor, frequently called a Bishop. He presided over the flock, and administered the sacraments: The former assisted him, and preached the Word, either in one or more congregations. I cannot prove from any part of the New Testament, or from any author of the three first centuries, that the office of an evangelist gave any man a right to act as a Pastor or Bishop. I believe these offices were considered as quite distinct from each other till the time of Constantine.

8. Indeed in that evil hour when Constantine the Great called himself a Christian, and poured in honour and wealth upon the Christians, the case was widely altered. It soon grew common for one man to take the whole charge of a congregation, in order to engross the whole pay. Hence the same person acted as Priest and Prophet, as Pastor and Evangelist. And this gradually spread more and more throughout the whole Christian Church. Yet even at this day, although the same person usually discharges both those offices, yet the office of an Evangelist or Teacher does not imply that of a Pastor, to whom peculiarly belongs the administration of the sacraments; neither
among the Presbyterians, nor in the Church of England, nor even among the Roman Catholics. All Presbyterian Churches, it is well known, that of Scotland in particular, license men to preach before they are ordained, throughout that whole kingdom. And it is never understood that this appointment to preach gives them any right to administer the sacraments. Likewise in our own Church, persons may be authorized to preach, yea, may be Doctors of Divinity, (as was Dr. Alwood at Oxford, when I resided there,) who are not ordained at all, and consequently have no right to administer the Lord’s Supper.

Yea, even in the Church of Rome itself, if a lay-brother believes he is called to go a mission, as it is termed, he is sent out, though neither priest nor deacon, to execute that office, and not the other.

9. But may it not be thought that the case now before us is different from all these? Undoubtedly in many respects it is. Such a phenomenon has now appeared as has not appeared in the Christian world before, at least not for many ages. Two young men sowed the word of God, not only in the churches, but likewise "by the high-way side;" and indeed in every place where they saw an open door, where sinners had ears to hear. They were members of the Church of England, and had no design of separating from it. And they advised all that were of it to continue therein, although they joined the Methodist society; for this did not imply leaving their former congregation, but only leaving their sins. The Churchmen might go to church still; the Presbyterian, Anabaptist, Quaker, might still retain their own opinions, and attend their own congregations. The having a real desire to flee from the wrath to come was the only condition required of them. Whosoever, therefore "feared God and worked righteousness" was qualified for this society.

10. Not long after, a young man, Thomas Maxfield, offered himself to serve them as a son in the gospel. And then another, Thomas Richards, and a little after a third, Thomas Westell. Let it be well observed on what terms we received these, viz., as Prophets, not as Priests. We received them wholly and solely to preach; not to administer sacraments. And those who imagine these offices to be inseparably joined are totally ignorant of the constitution of the whole Jewish as well as Christian Church. Neither the Romish, nor the English, nor the Presbyterian Churches, ever accounted them so. Otherwise we should never have accepted the service, either of Mr. Maxfield, Richards, or Westell.

11. In 1744, all the Methodist preachers had their first Conference. But none of them dreamed, that the being called to preach gave them any right to administer sacraments. And when that question was proposed, "In what light are we to consider ourselves?" it was answered, "As extraordinary messengers, raised up to provoke the ordinary ones to jealousy." In order hereto, one of our first rules was, given to each Preacher, you are to do that part of the work which we appoint." But what work was this? Did we ever appoint you to administer sacraments; to exercise the priestly office? Such a design never entered into our mind; it was the farthest from our thoughts: And if any Preacher had taken such a step, we should have looked upon it as a palpable breach of this rule, and consequently as a recantation of our connexion.

12. For, supposing (what I utterly deny) that the receiving you as a Preacher, at the same time gave an authority to administer the sacraments; yet it gave you no other authority than to do it, or anything else, where I appoint. But where did I appoint you to do this? Nowhere at all. Therefore, by this very rule you are excluded from doing it. And in doing it you renounce the first principle of Methodism, which was wholly and solely to preach the gospel.

13. It was several years after our society was formed, before any attempt of this kind was made. The first was, I apprehend, at Norwich. One of our Preachers there yielded to the importunity of a few of the people, and baptized their children. But as soon as it was known, he was informed it must not be, unless he designed to leave our Connexion. He promised to do it no more; and I suppose he kept his promise.

14. Now, as long as the Methodists keep to this plan, they cannot separate from the Church. And this is our peculiar glory. It is new upon the earth. Revolve all the histories of the Church, from the earliest ages, and you will find, whenever there was a great work of God in any particular city or nation, the subjects of that work soon said to their neighbours, "Stand by yourselves, for we are holier than you!" As soon as ever they separated themselves, either they retired into deserts, or they built religious houses; or at least formed parties, into which none was admitted but such as subscribed both to their judgment and practice. But with the Methodists it is quite otherwise: They are not a sect or party; they do not separate from the religious community to which they at first belonged. They are still members of the Church; -- such they desire to live and to die. And I believe one reason
why God is pleased to continue my life so long is, to confirm them in their present purpose, not to separate from
the Church.

15. But, notwithstanding this, many warm men say, “Nay, but you do separate from the Church.” Others are equally
warm, because they say, I do not. I will nackedly declare the thing as it is.

I hold all the doctrines of the Church of England. I love her liturgy. I approve her plan of discipline, and only
wish it could be put in execution. I do not knowingly vary from any rule of the Church, unless in those few
instances, where I judge, and as far as I judge, there is an absolute necessity.

For instance:

(1.) As few clergymen open their churches to me, I am under the necessity of preaching abroad.

(2.) As I know no forms that will suit all occasions, I am often under a necessity of praying extempore.

(3.) In order to build up the flock of Christ in faith and love, I am under a necessity of uniting them together,
and of dividing them into little companies, that they may provoke one another to love and good works.

(4.) That my fellow-labourers and I may more effectually assist each other, to save our own souls and those
that hear us, I judge it necessary to meet the Preachers, or at least the greater part of them, once a year.

(5.) In those Conferences we fix the stations of all the Preachers for the ensuing year.

But all this is not separating from the Church. So far from it that whenever I have opportunity I attend the
Church service myself, and advise all our societies so to do.

16. Nevertheless as [to] the generality even of religious people, who do not understand my motives of acting, and
who on the one hand hear me profess that I will not separate from the Church, and on the other that I do vary
from it in these instances, they will naturally think I am inconsistent with myself. And they cannot but think so,
unless they observe my two principles: The one, that I dare not separate from the Church, that I believe it would
be a sin so to do; the other, that I believe it would be a sin not to vary from it in the points above mentioned. I
say, put these two principles together, First, I will not separate from the Church; yet, Secondly, in cases of
necessity I will vary from it (both of which I have constantly and openly avowed for upwards of fifty years,) and
inconsistency vanishes away. I have been true to my profession from 1730 to this day.

17. “But is it not contrary to your profession to permit service in Dublin at Church hours? For what necessity is
there for this? Or what good end does it answer?” I believe it answers several good ends, which could not so well
be answered any other way. The First is, (strange as it may sound,) to prevent a separation from the Church.
Many of our society were totally separated from the Church; they never attended it at all. But now they duly
attend the Church every first Sunday in the month.

“But had they not better attend it every week?” Yes; but who can persuade them to it? I cannot. I have strove to
do it twenty or thirty years, but in vain. The Second is, the weaning them from attending Dissenting Meetings,
which many of them attended constantly, but have now wholly left.

The Third is, the constantly hearing that sound doctrine which is able to save their souls.

18. I wish all of you who are vulgarly termed Methodists would seriously consider what has been said. And
particularly you whom God hath commissioned to call sinners to repentance. It does by no means follow from
hence that ye are commissioned to baptize, or to administer the Lord’s Supper.

Ye never dreamed of this, for ten or twenty years after ye began to preach. Ye did not then, like Korah, Dathan,
and Abiram, “seek the priesthood also.” Ye knew, “no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called
of God, as was Aaron.” O contain yourselves within your own bounds; be content with preaching the gospel;
do the work of Evangelists; proclaim to all the world the lovingkindness of God our Saviour; declare to all,
“The kingdom of heaven is at hand: Repent ye, and believe the gospel!” I earnestly advise you, abide in your
place; keep your own station. Ye were, fifty years ago, those of you that were then Methodist Preachers,
extraordinary messengers of God, not going in your own will, but thrust out, not to supersede, but to “provoke to
jealousy” the ordinary messengers. In God’s name, stop there! Both by your preaching and example provoke
them to love and to good works. Ye are a new phenomenon in the earth, -- a body of people who, being of no
sect or party, are friends to all parties, and endeavour to forward all in heart religion, in the knowledge and love of God and man. Ye yourselves were at first called in the Church of England; and though ye have and will have a thousand temptations to leave it, and set up for yourselves, regard them not.

Be Church-of-England men still; do not cast away the peculiar glory which God hath put upon you, and frustrate the design of Providence, the very end for which God raised you up.

19. I would add a few words to those serious people who are not connected with the Methodists; many of whom are of our own Church, the Church of England. And why should ye be displeased with us? We do you no harm; we do not design or desire to offend you in anything; we hold your doctrines; we observe your rules, more than do most of the people in the kingdom. Some of you are Clergymen. And why should ye, of all men, be displeased with us? We neither attack your character, nor your revenue; we honour you for “your work’s sake!” If we see some things which we do not approve of; we do not publish them; we rather cast a mantle over them, and hide what we cannot commend. When ye treat us unkindly or unjustly, we suffer it. “Being reviled, we bless;” we do not return railing for railing. O let not your hand be upon us!

20. Ye that are rich in this world, count us not your enemies because we tell you the truth, and, it may be, in a fuller and stronger manner than any others will or dare do. Ye have therefore need of us, inexpressible need. Ye cannot buy such friends at any price. All your gold and silver cannot purchase such. Make use of us while ye may. If it be possible, never be without some of those who will speak the truth from their heart. Otherwise ye may grow grey in your sins; ye may say to your souls, “Peace, peace!” while there is no peace! Ye may sleep on, and dream ye are in the way to heaven, till ye awake in everlasting fire.

21. But whether ye will hear, or whether ye will forbear, we, by the grace of God, hold on our way; being ourselves still members of the Church of England, as we were from the beginning, but receiving all that love God in every Church as our brother, and sister, and mother. And in order to their union with us we require no unity in opinions, or in modes of worship, but barely that they “fear God and work righteousness,” as was observed. Now this is utterly a new thing, unheard of in any other Christian community. In what Church or congregation beside, throughout the Christian world, can members be admitted upon these terms, without any other conditions? Point any such out, whoever can. I know none in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America! This is the glory of the Methodists, and of them alone! They are themselves no particular sect or party; but they receive those of all parties who “endeavour to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.” Cork, May 4, 1789

John Wesley
SERMON 116
(text from the 1872 edition)

CAUSES OF THE INEFFICACY OF CHRISTIANITY

“Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?” Jer. 8:22.

1. This question, as here proposed by the Prophet, relates only to a particular people, -- the children of Israel. But I would here consider it in a general sense, with relation to all mankind. I would seriously inquire, Why has Christianity done so little good in the world? Is it not the balm, the outward means, which the great Physician has given to men, to restore their spiritual health? Why then is it not restored? You say, Because of the deep and universal corruption of human nature. Most true; but here is the very difficulty. Was it not intended, by our all-wise and almighty Creator, to be the remedy for that corruption? A universal remedy, for a universal evil? But it has not answered this intention it never did; it does not answer it at this day. The disease still remains in its full strength: Wickedness of every kind; vice, inward and outward, in all its forms, still overspreads the face of the earth.

2. O Lord God, “righteous art thou! Yet let us plead with thee.” How is this? Hast thou forgotten the world thou
hast made; which thou hast created for thy own glory? Canst thou despise the work of thy own hands, the purchase of thy Son’s blood? Thou hast given medicine to heal our sickness; yet our sickness is not healed. Yet darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness the people; yea, Darkness such as devils feel,

Issuing from the pit of hell.

3. What a mystery is this, that Christianity should have done so little good in the world! Can any account of this be given? Can any reasons be assigned for it? Does it not seem that one reason it has done so little good is this, -- because it is so little known? Certainly it can do no good where it is not known. But it is not known at this day to the far greater part the inhabitants of the earth. In the last century, our ingenious and laborious countryman, Mr. Brerewood, travelled over great part of the known world on purpose to inquire, so far as was possible, what proportion the Christians bear to the Heathens and Mahometans. And, according to his computation, (probably the most accurate which has yet been made,) I suppose mankind to be divided into thirty parts, nineteen parts of these are still open Heathens, having no more knowledge of Christianity than the beasts that perish. And we may add to these the numerous nations which have been discovered in the present century. Add to these such as profess the Mahometan religion, and utterly scorn Christianity; and twenty-five parts out of thirty of mankind are not so much as nominally Christians. So then five parts of mankind out of six are totally ignorant of Christianity. It is, therefore, no wonder that five in six of mankind, perhaps nine in ten, have no advantage from it.

4. But why is it that so little advantage is derived from it to the Christian world? Are Christians any better than other men? Are they better than Mahometans or Heathens? To say the truth, it is well if they are not worse; worse than either Mahometans or Heathens. In many respects they are abundantly worse; but then they are not properly Christians. The generality of these, though they hear the Christian name, do not know what Christianity is. They no more understand it than they do Greek or Hebrew; therefore they can be no better for it. What do the Christians, so called, of the Eastern Church, dispersed throughout the Turkish dominions, know of genuine Christianity? Those of the Morea, of Circassia, Mongoelia, Georgia? Are they not the very dregs of mankind? And have we reason to think that those of the Southern Church, those inhabiting Abyssinia, have any more conception than they, of “worshipping God in spirit and in truth?” Look we nearer home. See the Northern Churches; those that are under the Patriarch of Moscow. How exceedingly little do they know either of outward or inward Christianity! How many thousands, yea, myriads, of those poor savages know nothing of Christianity but the name! How little more do they know than the heathen Tartars on the one hand, or the heathen Chinese on the other!

5. But is not Christianity well known, at least, to all the inhabitants of the western world? A great part of which is eminently termed Christendom, or the land of Christians. Part of these are still members of the Church of Rome; part are termed Protestants. As to the former, Portuguese, Spaniards, Italians, French, Germans, what do the hulk of them know of scriptural Christianity? Having had frequent opportunity of conversing with many of these, both at home and abroad, I am bold to affirm, that they are in general totally ignorant, both as to the theory and practice of Christianity; so that they are “perishing” by thousands “for lack of knowledge,” -- for want of knowing the very first principles of Christianity.

6. "But surely this cannot be the case of the Protestants in France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland; much less in Denmark and Sweden.” Indeed I hope it is not altogether. I am persuaded, there are among them many knowing Christians; but I fear we must not think that one in ten, if one in fifty, is of this number; certainly not, if we may form a judgment of them by those we find in Great Britain and Ireland. Let us see how matters stand at our own door. Do the people of England, in general, (not the highest or the lowest; for these usually know nothing of the matter; but people of the middle rank,) understand Christianity? Do they conceive what it is? Can they give an intelligible account, either of the speculative or practical part of it? What know they of the very first principles of it? -- of the natural and moral attributes of God; of his particular providence; of the redemption of man; of the offices of Christ; of the operations of the Holy Ghost; of justification; of the new birth; of inward and outward sanctification? Speak of any of these things to the first ten persons you are in company with; and will you not find nine out of the ten ignorant of the whole affair? And are not most of the inhabitants of the Scotch Highlands full as ignorant as these; yea, and the common people in Ireland? (I mean the Protestants, of whom alone we are now speaking.) Make a fair inquiry, not only in the country cabins, but in the cities of Cork, Waterford, Limerick; yea, in Dublin itself.
How few know what Christianity means! How small a number will you find that have any conception of the analogy of faith! Of the connected chain of scripture truths, and their relation to each other, -- namely, the natural corruption of man; justification by faith; the new birth; inward and outward holiness. It must be acknowledged by all competent judges, who converse freely with their neighbours in these kingdoms, that a vast majority of them know no more of these things than they do of Hebrew or Arabic. And what good can Christianity do to these, who are so totally ignorant of it?

7. However, in some parts, both of England and Ireland, scriptural Christianity is well known; especially in London, Bristol, Dublin, and almost all the large and populous cities and towns of both kingdoms. In these, every branch of Christianity is openly and largely declared; and thousands upon thousands continually hear and receive “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Why is it then, that even in these parts Christianity has had so little effect? Why are the generality of the people, in all these places, Heathens still? No better than the Heathens of Africa or America, either in their tempers or in their lives? Now, how is this to be accounted for? I conceive, thus: It was a common saying among the Christians in the primitive Church, “The soul and the body make a man; the spirit and discipline make a Christian;” implying, that none could be real Christians, without the help of Christian discipline. But if this be so, is it any wonder that we find so few Christians; for where is Christian discipline? In what part of England (to go no farther) is Christian discipline added to Christian doctrine? Now, whatever doctrine is preached, where there is not discipline, it cannot have its full effect upon the hearers.

8. To bring the matter closer still. Is not scriptural Christianity preached and generally known among the people commonly called Methodists? Impartial persons allow it is. And have they not Christian discipline too, in all the essential branches of it, regularly and constantly exercised? Let those who think any essential part of it is wanting, point it out, and it shall not be wanting long. Why then are not these altogether Christians, who have both Christian doctrine and Christian discipline? Why is not the spiritual health of the people called Methodists recovered? Why is not all that “mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus?” Why have we not learned of him our very first lesson, to be meek and lowly of heart? To say with him, in all circumstances of life, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt? I come not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.” Why are not all that “crucified to the world, and the world crucified to us;” -- dead to the “desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life?” Why do not all of us live “the life that is hid with Christ in God?” O why do not we, that have all possible helps, “walk as Christ also walked?” Hath he not left us an example that we might tread in his steps? But do we regard either his example or precept? To instance only in one point: Who regards those solemn words, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth?” Of the three rules which are laid down on this head, in the sermon on “The Mammon of Unrighteousness,” you may find many that observe the First rule, namely, “Gain all you can.” You may find a few that observe the Second, “Save all you can:” But how many have you found that observe the Third rule, “Give all you can?” Have you reason to believe, that five hundred of these are to be found among fifty thousand Methodists? And yet nothing can be more plain, than that all who observe the two first rules without the third, will be twofold more the children of hell than ever they were before.

9. O that God would enable me once more, before I go hence and am no more seen, to lift up my voice like a trumpet to those who gain and save all they can, but do not give all they can! Ye are the men, some of the chief men, who continually grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and in a great measure stop his gracious influence from descending on our assemblies. Many of your brethren, beloved of God, have not food to eat; they have not raiment to put on; they have not a place where to lay their head. And why are they thus distressed? Because you impiously, unjustly, and cruelly detain from them what your Master and theirs lodges in your hands on purpose to supply their wants! See that poor member of Christ, pinched with hunger, shivering with cold, half naked! Meantime you have plenty of this world’s goods, -- of meat, drink, and apparel. In the name of God, what are you doing? Do you neither fear God, nor regard man? Why do you not deal your bread to the hungry, and cover the naked with a garment? Have you laid out in your own costly apparel what would have answered both these intentions? Did God command you so to do? Does he commend you for so doing. Did he entrust you with his (not your) goods for this end? And does he now say, “Servant of God, well done?” You well know he does not. This idle expense has no approbation, either from God, or your own conscience. But you say you can afford it! O be ashamed to take such miserable nonsense into your mouths! Never more litter such stupid cant; such palpable absurdity! Can any steward afford to be an arrant knave? To waste his Lord’s goods? Can any servant afford to lay out his Master’s money, any otherwise than his Master appoints him? So far from it, that whoever
does this ought to be excluded from a Christian society.

10. "But is it possible to supply all the poor in our society with the necessaries of life?" It was possible once to do this, in a larger society than this. In the first Church at Jerusalem there was not any among them that lacked; but distribution was made to every one according as he had need." And we have full proof that it may be so still. It is so among the people called Quakers. Yea, and among the Moravians, so called. And why should it not be so with us? “Because they are ten times richer than we.” Perhaps fifty times: And yet we are able enough, if we were equally willing, to do this.

A gentleman (a Methodist) told me some years since, “I shall leave forty thousand pounds among my children.” Now, suppose he had left them but twenty thousand, and given the other twenty thousand to God and the poor, would God have said to him, “Thou fool?” And this would have set all the society far above want.

11. But I will not talk of giving to God, or leaving, half your fortune. You might think this to be too high a price for heaven. I will come to lower terms. Are there not a few among you that could give a hundred pounds, perhaps some that could give a thousand, and yet leave your children as much as would help them to work out their own salvation? With two thousand pounds, and not much less, we could supply the present wants of all our poor, and put them in a way of supplying their own wants for the time to come. Now, suppose this could be done, are we clear before God while it is not done? Is not the neglect of it one cause why so many are still sick and weak among you; and that both in soul and in body? That they still grieve the Holy Spirit, by preferring the fashions of the world to the commands of God? And I many times doubt whether we Preachers are not, in some measure, partakers of their sin. I am in doubt whether it is not a kind of partiality. I doubt whether it is not a great sin to keep them in our society. May it not hurt their souls, by encouraging them to persevere in walking contrary to the Bible? And may it not, in some measure, intercept the salutary influences of the blessed Spirit upon the whole community?

12. I am distressed. I know not what to do. I see what I might have done once. I might have said peremptorily and expressly, “Here I am: I and my Bible. I will not, I dare not, vary from this book, either in great things or small. I have no power to dispense with one jot or tittle what is contained therein. I am determined to be a Bible Christian, not almost, but altogether. Who will meet me on this ground? Join me on this, or not at all.” With regard to dress, in particular, I might have been as firm (and I now see it would have been far better) as either the people called Quakers, or the Moravian Brethren: -- I might have said, “This is our manner of dress, which we know is both scriptural and rational. If you join with us, you are to dress as we do; but you need not join us, unless you please.” But, alas! The time is now past; and what I can do now, I cannot tell.

13. But to return to the main question. Why has Christianity done so little good, even among us? Among the Methodists, -- among them that hear and receive the whole Christian doctrine, and that have Christian discipline added thereto, in the most essential parts of it? Plainly, because we have forgot, or at least not duly attended to, those solemn words of our Lord, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” It was the remark of a holy man, several years ago, “Never was there before a people in the Christian Church, who had so much of the power of God among them, with so little self-denial.” Indeed the work of God does go on, and in a surprising manner, notwithstanding this capital defect; but it cannot go on in the same degree as it otherwise would; neither can the word of God have its full effect, unless the hearers of it “deny themselves, and take up their cross daily.”

14. It would be easy to show, in how many respects the Methodists, in general, are deplorably wanting in the practice of Christian self-denial; from which, indeed, they have been continually frighted by the silly outcries of the Antinomians. To instance only in one: While we were at Oxford, the rule of every Methodist was, (unless in case of sickness,) to fast every Wednesday and Friday in the year, in imitation of the Primitive Church; for which they had the highest reverence. Now this practice of the Primitive Church is universally allowed. “Who does not know,” says Epiphanius, an ancient writer, “that the fasts of the fourth and sixth days of the week” (Wednesday and Friday) “are observed by the Christians throughout the whole world.” So they were by the Methodists for several years; by them all, without any exception; but afterwards, some in London carried this to excess, and fasted so as to impair their health. It was not long before others made this a pretence for not fasting at all. And I fear there are now thousand of Methodists, so called, both in England and Ireland, who, following the same bad example, have entirely left off fasting; who are so far from fasting twice in the week, (as all the stricter Pharisees
did,) that they do not fast twice in the month. Yea, are there not some of you who do not fast one day from the beginning of the year to the end? But what excuse can there for this? I do not say for those that call themselves members of the Church of England; but for any who profess to believe the Scripture to be the word of God. Since, according to this, the man that never fasts is no more in the way to heaven, than the man that never prays.

15. But can any one deny that the members of the Church of Scotland fast constantly; particularly on their sacramental occasions? In some parishes they return only once a year; but in others, suppose in large cities, they occur twice, or even thrice, a year. Now, it is well known there is always a fast-day in the week preceding the administration of the Lord’s Supper. But, occasionally looking into a book of accounts in one of their vestries, I observed so much set down for the dinners of the Ministers on the fast-day; and I am informed there is the same article in them all. And is there any doubt but the people fast just as their Ministers do? But what a farce is this! What a miserable burlesque upon a plain Christian duty! O that the General Assembly would have regard to the honour of their nation! Let them roll away from it this shameful reproach, by either enforcing the duty, or removing that article from their books. Let it never appear there any more! Let it vanish away for ever.

16. But why is self-denial in general so little practised at present among the Methodists? Why is so exceedingly little of it to be found even in the oldest and largest societies? The more I observe and consider things, the more clearly it appears what is the cause of this in London, in Bristol, in Birmingham, in Manchester, in Leeds, in Dublin, in Cork. The Methodists grow more and more self-indulgent, because they grow rich. Although many of them are still deplorably poor; (“tell it not in Gath; publish it not in the streets of Askelon!”) yet many others, in the space of twenty, thirty, or forty years, are twenty, thirty, yea, a hundred times richer than they were when they first entered the society. And it is an observation which admits of few exceptions, that nine in ten of these decreased in grace, in the same proportion as they increased in wealth. Indeed, according to the natural tendency of riches, we cannot expect it to be otherwise.

17. But how astonishing a thing is this! How can we understand it? Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be) that Christianity, true scriptural Christianity, has a tendency, in process of time, to undermine and destroy itself? For wherever true Christianity spreads, it must cause diligence and frugality, which, in the natural course of things, must beget riches! And riches naturally beget pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive of Christianity. Now, if there be no way to prevent this, Christianity is inconsistent with itself, and, of consequence, cannot stand, cannot continue long among any people; since, wherever it generally prevails, it saps its own foundation.

18. But is there no way to prevent this? -- to continue Christianity among a people? Allowing that diligence and frugality must produce riches, is there no means to hinder riches from destroying the religion of those that possess them? I can see only one possible way; find out another who can. Do you gain all you can, and save all you can? Then you must, in the nature of things, grow rich. Then if you have any desire to escape the damnation of hell, give all you can; otherwise I can have no more hope of your salvation, than of that of Judas Iscariot.

19. I call God to record upon my soul, that I advise no more than I practise. I do, blessed be God, gain, and save, and give all I can. And so, I trust in God, I shall do, while the breath of God is in my nostrils. But what then? I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus my Lord! Still,

I give up every plea beside, --
Lord, I am damn’d! But thou hast died!

_Dublin, July 2, 1789._

John Wesley
SERMON 118
(text of the 1872 edition)
ON A SINGLE EYE

“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. Therefore, if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” Matt. 6:22, 23.

1. “Simplicity and purity,” says a devout man, “are the two wings that lift the soul up to heaven: Simplicity, which is in the intention; and purity, which is in the affections.” The former of these, that great and good man, Bishop Taylor, recommends with much earnestness, in the beginning of his excellent book, “Rules of Holy Living and Dying.” He sets out with insisting upon this, as the very first point in true religion, and warns us, that, without this, all our endeavours after it will be vain and ineffectual. The same truth, that strong and elegant writer, Mr. Law, earnestly presses in his “Serious Call to a Devout Life” -- a treatise which will hardly be excelled, if it be equalled, in the English tongue, either for beauty of expression, or for justness and depth of thought. And who can censure any follower of Christ, for laying ever so great stress on this point, that considers the manner wherein our Master recommends it, in the words above recited?

2. Let us attentively consider this whole passage, as it may be literally translated. “The eye is the lamp of the body:” And what the eye is to the body, the intention is to the soul. We may observe, with what exact propriety our Lord places simplicity of intention between worldly desires and worldly cares; either of which directly tend to destroy it. It follows, “If thine eye be single,” singly fixed upon God, “thy whole body,” that is, all thy soul, “shall be full of light,” -- shall be filled with holiness and happiness. “But if thine eye be evil,” -- not single, aiming at any other object, seeking anything beneath the sun, -- “thy whole body shall be full of darkness. And if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” how remote, not only from all real knowledge, but from all real holiness and happiness!

3. Considering these things, we may well cry out, “How great a thing it is to be a Christian; to be a real, inward, scriptural Christian, conformed in heart and life to the will of God! Who is sufficient for these things?” None, unless he be born of God. I do not wonder that one of the most sensible Deists should say, “I think the Bible is the finest book I ever read in my life; yet I have an insuperable objection to it: It is too good. It lays down such a plan of life, such a scheme of doctrine and practice, as is far too excellent for weak, silly men to aim at, or attempt to copy after.” All this is most true, upon any other than the scriptural hypothesis. But this being allowed, all the difficulty vanishes into air. For if “all things are possible with God, then all things are possible to him that believeth.”

4. But let us consider, First, the former part of our Lord’s declaration, -- “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light;” Secondly, the latter part, -- “If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness;” and, Thirdly, the dreadful state of those whose eye is not single, - “If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”

I.

1. And, First, “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” If thine eye be single; if God is in all thy thoughts; if thou art constantly aiming at Him that is invisible; if it be thy intention in all things, small and great, in all thy conversation, to please God, to do, not thy own will, but the will of Him that sent thee into the world; if thou canst say, not to any creature, but to Him that made thee for himself,”I view thee, Lord and end of my desires;” -- then the promise will certainly take place: “Thy whole body shall be full of light;” thy whole soul shall be filled with the light of heaven, -- with the glory of the Lord resting upon thee. In all thy actions and conversation, thou shalt have not only the testimony of a good conscience toward God, but likewise of his Spirit, bearing witness with thy spirit, that all thy ways are acceptable to him.

2. When thy whole soul is full of this light, thou wilt be able (according to St. Paul’s direction to the Thessalonians) to “rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks.” [1 Thess. 5:16-18] For who can be constantly sensible of the loving presence of God without “rejoicing evermore?” Who can have the loving eye of his soul perpetually fixed upon God, but he will “pray without ceasing?” For his “heart is unto God without a voice, and his silence speaketh unto him.” Who can be sensible that this loving Father is well-pleased with all he does and suffers, but he will be constrained “in everything to give thanks?” knowing that all things “work together for good.”
3. Thus shall “his whole body be full of light.” The light of knowledge is, doubtless, one thing here intended; arising from “the unction of the Holy One, which abideth with him, and teacheth him of all things,” -- all the things which it is now necessary for him to know in order to please God.

Hereby he will have a clear knowledge of the divine will in every circumstance of life. Not without the means, but in the use of all those means which God has furnished him with. And, walking in this light, he cannot but “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He will continually advance in all holiness, and in the whole image of God.

II.

1. Our Lord observes, Secondly, “If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.” If it be evil, that is, not single, (for the eye which is not single is evil,) “thy whole body shall be full of darkness.” It is certain there can be no medium between a single eye and an evil eye; for whenever we are not aiming at God, we are seeking happiness in some creature: And this, whatever that creature may be, is no less than idolatry. It is all one, whether we aim at the pleasures of sense, the pleasures of the imagination, the praise of men, or riches; all which St. John comprises under that general expression, “the love of the world.” The eye is evil if we aim at any of these, or indeed at anything beneath the sun. So far as you aim at any of these, indeed, at anything beneath God, your whole soul, and the whole course of your life, will be full of darkness. Ignorance of yourselves, ignorance of your real interest, ignorance of your relation to God, will surround you with impenetrable clouds, with darkness that may be felt. And so long as the eye of your soul rests upon all or any of these, those will continue to surround your soul, and cover it with utter darkness.

2. With how many instances of this melancholy truth, -- that those whose eye is not single are totally ignorant of the nature of true religion, -- are we surrounded on every side! How many, even of good sort of people, of them whose lives are innocent, are as ignorant of themselves, of God, and of worshipping him in spirit and in truth, as either Mahometans or Heathens! And yet they are not any way defective in natural understanding: And some of them have improved their natural abilities by a liberal education, whereby they have laid in a considerable stock of deep and various learning.

Yet how totally ignorant are they of God and of the things of God! How unacquainted both with the invisible and the eternal world! O why do they continue in this deplorable ignorance? It is the plain effect of this, -- their eye is not single. They do not aim at God, he is not in all their thoughts. They do not desire or think of heaven; therefore, they sink deep as hell.

3. For this reason they are as far from real holiness as they are from valuable knowledge. It is because their eye is not single that, they are such strangers to vital religion. Let them be ever so accomplished in other respects; let them be ever so learned, ever so well versed in every branch of polite literature; yea, ever so courteous, so humane; yet if their eye is not singly fixed on God they can know nothing of scriptural religion. They do not even know what Christian holiness means; what is the entrance of it, the new birth, with all the circumstances attending it: They know no more of this, than do the beasts of the field. Do they repent and believe the Gospel? How much less are they “renewed in the spirit of their minds,” in the image of him that created them? As they have not the least experience of this, so they have not the least conception of it. Were you to name such a thing, you might expect to hear, “Much religion hath made thee mad:” So destitute are they, whatever accomplishments they have beside, of the only religion which avails with God.

4. And till their eye is single they are as far remote from happiness as from holiness. They may now and then have agreeable dreams, from

Wealth, honour, pleasure, or what else
This short-enduring world can give:

But none of these can satisfy the appetite of an immortal soul. Nay, all of them together cannot give rest, which is the lowest ingredient of happiness, to a never-dying spirit, which God created for the enjoyment of himself. The hungry soul, like the busy bee, wanders from flower to flower; but it goes off from each, with an abortive hope, and a deluded expectation. Every creature cries, (some with a loud and others with a secret voice,) “Happiness is not in me.” The height and the depth proclaim to an attentive ear, “The Creator hath not implanted in me a capacity of giving happiness: Therefore, with all thy skill and pains, thou canst not extract it from me.”
And indeed the more pains any of the children of men take to extract it from any earthly object, the greater will their chagrin be, -- the more secure their disappointment.

5. "But although the vulgar herd of mankind can find no happiness; although it cannot be found in the empty pleasures of the world; may it not be found in learning, even by him that has not a single eye! Surely

Content of spirit must from science flow;
For 'tis a godlike attribute to know."

By no means. On the contrary, it has been the observation of all ages, that the men who possessed the greatest learning were the most dissatisfied of all men. This occasioned a person of eminent learning to declare, "A fool may find a kind of paradise upon earth," (although this is a grand mistake,) "but a wise man can find none." These are the most discontented, the most impatient, of men. Indeed, learning naturally effects this: "Knowledge," as the Apostle observes, "puffeth up." But where pride is, happiness is not; they are utterly inconsistent with each other. So much ground there is for that melancholy reflection, wherever true religion is not,

Avails it then, O Reason! To be wise?
To see this mournful sight with quicker eyes?
To know with more distinction to complain,
And have superior sense in feeling pain?

III.

1. It remains to consider, in the Third place, our Lord’s important question: "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The plain meaning is, if that principle which ought to give light to thy whole soul, as the eye does to the body; to direct thy understanding, passions, affections, tempers, -- all thy thoughts, words, and actions; if this principle itself be darkened, -- be set wrong, and put darkness for light; how great must that darkness be! How terrible its effects!

2. In order to see this in a stronger point of view, let us consider it in a few particular instances.

Begin with one of no small importance. Here is a father choosing an employment for his son. If his eye be not single; if he do not singly aim at the glory of God in the salvation of his soul; if it be not his one consideration, what calling is likely to secure him the highest place in heaven; not the largest share of earthly treasure, or the highest preferment in the Church; -- the light which is in him is manifestly darkness. And O how great is that darkness! The mistake which he is in, is not a little one, but inexpressibly great. What! Do not you prefer his being a cobbler on earth, and a glorious saint in heaven, before his being a lord on earth, and a damned spirit in hell? If not, how great, unutterably great, is the darkness that covers your soul! What a fool, what a dolt, what a madman is he, how stupid beyond all expression, who judges a palace upon earth to be preferable to a throne in heaven! How unspeakably is his understanding darkened, who, to gain for his child the honour that cometh of men, will entail upon him everlasting shame in the company of the devil and his angels!

3. I cannot dismiss this subject yet, as it is of the utmost importance. How great is the darkness of that execrable wretch (I can give him no better title, be he rich or poor) who will sell his own child to the devil, who will barter her own eternal happiness for any quantity of gold or silver! What a monster would any man be accounted, who devoured the flesh of his own offspring! And is he not as great a monster who, by his own act and deed, gives her to be devoured by that roaring lion? As he certainly does (so far as is in his power) who marries her to an ungodly man. "But he is rich; but he has ten thousand pounds!" What, if it were a hundred thousand? The more the worse; the less probability will she have of escaping the damnation of hell. With what face wilt thou look upon her, when she tells thee in the realms below, "Thou hast plunged me into this place of torment. Hadst thou given me to a good man, however poor, I might have now been in Abraham’s bosom. But, O! What have riches profited me? They have sunk both me and thee into hell!"

4. Are any of you that are called Methodists thus merciful to your children? Seeking to marry them well (as the cant phrase is;) that is, to sell them to some purchaser that has much money, but little or no religion? Is then the light that is in you also darkness? Are ye, too, regarding God less than mammon? Are ye also without understanding? Have ye profited no more by all ye have heard?
Man, woman, think what you are about! Dare you also sell your child to the devil? You undoubtedly do this (as far as in you lies) when you marry a son or a daughter to a child of the devil; though it be one that wallows in gold and silver. O take warning in time! Beware of the gilded bait! Death and hell are hid beneath. Prefer grace before gold and precious stones; glory in heaven, to riches on earth! If you do not, you are worse than the very Canaanites. They only made their children pass “through the fire” to Moloch. You make yours pass into the fire that never shall be quenched, and to stay in it for ever! O how great is the darkness that causes you, after you have done this, to “wipe your mouth, and say you have done no evil!”

5. Let us consider another case, not far distant from this. Suppose a young man, having finished his studies at the University, is desirous to minister in holy things, and, accordingly, enters into orders. What is his intention in this? What is the end he proposes to himself? If his eye be single, his one design is to save his own soul, and them that hear him; to bring as many sinners as he possibly can out of darkness into marvellous light. If, on the other hand, his eye be not single, if he aim at ease, honour, money, or preferment; the world may account him a wise man, but God says unto him, “Thou fool!” And while the light that is in him is thus darkness, “how great is that darkness!” What folly is comparable to his folly! -- one peculiarly dedicated to the God of heaven, to “mind earthly things!” A worldly Clergyman is a fool above all fools, a madman above all madmen! Such vile, infamous wretches as these are the real “ground of the contempt of the Clergy.” Indolent Clergymen, pleasure-taking Clergymen, money-loving Clergymen, praise-loving Clergymen, preferment-seeking Clergymen, -- these are the pests of the Christian world; the grand nuisance of mankind; a stink in the nostrils of God! Such as these were they who made St. Chrysostom to say, “Hell is paved with the souls of Christian Priests.”

6. Take another case. Suppose a young woman, of an independent fortune, to be addressed at the same time by a man of wealth without religion, and a man of religion without wealth; in other words, by a rich child of the devil, and a poor child of God. What shall we say, if, other circumstances being equal, she prefer the rich man to the good man? It is plain, her eye is not single; therefore her foolish heart is darkened; and how great is that darkness which makes her judge gold and silver a greater recommendation than holiness! Which makes a child of the devil, with money, appear more amiable to her than a child of God without it! What words can sufficiently express the inexcusable folly of such a choice? What a laughing-stock (unless she severely repent) will she be to all the devils in hell, when her wealthy companion has dragged her down to his own place of torment!

7. Are there any of you that are present before God who are concerned in any of these matters? Give me leave with “great plainness of speech,” to apply to your consciences “in the sight of God.” You, whom God hath entrusted with sons or daughters, is your eye single in choosing partners for them? What qualifications do you seek in your sons and daughters in law? -- religion or riches? Which is your first consideration? Are you not of the old Heathen’s mind,

Quaerenda pecunia primum,
Virtus post nummos?
Seek money first: Let virtue then be sought.

Bring the matter to a point. Which will you prefer? A rich Heathen, or a pious Christian? -- a child of the devil, with an estate; or the child of God, without it? -- a lord or gentleman, with the devil in his heart; (he does not hide it, his speech bewrayeth him;) or a tradesman, who, you have reason to believe, has Christ dwelling in his heart? O how great is that darkness which makes you prefer a child of the devil to a child of God! Which causes you to prefer the poor trash of worldly wealth, which flies as a shadow, to the riches of eternal glory!

8. I call upon you more especially who are called Methodists. In the sight of the great God, upwards of fifty years I have ministered unto you, I have been your servant for Christ’s sake. During this time I have given you many solemn warnings on this head. I now give you one more, perhaps the last. Dare any of you, in choosing your calling or situation, eye the things on earth, rather than the things above? In choosing a profession, or a companion for life, for your child, do you look at earth or heaven? And can you deliberately prefer, either for yourself or your offspring, a child of the devil with money, to a child of God without it? Why, the very Heathens cry out, O cunae in terras animae, et caelestium inanes!

O souls, bow’d down to earth, strangers to heaven!
Repent, repent of your vile earthly-mindedness! Renounce the title of Christians, or prefer, both in your own case and the case of your children, grace to money, and heaven to earth! For the time to come, at least, “let your eye be single,” that your “whole body may be full of light!”

John Wesley
SERMON 120
(text of the 1872 edition)

ON THE WEDDING GARMENT


1. In the verses preceding the text we read, “After these things, Jesus spake to them again in parables, and said, A certain king made a supper for his son. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw one who had not on a wedding garment. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

2. Upon this parable one of our most celebrated expositors comments in the following manner: -- “The design of this parable is to set forth that gracious supply made by God to men in and by the preaching of the gospel. To invite them to this, God sent forth his servants, the Prophets and Apostles.” -- And on these words, -- “Why camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” he proceeds thus: “The punishment of whom ought not to discourage us, or make us turn our backs upon the holy ordinances.” Certainly it ought not; but nothing of this kind can be inferred from this parable, which has no reference to the ordinances, any more than to baptism and marriage. And probably we should never have imagined it, but that the word supper occurred therein.

3. However, most of the English annotators have fallen into the same mistake with Mr. Burkitt.

And so have thousands of their readers. Yet a mistake it certainly is; and such a mistake as has not any shadow of foundation in the text. It is true, indeed, that none ought to approach the Lord’s table without habitual, at least, if not actual, preparation; that is, a firm purpose to keep all the commandments of God, and a sincere desire to receive all his promises. But that obligation cannot be inferred from this text, though it may from many other passages of Scripture. But there is no need of multiplying texts; one is as good as a thousand: There needs no more to induce any man of a tender conscience to communicate at all opportunities, than that single commandment of our Lord, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

4. But whatever preparation is necessary in order to our being worthy partakers of the Lord’s Supper, it has no relation at all to the “wedding garment” mentioned in this parable. It cannot: For that commemoration of his death was not then ordained. It relates wholly to the proceedings of our Lord, when he comes in the clouds of heaven to judge the quick and the dead; and to the qualifications which will then be necessary to their inheriting “the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.”

5. Many excellent men, who are thoroughly apprized of this – who are convinced, the wedding garment here mentioned is not to be understood of any qualification for the Lord’s Supper, but of the qualification for glory, -- interpret it of the righteousness of Christ; “which,” say they, is the sole qualification for heaven; this being the only righteousness wherein any man can stand in the day of the Lord. For who,” they ask, “will then dare to appear before the great God, save in the righteousness of his well-beloved Son? Shall we not then at least, if not before, find the need of having a better righteousness than our own? And what other can that be than the righteousness of God our Saviour?” The late pious and ingenious Mr. Hervey descants largely upon this; particularly in his elaborate “Dialogues between Theron and Aspasio.”

6. Another elegant writer, now I trust with God, speaks strongly to the same effect in the preface to his comment on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “We certainly,” says he, “shall need a better righteousness than our own, wherein to Stand at the bar of God in the day of judgment.” I do not understand the expression. Is it scriptural?
Do we read it in the Bible, either in the Old Testament or the New? I doubt it is an unscriptural, awkward phrase, Which has no determinate meaning. If you mean by that odd, uncouth question, “In whose righteousness are you to stand at the last day?” -- for whose sake, or by whose merit, do you expect to enter into the glory of God? I answer, without the least hesitation, For the sake of Jesus Christ the Righteous. It is through his merits alone that all believers are saved; that is, justified – saved from the guilt, -- sanctified – saved from the nature, of sin; and glorified – taken into heaven.

7. It may be worth our while to spend a few more words on this important point. Is it possible to devise a more unintelligible expression than this, -- “In what righteousness are we to stand before God at the last day?” Why do you not speak plainly, and say, “For whose sake do you look to be saved?” Any plain peasant would then readily answer, “For the sake of Jesus Christ.” But all those dark, ambiguous phrases tend only to puzzle the cause, and open a way for unwary hearers to slide into Antinomianism.

8. Is there any expression similar to this of the “wedding garment” to be found in Holy Scripture? In the Revelation we find mention made of “linen, white and clean, which is the righteousness of the saints.” And this, too, many vehemently contend, means the righteousness of Christ. But how then are we to reconcile this with that passage in the seventh chapter, “They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?” Will they say, “The righteousness of Christ was washed and made white in the blood of Christ?” Away with such Antinomian jargon! Is not the plain meaning this: -- It was from the atoning blood that the very righteousness of the saints derived its value and acceptableness with God?

9. In the nineteenth chapter of the Revelation, at the ninth verse, there is an expression which comes much nearer to this: -- “The wedding supper of the Lamb.” [Rev. 19] There is a near resemblance between this and the marriage supper mentioned in the parable. Yet they are not altogether the same: there is a clear difference between them. The supper mentioned in the parable belongs to the Church Militant; that mentioned in the Revelation, to the Church Triumphant: The one, to the kingdom of God on earth; the other, to the kingdom of God in heaven. Accordingly, in the former, there may be found those who have not a “wedding garment.” But there will be none such to be found in the latter: No, not “in that great multitude which no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” They will all be “kings and priests unto God, and shall reign with him for ever and ever.”

10. Does not that expression, “the righteousness of the saints,” point out what is the “wedding garment” in the parable? It is the “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.” The righteousness of Christ is doubtless necessary for any soul that enters into glory: But so is personal holiness too, for every child of man. But it is highly needful to be observed, that they are necessary in different respects. The former is necessary to entitle us to heaven; the latter to qualify us for it.

Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no claim to glory; without holiness we could have no fitness for it. By the former we become members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. By the latter “we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

11. From the very time that the Son of God delivered this weighty truth to the children of men, -- that all who had not the “wedding garment” would be “cast into outward darkness, where are weeping and gnashing of teeth,” -- the enemy of souls has been labouring to obscure it, that they might still seek death in the error of their life; and many ways has he tried to disguise the holiness without which we cannot be saved. How many things have been palmed, even upon the Christian world, in the place of this! Some of these are utterly contrary thereto, and subversive of it. Some were noways connected with or related to it; but useless and insignificant trifles. Others might be deemed to be some part of it, but by no means the whole. It may be of use to enumerate some of them, lest ye should be ignorant of Satan’s devices.

12. Of the first sort, things prescribed as Christian holiness although flatly contrary thereto, is idolatry. How has this, in various shapes, been taught, and is to this day, as essential to holiness! How diligently is it now circulated in a great part of the Christian Church! Some of their idols are silver and gold, or wood and stone, “graven by art, and man’s device;” some, men of like passions with themselves, particularly the Apostles of our Lord, and the Virgin Mary. To these they add numberless saints of their own creation, with no small company of angels.

13. Another thing as directly contrary to the whole tenor of true religion, is, what is diligently taught in many parts
of the Christian Church; I mean the spirit of persecution; of persecuting their brethren even unto death; so that
the earth has been often covered with blood by those who were called Christians, in order to “make their calling
and election sure.” It is true, many, even in the Church of Rome, who were taught this horrid doctrine, now seem
to be ashamed of it. But have the heads of that community as openly and explicitly renounced that capital
doctrine of devils, as they avowed it in the Council of Constance, and practised it for many ages? Till they have
done this, they will be chargeable with the blood of Jerome of Prague, basely murdered, and of many thousands,
both in the sight of God and man.

14. Let it not be said, “This does not concern us Protestants: We think and let think. We abhor the spirit of
persecution; and maintain, as an indisputable truth, that every rational creature has a right to worship God as he
is persuaded in his own mind.” But are we true to our own principles? So far, that we do not use fire and faggot.
We do not persecute unto blood those that do not subscribe to our opinions. Blessed be God, the laws of our
country do not allow of this; but is there no such thing to be found in England as domestic persecution? The
saying or doing anything unkind to another for following his own conscience is a species of persecution. Now,
are we all clear of this? Is there no husband who, in this sense, persecutes his wife? Who uses her unkindly, in
word or deed, for worshipping God after her own conscience? Do no parents thus persecute their children? No
masters or mistresses, their servants? If they do this, and think they do God service therein, they must not cast the
First stone at the Roman Catholics.

15. When things of an indifferent nature are represented as necessary to salvation, it is a folly of the same kind,
though not of the same magnitude. Indeed, it is not a little sin to represent trifles as necessary to salvation; such
as going of pilgrimages, or anything that is not expressly enjoined in the Holy Scripture. Among these we may
undoubtedly rank orthodoxy, or right opinions. We know, indeed, that wrong opinions in religion naturally lead
to wrong tempers, or wrong practices; and that, consequently, it is our bounden duty to pray that we may have a
right judgment in all things. But still a man may judge as accurately as the devil, and yet be as wicked as he.

16. Something more excusable are they who imagine holiness to consist in things that are only a part of it; (that is,
when they are connected with the rest; otherwise they are no part of it at all;) suppose in doing no harm. And
how exceeding common is this! How many take holiness and harmlessness to mean one and the same thing!
Whereas were a man as harmless as a post, he might be as far from holiness as heaven from earth. Suppose a
man, therefore, to be exactly honest, to pay every one his own, to cheat no man, to wrong no man, to hurt no
man, to be just in all his dealings; suppose a woman to be uniformly modest and virtuous in all her words and
actions; suppose the one and the other to be steady practisers of morality, that is, of justice, mercy, and truth; yet
all this, though it is good as far as it goes, is but a part of Christian holiness. Yea, suppose a person of this
amiable character to do much good wherever he is; to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, relieve the stranger, the
sick, the prisoner; yea, and to save many souls from death: it is possible he may still fall far short of that holiness
without which he cannot see the Lord.

17. What, then, is that holiness which is the true “wedding garment,” the only qualification for glory? “In Christ
Jesus,” (that is, according to the Christian institution, whatever be the case of the heathen world,) “neither
circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creation, -- the renewal of the soul “in the image
of God wherein it was created.” In “Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but
faith which worketh by love.” [Gal. 5:6] It first, through the energy of God, worketh love to God and all
mankind; and, by this love, every holy and heavenly temper, -- in particular, lowliness, meekness, gentleness,
temperance, and longsuffering. “It is neither circumcision,” -- the attending on all the Christian ordinances, --
“nor uncircumcision,” -- the fulfilling of all heathen morality, -- but “the keeping the commandments of God;
particularly those, -- “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.” In a
word, holiness is the having “the mind that was in Christ,” and the “walking as Christ walked.”

18. Such has been my judgment for these threescore years, without any material alteration. Only, about fifty years
ago I had a clearer view than before of justification by faith: and in this, from that very hour, I never varied, no,
not an hair’s breadth. Nevertheless, an ingenious man has publicly accused me of a thousand variations. I pray
God, not to lay this to his charge! I am now on the borders of the grave; but, by the grace of God, I still witness
the same confession. Indeed, some have supposed, that when I began to declare, “By grace ye are saved through
faith,” I retracted what I had before maintained: “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” But it is an entire
mistake: These scriptures well consist with each other; the meaning of the former being plainly this, -- By faith we are saved from sin, and made holy. The imagination that faith supersedes holiness, is the marrow of Antinomianism.

19. The sum of all is this: The God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made. This he has proclaimed to them in his word, together with the terms of salvation, revealed by the Son of his love, who gave his own life that they that believe in him might have everlasting life. And for these he has prepared a kingdom, from the foundation of the world. But he will not force them to accept of it; he leaves them in the hands of their own counsel; he saith, “Behold, I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: Choose life, that ye may live.” Choose holiness, by my grace; which is the way, the only way, to everlasting life. He cries aloud, “Be holy, and be happy; happy in this world, and happy in the world to come.” “Holiness becometh his house for ever!” This is the wedding garment of all that are called to “the marriage of the Lamb.” Clothed in this, they will not be found naked: “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” But as to all those who appear in the last day without the wedding garment, the Judge will say, “Cast them into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

MADELEY, March 26, 1790

John Wesley

SERMON 121

HUMAN LIFE A DREAM

“Even like as a dream when one awaketh; so shalt thou make their image to vanish out of the city.” Ps. 73:20.

1. Anyone that considers the foregoing verses will easily observe that the Psalmist is speaking directly of the wicked, that prosper in their wickedness. It is very common for these utterly to forget that they are creatures of a day; to live as if they were never to die; as if their present state was to endure for ever; or, at least as if they were indisputably sure that they “had much goods laid up for many years:” So that they might safely say, “Soul, take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” But how miserable a mistake is this! How often does God say to such a one, “Thou fool! This night shall thy soul be required of thee!” Well then may it be said of them, “O, how suddenly do they consume!” -- perish, and come to a fearful end. Yea, “even like as a dream when one awaketh; so shalt thou make their image to vanish out of the city.”

2. But I would at present carry this thought farther; I would consider it in a general sense, and show how near a resemblance there is between human life and a dream. An ancient poet carries the comparison farther still, when he styles life, “the dream of a shadow.” And so does Cowley, when he cries out,

O life, thou nothing’s younger brother!
So like, that we mistake the one for the other!

But, setting these and all other flights of poetry aside, I would seriously inquire, wherein this resemblance lies; wherein the analogy between the one and the other does properly consist.

3. In order to this, I would inquire, First, What is a dream? You will say, “Who does not know this?” Might you not rather say, Who does know? Is there anything more mysterious in nature? Who is there that has not experienced it, that has not dreamed a thousand times? Yet he is no more able to explain the nature of it, than he is to grasp the skies. Who can give any clear, satisfactory account of the parent of dreams, sleep? It is true, many physicians have attempted this, but they have attempted it in vain. They have talked learnedly about it, but have left the matter at last just as dark as it was before. They tell us some of its properties and effects; but none can tell what is the essence of it.

4. However, we know the origin of dreams, and that with some degree of certainty. There can be no doubt but some of them arise from the present constitution of the body; while others of them are probably occasioned by the
passions of the mind. Again: We are clearly informed in Scripture, that some are caused by the operation of good angels; as others, undoubtedly, are owing to the power and malice of evil angels (if we may dare to suppose that there are any such now; or, at least, that they have anything to do in the world). From the same divine treasury of knowledge we learn that, on some extraordinary occasions, the great Father of spirits has manifested himself to human spirits, “in dreams and visions of the night.” But which of all these arise from natural, which from supernatural, influence, we are many times not able to determine.

5. And how can we certainly distinguish between our dreams and our waking thoughts? What criterion is there by which we may surely know whether we are awake or asleep? It is true, as soon as we awake out of sleep, we know we have been in a dream, and are now awake. But how shall we know that a dream is such while we continue therein? What is a dream? To give a gross and superficial, not a philosophical, account of it: It is a series of persons and things presented to our mind in sleep, which have no being but in our own imagination. A dream, therefore, is a kind of digression from our real life. It seems to be a sort of echo of what was said or done a little when we were awake. Or, may we say, a dream is a fragment of life, broken off at both ends; not connected either with the part that goes before, or with that which follows after? And is there any better way of distinguishing our dreams from our waking thoughts, than by this very circumstance? It is a kind of parenthesis, inserted in life, as that is in a discourse, which goes on equally well either with it or without it. By this then we may infallibly know a dream, -- by its being broken off at both ends; by its having no proper connection with the real things which either precede or follow it.

6. It is not needful to prove that there is a near resemblance between these transient dreams, and the dream of life. It may be of more use to illustrate this important truth; to place it in as striking a light as possible. Let us then seriously consider, in a few obvious particulars, the case of one that is just awaking out of life, and opening his eyes in eternity.

7. Let us then propose the case. Let us suppose we had now before us one that was just passed into the world of spirits. Might not you address such a new-born soul in some such manner as this? You have been an inhabitant of earth forty, perhaps fifty or sixty, years. But now God has altered his voice: “Awake, thou that sleepest!” You awake; you arise; you have no more to do with these poor transient shadows. Arise, and shake thyself from the dust! See, all is real here! All is permanent; all eternal! Far more stable than the foundations of the earth; yea, than the pillars of that lower heaven.

Now that your eyes are open, see how inexpressibly different are all the things that are now round about you! What a difference do you perceive in yourself! Where is your body, -- your house of clay? Where are your limbs, your hands, your feet, your head? There they lie, cold, insensible! No anger, hereafter, or shame, Shall redden the innocent clay;
Extinct is the animal flame,
And passion is vanish’d away.

What a change is in the immortal spirit! You see everything around you; but how? Not with eyes of flesh and blood! You hear; but not by a stream of undulating air, striking on an extended membrane.

You feel; but in how wonderful a manner! You have no nerves to convey the ethereal fire to the common sensory; rather, are you not now all eye, all ear, all feeling, all perception? How different, now you are wholly awake, are all the objects round about you! Where are the houses, and gardens, and fields, and cities, which you lately saw? Where are the rivers, and seas, and everlasting hills? Was it then only in a dream that our poet discovered,

   Earth hath this variety from heaven
   Of pleasure situate in hill and dale?
   Nay, I doubt all these vanished away like smoke, the moment you awoke out of the body.

8. How strange must not only the manner of existence appear, and the place wherein you are (if it may be called place; though who can define or describe the place of spirits?) but the inhabitants of that unknown region! Whether they are of the number of those unhappy spirits that “kept not their first estate,” or of those holy ones that still “minister to the heirs of salvation.” How strange are the employments of those spirits with which you are now surrounded! How bitter are they to the taste of those that are still dreaming upon earth! ‘I have no
relish,” said one of these, (a much-applauded wit, who has lately left the body,) “for sitting upon a cloud all day long, and singing praise to God.” We may easily believe him; and there is no danger of his being put to that trouble. Nevertheless, this is no trouble to them who cease not day and night, but continually sing, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth!”

9. Suppose this to be the case with any of you that are now present before God. It may be so to-morrow; perhaps tonight; perhaps this night your “soul may be required of you;” the dream of life may end, and you may wake into broad eternity! See, there lies the poor inanimate carcase, shortly to be sown in corruption and dishonour. But where is the immortal, incorruptible spirit? There it stands, naked before the eyes of God! Meantime, what is become of all the affairs which you have been eagerly engaged in under the sun? What profit have you reaped of all your labour and care? Does your money follow you? No; you have left it behind you; -- the same thing to you as if it had vanished into air! Does your gay or rich apparel follow you? Your body is clothed with dust and rottenness. Your soul, indeed is clothed with immortality. But, O! What immortality? Is it an immortality of happiness and glory; or of shame and everlasting contempt? Where is the honour, the pomp, of the rich and great; the applause that surrounded you? All gone; all are vanished away, “like as a shadow that departeth.” “The play is over,” said Monsieur Moultray, when he saw the ball pierce the temples of his dying master. [Charles XII, King of Sweden, at the siege of Frederickshall.] And what cared the courtier for this? No more than if it had been the conclusion of a farce or dance. But while the buffoon slept on and took his rest, it was not so with the monarch. Though he was not terrified with anything on earth, he would be at the very gates of hell. Vain valour! In the very article of death, he grasped the hilt of his sword! But where was he the next moment, when the sword dropped out of his hand, and the soul out of his body? Then ended the splendid dream of royalty, - of glory, of destroying cities, and of conquering kingdoms!

10. "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!” What are the weapons that are so terrible among us, to the inhabitants of eternity? How are the wise, the learned, the poet, the critic fallen, and their glory vanished away! How is the beauty fallen, the late idol of a gazing crowd! In how complete a sense are “the daughters of music brought low,” and all the instruments thereof forgotten! Are you not now convinced, that (according to the Hebrew proverb) “a living dog is better than a dead lion?” For the living know, yea, must know, unless they obstinately refuse, “that they shall die; but the dead know not anything” that will avail for the ease of their pain, or to lessen their misery. Also “their hope and fear, and their desire,” all are perished; all of them are fled; “they have not any portion in the things that are done under the sun!”

11. Where, indeed, is the hope of those who were lately laying deep schemes, and saying, “To-day, or to-morrow, we will go to such a city, and continue there a year, and traffic, and get gain?” How totally had they forgotten that wise admonition, “Ye know not what shall be on the morrow! For, what is your life? It is a vapour that appeareth awhile, and then vanisheth away!” Where is all your business? Where your worldly cares, your troubles or engagements? All these things are fled away like smoke; and your soul is left. And how is it qualified for the enjoyment of this new world? Has it a relish for the objects and enjoyments of the invisible world? Are your affections loosened from things below, and fixed on things above, -- fixed on that place where Jesus sitteth at the right hand of God? Then happy are ye; and when He whom ye love shall appear, “ye shall also appear with him in glory.”

12. But how do you relish the company that surrounds you? Your old companions are gone; a great part of them probably separated from you never to return. Are your present companions angels of light? -- ministering spirits, that but now whispered, “Sister spirit, come away! We are sent to conduct thee over that gulf into Abraham’s bosom.” And what are those? Some of the souls of the righteous, whom thou didst formerly relieve with “the mammon of unrighteousness;” and who are now commissioned by your common Lord to receive, to welcome you “into the everlasting habitations.” Then the angels of darkness will quickly discern they have no part in you. So they must either hover at a distance, or flee away in despair. Are some of these happy spirits that take acquaintance with you, the same that travelled with you below, and bore a part in your temptations; that, together with you, fought the good fight of faith, and laid hold on eternal life? As you then wept together, you may rejoice together, you and your guardian angels perhaps, in order to increase your thankfulness for being “delivered from so great a death.” They may give you a view of the realms below; those

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell.
See, on the other hand, the mansions which were “prepared for you from the foundation of the world!” O what a difference between the dream that is past, and the real scene that is now present with thee! Look up! See!

No need of the sun in that day,
Which never is follow’d by night;
Where Jesus’s beauties display
A pure and a permanent light!

Look down! What a prison is there! “Twixt upper, nether, and surrounding fire!” And what inhabitants! What horrid, fearful shapes, emblems of the rage against God and man, the envy, fury, despair, fixed within, -- causing them to gnash their teeth at Him they so long despised! Meanwhile,

does it comfort them to see, across the great gulf, the righteous in Abraham’s bosom? What a place is that! What a “house of God, eternal in the heavens!” Earth is only His footstool; yea,

The spacious firmament on high,
And all the blue, ethereal sky.
Well then may we say to its inhabitants,
Proclaim the glories of our Lord,
Dispersed through all the heavenly street;
Whose boundless treasures can afford
So rich a pavement for his feet.

And yet how inconsiderable is the glory of that house, compared to that of its great Inhabitant! In view of whom all the first-born sons of light, angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven, full of light as they are full of love,

Approach not, but with both wings veil their eyes.

13. How wonderful, then, now the dream of life is over, now you are quite awake, do all these scenes appear! Even such a sight as never entered, or could enter into your hearts to conceive! How are all those that “awake up after his likeness, now satisfied with it!” They have now a portion, real, solid, incorruptible, “that fadeth not away.” Meantime, how exquisitely wretched are they who (to wave all other considerations) have chosen for their portion those transitory shadows which now are vanished, and have left them in an abyss of real misery, which must remain to all eternity!

14. Now, considering that every child of man who is yet upon earth must sooner or later wake out of this dream, and enter real life; how infinitely does it concern every one of us to attend to this before our great change comes! Of what importance is it to be continually sensible of the condition wherein we stand! How advisable, by every possible means, to connect the ideas of time and eternity! So to associate them together, that the thought of one may never recur to your mind, without the thought of the other! It is our highest wisdom to associate the ideas of the visible and invisible world; to connect temporal and spiritual, mortal and immortal being. Indeed, in our common dreams we do not usually know we are asleep whilst we are in the midst of our dream. As neither do we know it while we are in the midst of the dream which we call life. But you may be conscious of it now! God grant you may, before you awake in a winding-sheet of fire!

15. What an admirable foundation for thus associating the ideas of time and eternity, of the visible and invisible world, is laid in the very nature of religion! For, what is religion, -- I mean scriptural religion? For all other is the vainest of all dreams. What is the very root of this religion? It is Immanuel, God with us! God in man! Heaven connected with earth! The unspeakable union of mortal with immortal. For “truly our fellowship” (may all Christians say) “is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. God hath given unto us eternal life; and this life is in his Son.” What follows? “He that hath the Son hath life: And he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

16. But how shall we retain a constant sense of this? I have often thought, in my waking hours, “Now, when I fall asleep, and see such and such things, I will remember it was but a dream.” Yet I could not, while the dream lasted; and probably none else can. But it is otherwise with the dream of life; which we do remember to be such, even while it lasts. And if we do forget it, (as we are indeed apt to do,) a friend may remind us of it. It is much to
be wished that such a friend were always near; one that would frequently sound in our ear, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead!” Soon you will awake into real life. You will stand, a naked spirit, in the world of spirits, before the face of the great God! See that you now hold fast that “eternal life, which he hath given you in his Son!”

17. How admirably does this life of God branch out into the whole of religion, -- I mean scriptural religion! As soon as God reveals his Son in the heart of a sinner, he is enabled to say, “The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” He then “rejoices in hope of the glory of God,” even with joy unspeakable. And in consequence both of this faith and hope, the love of God is shed abroad in his heart; which, filling the soul with love to all mankind, “is the fulfilling of the law.”

18. And how wonderfully do both faith and hope and love connect God with man, and time with eternity! In consideration of this, we may boldly say, - Vanish then this world of shadows;

Pass the former things away!
Lord, appear! Appear to glad us,
With the dawn of endless day!
O conclude this mortal story,
Throw this universe aside!
Come, eternal King of glory,
Now descend, and take thy bride!

[August 1789]

John Wesley
SERMON 122
(text from the 1872 edition)

ON FAITH

“Now faith is the evidence of things not seen.” Heb. 11:1.

1. Many times have I thought, many times have I spoke, many times have I wrote upon these words; and yet there appears to be a depth in them which I am in no wise able to fathom. Faith is, in one sense of the word, a divine conviction of God and of the things of God; in another, (nearly related to, yet not altogether the same,) it is a divine conviction of the invisible and eternal world.

In this sense I would now consider, -

2. I am now an immortal spirit, strangely connected with a little portion of earth; but this is only for a while: In a short time I am to quit this tenement of clay, and to remove into another state, Which the living know not,

And the dead cannot, or they may not tell!

What kind of existence shall I then enter upon, when my spirit has launched out of the body? How shall I feel myself, -- perceive my own being? How shall I discern the things that are round about me, either material or spiritual objects? When my eyes no longer transmit the rays of light, how will the naked spirit see? When the organs of hearing are mouldered into dust, in what manner shall I hear? When the brain is of no farther use, what means of thinking shall I have? When my whole body is resolved into senseless earth, what means shall I have of gaining knowledge?

3. How strange, how incomprehensible, are the means whereby I shall then take knowledge even of the material world! Will things appear then as they do now, -- of the same size, shape, and colour? Or will they be altered in any, or all these respects? How will the sun, moon, and stars appear? The sublunary heavens? The planetary heavens? The region of the fixed stars? -- how the fields of ether, which we may conceive to be millions of miles beyond them? Of all this we know nothing yet. And, indeed, we need to know nothing.
4. What then can we know of those innumerable objects which properly belong to the invisible world; which mortal eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into our heart to conceive? What a scene will then be opened, when the regions of hades are displayed without a covering! Our English translators seem to have been much at a loss for a word to render this. Indeed, two hundred years ago, it was tolerably expressed by the word hell, which then signified much the same with the word hades, namely, the invisible world. Accordingly, by Christ descending into hell, they meant, his body remained in the grave, his soul remained in hades, (which is the receptacle of separate spirits,) from death to the resurrection. Here we cannot doubt but the spirits of the righteous are inexpressibly happy. They are, as St. Paul expresses it, “with the Lord,” favoured with so intimate a communion with him as “is far better” than whatever the chief of the Apostles experienced while in this world. On the other hand, we learn from our Lord’s own account of Dives and Lazarus, that the rich man, from the moment he left the world, entered into a state of torment. And “there is a great gulf fixed” in hades, between the place of the holy and that of unholy spirits, which it is impossible for either the one or the other to pass over. Indeed, a gentleman of great learning, the Honourable Mr. [Alexander] Campbell, in his account of the Middle State, published not many years ago, seems to suppose that wicked souls may amend in hades, and then remove to a happier mansion. He has great hopes that “the rich man,” mentioned by our Lord, in particular, might be purified by that penal fire, till, in process of time, he might be qualified for a better abode. But who can reconcile this with Abraham’s assertion that none can pass over the “great gulf?”

5. I cannot therefore but think, that all those who are with the rich man in the unhappy division of hades, will remain there, howling and blaspheming, cursing God and looking upwards, till they are cast into “the everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” And, on the other hand, can we reasonably doubt but that those who are now in paradise, in Abraham’s bosom, -- all those holy souls who have been discharged from the body, from the beginning of the world unto this day, -- will be continually ripening for heaven; will be perpetually holier and happier, till they are received into “the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world?”

6. But who can inform us in what part of the universe hades is situated, -- this abode of both happy and unhappy spirits, till they are re-united to their bodies? It has not pleased God to reveal anything concerning it in the Holy Scripture; and, consequently, it is not possible for us to form any judgment, or even conjecture, about it. Neither are we informed, how either one or the other are employed, during the time of their abode there. Yet may we not probably suppose that the Governor of the world may sometimes permit wicked souls “to do his gloomy errands in the deep;” or, perhaps, in conjunction with evil angels, to inflict vengeance on wicked men? Or will many of them be shut up in the chains of darkness, unto the great judgment of the great day? In the mean time, may we not probably suppose, that the spirits of the just, though generally lodged in paradise, yet may sometimes, in conjunction with the holy angels, minister to the heirs of salvation? May they not Sometimes, on errands of love, Revisit their brethren below?

It is a pleasing thought, that some of these human spirits, attending us with, or in the room of, angels, are of the number of those that were dear to us while they were in the body. So that there is no absurdity in the question:

Have ye your own flesh forgot,
By a common ransom bought?
Can death’s interposing tide
Spirits one in Christ divide?

But, be this as it may, it is certain human spirits swiftly increase in knowledge, in holiness, and in happiness; conversing with all the wise and holy souls that lived in all ages and nations from the beginning of the world; with angels and archangels, to whom the children of men are no more than infants; and above all, with the eternal Son of God, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” And let it be especially considered, whatever they learn they will retain for ever. For they forget nothing. To forget is only incident to spirits that are clothed with flesh and blood.

7. But how will this material universe appear to a disembodied spirit? Who can tell whether any of these objects that surround us will appear the same as they do now? And if we know so little of these, what can we now know concerning objects of a quite different nature? Concerning the spiritual world? It seems it will not be possible for
us to discern them at all, till we are furnished with senses of a different nature, which are not yet opened in our souls. These may enable us both to penetrate the inmost substance of things, whereof we now discern only the surface; and to discern innumerable things, of the very existence whereof we have not now the least perception. What astonishing scenes will then discover themselves to our newly-opening senses! Probably fields of ether, not only ten fold, but ten thousand fold, “the length of this terrene.” And with what variety of furniture, animate and inanimate! How many orders of beings, not discovered by organs of flesh and blood! Perhaps thrones, dominions, principats, virtues, powers! -- whether of those that retain their first habitations and primeval strength, or of those that, rebelling against their Creator, have been cast out of heaven! And shall we not then, as far as angel’s ken, survey the bounds of creation, and see every place where the Almighty

Stopp’d his rapid wheels, and said, -
“This be thy just circumference, O world?”

Yea, shall we not be able to move, quick as thought, through the wide realms of uncreated night? Above all, the moment we step into eternity, shall we not feel ourselves swallowed up of Him who is in this and every place, -- who filleth heaven and earth? It is only the veil of flesh and blood which now hinders us from perceiving, that the great Creator cannot but fill the whole immensity of space.

He is every moment above us, beneath us, and on every side. Indeed, in this dark abode, this land of shadows, this region of sin and death, the thick cloud which is interposed between conceals him from our sight. But the veil will disappear; and he will appear in unclouded majesty, “God over all, blessed for ever!”

8. How variously are the children of men employed in this world! In treading over “the paths they trod six thousand years before!” But who knows how we shall be employed after we enter that visible world? A little of it we may conceive, and that without any doubt, provided we keep to what God himself has revealed in his word, and what he works in the hearts of his children. Let us consider, First, what may be the employment of unholy spirits from death to the resurrection. We cannot doubt but the moment they leave the body, they find themselves surrounded by spirits of their own kind, probably human as well as diabolical. What power God may permit these to exercise over them, we do not distinctly know. But it is not improbable, he may suffer Satan to employ them, as he does his own angels, in inflicting death, or evils of various kinds, on the men that know not God: For this end they may raise storms by sea or by land; they may shoot meteors through the air; they may occasion earthquakes; and, in numberless ways, afflict those whom they are not suffered to destroy. Where they are not permitted to take away life, they may inflict various diseases; and many of these, which we judge to be natural, are undoubtedly diabolical. I believe this is frequently the case with lunatics.

It is observable, that many of those mentioned in Scripture, who are called lunatics by one of the Evangelists, are termed demoniacs by another. One of the most eminent Physicians I ever knew, particularly in cases of insanity, the late Dr. [Thomas] Deacon, was clearly of opinion that this was the case with many, if not most, lunatics. And it is no valid objection to this, that these diseases are so often cured by natural means; for a wound inflicted by an evil spirit might be cured as any other, unless that spirit was permitted to repeat the blow.

9. May not some of these evil spirits be likewise employed, in conjunction with evil angels, in tempting wicked men to sin, and in procuring occasions for them? Yea, and in tempting good men to sin, even after they have escaped the corruption that is in the world? Herein, doubtless, they put forth all their strength; and greatly glory if they conquer. A passage in an ancient author may greatly illustrate this: (Although I apprehend, he did not intend that we should take it literally:) “Satan summoned his powers, and examined what mischief each of them had done. One said, ‘I have set a house on fire, and destroyed all its inhabitants.’ Another said, ‘I have raised a storm at sea, and sunk a ship; and all on board perished in the waters.’ Satan answered, ‘Perhaps those that were burnt or drowned were saved.’ A third said, ‘I have been forty years tempting a holy man to commit adultery; and I have left him asleep in his sin.’ Hearing this, Satan rose to do him honour; and all hell resounded with his praise.” Hear this, all ye that imagine you cannot fall from grace!

10. Ought not we then to be perpetually on our guard against those subtle enemies? Though we see them not, -

A constant watch they keep;
They eye us night and day;
And never slumber, never sleep,
Lest they should lose their prey.
Herein they join with “the rulers of the darkness,” the intellectual darkness, “of this world,” -- the ignorance, wickedness, and misery diffused through it, -- to hinder all good, and promote all evil! To this end they are continually “working with energy in the children of disobedience.” Yea, sometimes they work by them those lying wonders that might almost deceive even the children of God.

11. But meantime, how may we conceive the inhabitants of the other part of hades, the souls of the righteous, to be employed? It has been positively affirmed by some philosophical men, that spirits have no place. But they do not observe, that if it were so, they must be omnipresent, -- an attribute which cannot be allowed to any but the Almighty Spirit. The abode of these blessed spirits the ancient Jews were used to term Paradise, -- the same name which our Lord gave it, telling the penitent thief, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Yet in what part of the universe this is situated who can tell, or even conjecture, since it has not pleased God to reveal anything concerning it? But we have no reason to think they are confined to this place; or, indeed, to any other. May we not rather say, that, “servants of his,” as well as the holy angels, they “do his pleasure;” whether among the inhabitants of earth, or in any other part of his dominions? And as we easily believe that they are swifter than the light; even as swift as thought; they are well able to traverse the whole universe in the twinkling of an eye, either to execute the divine commands, or to contemplate the works of God. What a field is here opened before them! And how immensely may they increase in knowledge, while they survey his works of creation or providence, or his manifold wisdom in the Church! What depth of wisdom, of power, and of goodness do they discover in his methods of “bringing many sons to glory!” Especially while they converse on any of these subjects, with the illustrious dead of ancient days! With Adam, first of men; with Noah, who saw both the primeval and the ruined world; with Abraham, the friend of God; with Moses, who was favoured to speak with God, as it were, “face to face;” with Job, perfected by sufferings; with Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel, and all the Prophets; with the Apostles, the noble army of Martyrs, and all the saints who have lived and died to the present day; with our elder brethren, the holy angels, cherubim, seraphim, and all the companies of heaven; above all the name of creature owns, with Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant! Meantime, how will they advance in holiness; in the whole image of God, wherein they were created; in the love of God and man; gratitude to their Creator, and benevolence to all their fellow-creatures! Yet it does not follow, (what some earnestly maintain,) that this general benevolence will at all interfere with that peculiar affection which God himself implants for our relations, friends, and benefactors. O no! Had you stood by his bed-side, when that dying saint was crying out, “I have a father and a mother gone to heaven;” (to paradise, the receptacle of happy spirits;) “I have ten brothers and sisters gone to heaven; and now I am going to them that am the eleventh! Blessed be God that I was born!” would you have replied, “What, if you are going to them? They will be no more to you than any other persons; for you will not know them.” Not know them! Nay, does not all that is in you recoil at that thought? Indeed, sceptics may ask, “How do disembodied spirits know each other?” I answer plainly, I cannot tell: But I am certain that they do.

This is as plainly proved from one passage of Scripture as it could be from a thousand. Did not Abraham and Lazarus know each other in hades, even afar off? Even though they were fixed on different sides of the “great gulf?” Can we doubt, then, whether the souls that are together in paradise shall know one another? The Scripture, therefore, clearly decides this question. And so does the very reason of the thing; for we know, every holy temper which we carry with us into paradise will remain in us for ever. But such is gratitude to our benefactors. This, therefore, will remain for ever. And this implies, that the knowledge of our benefactors will remain, without which it cannot exist.

12. And how much will that add to the happiness of those spirits which are already discharged from the body, that they are permitted to minister to those whom they have left behind! An indisputable proof of this we have in the twenty-second chapter of the Revelation. When the Apostle fell down to worship the glorious spirit which he seems to have mistaken for Christ, he told him plainly, “I am of thy fellow-servants, the Prophets;” [Rev. 22] not God, not an angel, not a human spirit. And in how many ways may they “minister to the heirs of salvation!” Sometimes by counteracting wicked spirits whom we cannot resist, because we cannot see them; sometimes by preventing our being hurt by men, or beasts, or inanimate creatures. How often may it please God to answer the prayer of good Bishop Ken! -
O may thine angels, while I sleep,
Around my bed their vigils keep;
Their love angelical instil;
Stop all the avenues [consequence] of ill!
May they celestial joys rehearse,
And thought to thought with me converse;
Or, in my stead, the whole night long,
Sing to my God a grateful song!

And may not the Father of spirits allot this office jointly to angels, and human spirits waiting to be made perfect?

13. It may indeed be objected that God has no need of any subordinate agents, of either angelical or human spirits, to guard his children in their waking or sleeping hours; seeing “He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep.” And certainly, he is able to preserve them by his own immediate power; yea, and he is able, by his own immediate power, without any instruments at all, to supply the wants of all his creatures both in heaven and earth. But it is, and ever was, his pleasure, not to work by his own immediate power only, but chiefly by subordinate means, from the beginning of the world. And how wonderfully is his wisdom displayed in adjusting all these to each other! So that we may well cry out, “O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all.”

14. This we know, concerning the whole frame and arrangement of the visible world. But how exceeding little do we now know concerning the invisible! And we should have known still less of it, had it not pleased the Author of both worlds to give us more than natural light, to give us “his word to be a lantern to our feet, and a light in all our paths.” And holy men of old, being assisted by his Spirit, have discovered many particulars of which otherwise we should have had no conception.

15. And without revelation, how little certainty of invisible things did the wisest of men obtain! The small glimmerings of light which they had were merely conjectural. At best they were only a faint, dim twilight, delivered from uncertain tradition; and so obscured by heathen fables, that it was but one degree better than utter darkness.

16. How uncertain the best of these conjectures was, may easily be gathered from their own accounts. The most finished of all these accounts, is that of the great Roman poet. Where observe how warily he begins, with that apologetic preface, --Sit mihi fas audita loqui? -- “May I be allowed to tell what I have heard?” And, in the conclusion, lest anyone should imagine he believed any of these accounts, he sends the relater of them out of hades by the ivory gate, through which, he had just informed us, that only dreams and shadows pass, -- a very plain intimation, that all which has gone before, is to be looked upon as a dream!

17. How little regard they had for all these conjectures, with regard to the invisible world, clearly appears from the words of his brother poet; who affirms, without any scruple, -

Esse aliquos manes, et subterranea regna
Nec pueri credunt.

“That there are ghosts, or realms below, not even a man [boy] of them now believes.”

So little could even the most improved reason discover concerning the invisible and eternal world! The greater cause have we to praise the Father of Lights, who hath opened the eyes of our understanding, to discern those things which could not be seen by eyes of flesh and blood; that He who of old time shined out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, and enlightened us with the light of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, “the author and finisher of our faith;” “by whom he made the worlds;” “by whom he now sustains whatever he hath made; for,

Till nature shall her Judge survey,
The King Messiah reigns.

These things we have believed upon the testimony of God, the Creator of all things, visible and invisible; by this testimony we already know the things that now exist, though not yet seen, as well as those that will exist in their season, until this visible world will pass away, and the Son of Man shall come in his glory.

18. Upon the whole, what thanks ought we to render to God, who has vouchsafed this “evidence of things unseen”
to the poor inhabitants of earth, who otherwise must have remained in utter darkness concerning them! How invaluable a gift is even this imperfect light, to the benighted sons of men! What a relief is it to the defects of our senses, and consequently, of our understanding; which can give us no information of anything, but what is first presented by the senses! But hereby a new set of senses (so to speak) is opened in our souls; and, by this means, The things unknown to feeble sense,

Unseen by reason’s glimmering ray,
With strong, commanding evidence,
Their heavenly origin display.
Faith lends its realizing light:
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
The’ Invisible appears in sight,
And GOD is seen by mortal eye!

London, Jan. 17, 1791 [probably Wesley’s last sermon]

John Wesley
SERMON 123
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART

“The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: Who can know it?” Jer. 17:9.

1. The most eminent of the ancient Heathens have left us many testimonies of this. It was indeed their common opinion that there was a time when men in general were virtuous and happy; this they termed the “golden age.” And the account of this was spread through almost all nations. But it was likewise generally believed that this happy age had expired long ago; and that men are now in the midst of the “iron age.” At the commencement of this, says the poet, --

Irumpit venae pejoris in aeuum
Omne nefas: fugere pudor, verumque, fidesque
In quorum subiere locum, fraudesque, dolique
Insidiaque, et vis, et amor sceleratus habendi.
Immediately broke in,
With a full tide, all wickedness and sin:
Shame, truth, fidelity, swift fled away;
And cursed thirst of gold bore unresisted sway.

2. But how much more knowing than these old Pagans are the present generation of Christians! How many labored panegyrics do we now read and hear on the Dignity of Human Nature. One eminent preacher, in one of his sermons, preached and printed a few years ago, does not scruple to affirm, First, that men in general (if not every individual) are very wise; Secondly, that men in general are very virtuous; and Thirdly, that they are very happy: And I do not know that anyone yet has been so hardy as to controvert the assertion.

3. Nearly related to them were the sentiments of an ingenious gentleman who, being asked, “My Lord, what do you think of the Bible?” answered, “I think it is the finest book I ever read in my life.

Only that part of it which indicates the mediatorial scheme, I do not understand; for I do not conceive there is any need of a Mediator between God and man. If indeed,” continued he, “I was a sinner, then I should need a Mediator; but I do not conceive I am. It is true, I often act wrong, for want of more understanding: And I frequently feel wrong tempers, particularly proneness to anger; but I cannot allow this to be a sin; for it depends on the motion of my blood and spirits, which I cannot help.

Therefore it cannot be a sin; or, if it be, the blame must fall, not on me, but on him that made me.” The very sentiments of pious Lord Kames, and modest Mr. Hume!
4. Some years ago, a charitable woman discovered that there was no sinner in the world but the devil. “For,” said she, “he forces men to act as they do; therefore they are unaccountable: The blame lights on Satan.” But these more enlightened gentlemen have discovered that “there is no sinner in the world but God! For he forces men to think, speak, and act as they do; therefore the blame lights on God alone. Satan, avaunt! It may be doubted whether he himself ever uttered so fond a blasphemy as this!

5. But, whatever unbaptized or baptized infidels may say concerning the innocence of mankind, He that made man, and that best knows what he has made, gives a very different account of him. He informs us that “the heart of man,” of all mankind, of every man born into the world, “is desperately wicked;” and that it is “deceitful above all things;” So that we may well ask, “Who can know it?”

I.

1. To begin with this: “The heart of man is desperately wicked.” In considering this, we have no need to refer to any particular sins; these are no more than the leaves, or, at most, the fruits, which spring from that evil tree;) but rather to the general root of all. See how this was first planted in heaven itself, by “Lucifer, son of the morning;” -- till then undoubtedly “one of the first, if not the first archangel;” “Thou saidst, I will sit upon the side of the north.” See self-will, the first-born of Satan! “I will be like the Most High.” See pride, the twin sister of self-will. Here was the true origin of evil. Hence came the inexhaustible flood of evils upon the lower world. When Satan had once transfused his own self-will and pride into the parents of mankind, together with a new species of sin, -- love of the world, the loving the creature above the Creator, -- all manner of wickedness soon rushed in; all ungodliness and unrighteousness; shooting out into crimes of every kind; soon covering the whole face of the earth with all manner of abominations. It would be an endless task to enumerate all the enormities that broke out. Now the fountains of the great deep were broken up. The earth soon became a field of blood: Revenge, cruelty, ambition, with all sorts of injustice, every species of public and private wrongs, were diffused through every part of the earth. Injustice, in ten thousand forms, hatred, envy, malice, blood-thirstiness, with every species of falsehood, rode triumphant; till the Creator, looking down from heaven, would be no more entreated for an incorrigible race, but swept them off from the face of the earth. But how little were the following generations improved by the severe judgment! They that lived after the flood do not appear to have been a whit better than those that lived before it. In a short time, probably before Noah was removed from the earth, all unrighteousness prevailed as before.

2. But is there not a God in the world? Doubtless there is: And it is “He that hath made us, not we ourselves.” He made us gratuitously, of his own mere mercy; for we could merit nothing of him before we had a being. It is of his mercy that he made us at all; that he made us sensible, rational creatures, and above all, creatures capable of God. It is this, and this alone, which puts the essential difference between men and brutes. But if he has made us, and given us all we have, if we owe all we are and have to him; then surely he has a right to all we are and have, -- to all our love and obedience. This has been acknowledged by almost all who believed themselves to be his creatures, in all ages and nations. But a few years ago a learned man frankly confessed: “I could never apprehend that God’s having created us, gave him any title to the government of us; or, that his having created us, laid us under any obligation to yield him our obedience.” I believe that Dr. Hutcheson was the first man that ever made any doubt of this; or that ever doubted, much less denied, that a creature was obliged to obey his Creator. If Satan ever entertained this thought, (but it is not probable he ever did,) it would be no wonder he should rebel against God, and raise war in heaven. And hence would enmity against God arise in the hearts of men also; together with all the branches of ungodliness which abound therein at this day. Hence would naturally arise the neglect of every duty which we owe to him as our Creator, and all the passions and hopes which are directly opposite to every such duty.

3. From the devil the spirit of independence, self-will, and pride, productive of all ungodliness and unrighteousness, quickly infused themselves into the hearts of our first parents in paradise. After they had eaten of the tree of knowledge, wickedness and misery of every kind rushed in with a full tide upon the earth, alienated us from God, and made way for all the rest. Atheism, (now fashionably termed dissipation,) and idolatry, love of the world, seeking happiness in this or that creature, covered the whole earth.
Upright both in heart and will,
We by our God were made;
But we turn’d from good to ill,
And o’er the creatures stray’d;
Multiplied our wandering thought,
Which first was fix’d on God alone;
In ten thousand objects sought
The bliss we lost in one.

4. It would be endless to enumerate all the species of wickedness, whether in thought, word, or action, that now overspread the earth, in every nation, and city, and family. They all centre in this, -- Atheism, or idolatry; pride, either thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think, or glorying in something which they have received, as though they had not received it; independence and self-will, -- doing their own will, not the will of Him that made them. Add to this, seeking happiness out of God, in gratifying the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life.

Hence it is a melancholy truth that (unless when the Spirit of God has made the difference) all mankind now, as well as four thousand years ago, “have corrupted their ways before the Lord; and every imagination of the thought of man’s heart is evil, only evil, and that continually.” However therefore men may differ in their outward ways, (in which, undoubtedly, there are a thousand differences,) yet in the inward root, the enmity against God, Atheism, pride, self-will, and idolatry, it is true of all, that “the heart of man,” of every natural man, “is desperately wicked.”

5. But if this be the case, how is it that everyone is not conscious of it? For who should “know the things of a man, like the spirit of a man that is in him?” Why is it that so few know themselves? For this plain reason: Because the heart is not only “desperately wicked,” but “deceitful above all things.” So deceitful, that we may well ask, “Who can know it?” Who, indeed, save God that made it? By his assistance we may, in the Second place, consider this, -- the deceitfulness of man’s heart.

II.

1. It is deceitful above all things;” that is, in the highest degree, above all that we can conceive.

So deceitful, that the generality of men are continually deceiving both themselves and others. How strangely do they deceive themselves, not knowing either their own tempers or characters, imagining themselves to be abundantly better and wiser than they are! The ancient poet supposes there is no exception to this rule, -- “that no man is willing to know his own heart.” Ut nemo in sese tentat descendere, nemo! None but those who are taught of God!

2. And if men thus deceive themselves, is it any wonder that they deceive others also, and that we so seldom find “an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile?” In looking over my books, some years ago, I found the following memorandum: “I am this day thirty years old; and till this day I know not that I have met with one person of that age, except in my father’s house, who did not use guile, more or less.”

3. This is one of the sorts of desperate wickedness which cleaves to the nature of every man, proceeding from those fruitful roots, -- self-will, pride, and independence on God. Hence springs every species of vice and wickedness; hence every sin against God, our neighbour, and ourselves.

Against God, -- forgetfulness and contempt of God, of his name, his day, his word, his ordinances; Atheism on the one hand, and idolatry on the other; in particular, love of the world, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life; the love of money, the love of power, the love of ease, the love of the “honour that cometh of men,” the love of the creature more than the Creator, the being lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God: -- Against our neighbour, ingratitude, revenge, hatred, envy, malice, uncharitableness.

4. Hence there is in the heart of every child of man, an inexhaustible fund of ungodliness and unrighteousness, so deeply and strongly rooted in the soul, that nothing less than almighty grace can cure it. From hence naturally arises a plentiful harvest of all evil words and works; and to complete the whole, that complex of all evils,
That foul monster, War, that we meet,
Lays deep the noblest work of the creation;
Which wears in vain its Maker's glorious image,
Unprivileged from thee!

In the train of this fell monster are murder, adultery, rape, violence, and cruelty of every kind. And all these abominations are not only found in Mahometan or Pagan countries, where their horrid practice may seem to be the natural result of equally horrid principles; but in those that are called Christian countries, yea, in the most knowing and civilized states and kingdoms. And let it not be said, “This is only the case in Roman Catholic countries.” Nay, we that are called Reformed are not one whit behind them in all manner of wickedness. Indeed, no crime ever prevailed among the Turks or Tartars, which we here cannot parallel in every part of Christendom. Nay, no sin ever appeared in heathen or papal Rome, which is not found at this day in Germany, France, Holland, England, and every other Protestant as well as popish country. So that it might now be said, with as much truth and as few exceptions, of every court in Europe, as it was formerly in the court of Saul: “There is none righteous, no not one; they are altogether become abominable: There is none that understandeth, and seeketh after God.”

5. But is there no exception as to the wickedness of man’s heart? Yes, in those that are born of God. “He that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” God has “purified his heart by faith,” so that his wickedness is departed from him. “Old things are passed away, and all things” in him “are become new.” So that his heart is no longer desperately wicked, but “renewed in righteousness and true holiness.” Only let it be remembered, that the heart, even of a believer, is not wholly purified when he is justified. Sin is then overcome, but it is not rooted out; it is conquered, but not destroyed. Experience shows him, First, that the roots of sin, self-will, pride, and idolatry, remain still in his heart. But as long as he continues to watch and pray, none of them can prevail against him. Experience teaches him, Secondly, that sin (generally pride or self-will) cleaves to his best actions: So that, even with regard to these, he finds an absolute necessity for the blood of atonement.

6. But how artfully does this conceal itself, not only from others, but even from ourselves! Who can discover it in all the disguises it assumes, or trace it through all its latent mazes? And if it be so difficult to know the heart of a good man, who can know the heart of a wicked one, which is far more deceitful? No unregenerate man, however sensible, ever so experienced, ever so wise in his generation. And yet these are they who pique themselves upon “knowing the world,” and imagine they see through all men. Vain men! One may boldly say they “know nothing yet as they ought to know.” Even that politician in the late reign neither knew the heart of himself or of other men, whose favourite saying was: “Do not tell me of your virtue, or religion: I tell you, every man has his price.” Yes, Sir R[obert]; every man like you; everyone that sells himself to the devil.

7. Did that right honourable wretch, compared to whom Sir R[obert] was a saint, know the heart of man, -- he that so earnestly advised his own son, “never to speak the truth, to lie or dissemble as often as he speaks, to wear a mask continually?” that earnestly counselled him, “not to debauch single women,” (because some inconveniences might follow,) “but always married women?” Would one imagine this grovelling animal ever had a wife or a married daughter of his own? O rare Lord C[hesterfield]! Did ever man so well deserve, though he was a Peer of the realm, to die by the side of Newgate? Or did ever book so well deserve to be burned by the common hangman, as his Letters? Did Mr. David Hume, lower, if possible, than either of the former, know the heart of man? No more than a worm or a beetle does. After “playing so idly with the darts of death,” do you now find it a laughing matter? What think you now of Charon? Has he ferried you over Styx? At length he has taught you to know a little of your own heart! At length you know it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

8. One of the ablest champions of infidelity (perhaps the most elegant, and the most decent writer that ever produced a system of religion without being in the least obliged to the Bible for it) breaks out in the fullness of his heart: “Who would not wish that there was full proof of the Christian revelation, since it is undoubtedly the most benevolent system that ever appeared in the world!” Might he not add a reason of another kind, -- Because without this man must be altogether a mystery to himself? Even with the help of Revelation, he knows exceeding little: but without it, he would know abundantly less, and nothing with any certainty. Without the light which is given us by the oracles of God, how could we reconcile his greatness with his meanness? While we
acknowledged, with Sir John Davies, -

    I know my soul has power to know all things,
    Yet is she blind, and ignorant of all:
    I know I’m one of nature’s little kings;
    Yet to the least and vilest things in thrall.

9. Who then knoweth the hearts of all men? Surely none but He that made them. Who knoweth his own heart? Who can tell the depth of its enmity against God? Who knoweth how deeply it is sunk into the nature of Satan?

III.

1. From the preceding considerations, may we not learn, First, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool?” For who that is wise would trust one whom he knows to be “desperely wicked?” especially, whom he hath known, by a thousand experiments, to be “deceitful above all things”? What can we expect, if we still trust a known liar and deceiver, but to be deceived and cheated to the end?

2. We may hence, in the Second place, infer the truth of that other reflection of Solomon: “Seest thou a man that is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope of a fool than of him.” For at what a distance from wisdom must that man be who never suspected his want of it? And will not his thinking so well of himself prevent his receiving instruction from others? Will he no be apt to be displeased at admonition, and to construe reproof into reproach? Will he not therefore be less ready to receive instruction than even one that has little natural understanding? Surely no fool is so incapable of amendment as one that imagines himself to be wise. He that supposes himself not to need a physician, will hardly profit by his advice.

3. May we not learn hence, Thirdly, the wisdom of that caution, “Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall?” Or, to render the text more properly,) “Let him that assuredly standeth take heed lest he fall.” How firmly soever he may stand, he has still a deceitful heart. In how many instances has he been deceived already! And so he may again. Suppose he be not deceived now, does it follow that he never will? Does he not stand upon slippery ground? And is he not surrounded with snares? Into which he may fall and rise no more?

4. Is it not wisdom for him that is now standing, continually to cry to God, “Search me, O Lord, and prove me; try out my reins and my heart! Look well, if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting?” Thou alone, O God, “knowest the hearts of all the children of men:” O show thou me what spirit I am of, and let me not deceive my own soul! Let me not “think of myself more highly than I ought to think.” But let me always “think soberly, according as thou hast given me the measure of faith!”

   Halifax, April 21, 1790

John Wesley
SERMON 124
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE HEAVENLY TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

“We have this treasure in earthen vessels.” 2 Cor. 4:7.

1. How long was man a mere riddle to himself! For how many ages were the wisest of men utterly unable to reveal the mystery, to reconcile the strange inconsistencies, in him, -- the wonderful mixture of good and evil, of greatness and littleness, of nobleness and baseness [barrenness]? The more deeply they considered these things the more they were entangled. The more pains they took, in order to clear up the subject, the more they were bewildered in vain, uncertain conjectures.

2. But what all the wisdom of man was unable to do, was in due time done by the wisdom of God.

    When it pleased God to give an account of the origin of things, and of man in particular, all the darkness
vanished away, and the clear light shone. “God said, Let us make man in our own image.” It was done. In the image of God man was made. Hence we are enabled to give a clear, satisfactory account of the greatness, the excellency, the dignity of man. But “man, being in honour” did not continue therein, but rebelled 20 against his sovereign Lord. Hereby he totally lost, not only the favour, but likewise the image of God. And “in Adam all died.” For fallen “Adam begat a son in his own likeness.” And hence we are taught to give a clear, intelligible account of the littleness and baseness of man. He is sunk even below the beasts that perish. Human nature now is not only sensual but devilish. There is in every man born into the world, (what is not in any part of the brute creation; no beast is fallen so low,) a “carnal mind, which is enmity,” direct enmity, “against God.”

3. By considering, therefore, these things in one view, -- the creation and the fall of man, -- all the inconsistencies of his nature are easily and fully understood. The greatness and littleness, the dignity and baseness, the happiness and misery, of his present state, are no longer a mystery, but clear consequences of his original state and his rebellion against God. This is the key that opens the whole mystery, that removes all the difficulty, by showing what God made man at first, and what man has made himself. It is true, he may regain a considerable measure of “the image of God wherein he was created:” But still, whatever we regain, we shall “have this treasure in earthen vessels.” In order to have a clear conception of this, we may inquire, First, what is “the treasure” which we now have; and, in the Second place, consider how “we have this treasure in earthen vessels.”

I.

1. And, First, let us inquire, What is this treasure which Christian believers have? I say, believers; for it is of these directly that the Apostle is here speaking. Part of this they have, in common with other men, in the remains of the image of God. May we not include herein, First, an immaterial principle, a spiritual nature, endowed with understanding, and affections, and a degree of liberty; of a self-moving, yea, and self-governing power? (otherwise we were mere machines, stocks, and stones)? And, Secondly, all that is vulgarly called natural conscience; implying some discernment of the difference between moral good and evil, with an approbation of one, and disapprobation of the other, by an inward monitor excusing or accusing? Certainly, whether this is natural or superadded by the grace of God, it is found, at least in some small degree, in every child of man. Something of this is found in every human heart, passing sentence concerning good and evil, not only in all Christians, but in all Mahometans, all Pagans, yea, the vilest of savages.

2. May we not believe, that all Christians, though but nominally such, have sometimes at least, some desire to please God, as well as some light concerning what does really please him, and some convictions when they are sensible of displeasing him? Such treasure have all the children of men, more or less, even when they do not yet know God.

3. But it is not these of whom the Apostle is here speaking; neither is this the treasure which is the subject of his discourse. The persons concerning whom he is here speaking are those that are born of God; those that, “being justified by faith,” have now redemption in the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of sins; those who enjoy that peace of God which passeth all understanding; whose soul doth magnify the Lord, and rejoice in him with joy unspeakable; and who feel the “love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them.” This, then, is the treasure which they have received; -- a faith of the operation of God; a peace which sets them above the fear of death, and enables them in everything to be content; an hope full of immortality, whereby they already “taste of the powers of the world to come;” the love of God shed abroad in their hearts with love to every child of man, and a renewal in the whole image of God, in all righteousness and true holiness. This is properly and directly the treasure concerning which the Apostle is here speaking.

II.

1. But this, invaluable as it is, “we have in earthen vessels.” The word is exquisitely proper, denoting both the brittleness of the vessels, and the meaness of the matter they are made of. It directly means, what we term earthenware; china, porcelain, and the like. How weak, how easily broken in pieces! Just such is the case with a holy Christian. We have the heavenly treasure in earthly, mortal, corruptible bodies. “Dust thou art,” said the righteous Judge to his rebellious creature, till then incorruptible and immortal, “and to dust thou shalt return.” How finely (but with what a mixture of light and darkness) does the heathen poet touch upon this change! Post ignem etherea domo subduxerat, -- “After man had stolen fire from heaven,” (what an emblem of forbidden
knowledge!) macies et nova febrium, &c., -- that unknown army of consumptions, fevers, sickness, pain of every kind, fixed their camp upon earth, which till then they could no more have entered than they could scale heaven; and all tended to introduce and pave the way for the last enemy, death.

From the moment that awful sentence was pronounced the body received the sentence of death in itself; if not from the moment our first parents completed their rebellion by eating of the forbidden fruit. May we not probably conjecture that there was some quality naturally in this, which sowed the seeds of death in the human body, till then incorruptible and immortal? Be this as it may, it is certain that, from this time, “the corruptible body has pressed down the soul.” And no marvel, seeing the soul, during its vital union with the body, cannot exert any of its operations, any otherwise than in union with the body, with its bodily organs. But all of these are more debased and depraved by the fall of man, than we can possibly conceive; and the brain, on which the soul more directly depends, not less than the rest of the body. Consequently, if these instruments, by which the soul works, are disordered, the soul itself must be hindered in its operations. Let a musician be ever so skilful, he will make but poor music if his instrument be out of tune. From a disordered brain (such as is, more or less, that of every child of man) there will necessarily arise confusedness of apprehension, showing itself in a thousand instances; false judgment, the natural result thereof, and wrong inferences; and from these, innumerable mistakes will follow, in spite of all the caution we can use.

But mistakes in the judgment will frequently give occasion to mistakes in practice; they will naturally cause our speaking wrong in some instances, and acting wrong in others; nay, they may occasion not only wrong words or actions, but wrong tempers also. If I judge a man to be better than he really is; in consequence I really love him more than he deserves. If I judge another to be worse than he really is; I shall, in consequence, love him less than he deserves. Now both these are wrong tempers. Yet possibly it may not be in my power to avoid either the one or the other.

2. Such are the unavoidable consequences of “having these treasures in earthen vessels.” Not only death, and its forerunners, -- sickness, weakness, and pain, and a thousand infirmities, -- but likewise error, in ten thousand shapes, will be always ready to attack us. Such is the present condition of humanity! Such is the state of the wisest men! Lord, “what is man, that thou art still mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou regardest him?”

3. Something of this great truth, that the “corruptible body presses down the soul,” -- is strongly expressed in those celebrated lines of the ancient poet. Speaking of the souls of men he says:

Igneus est ollis vigor, et coelestis origo
Semnibus; quantum non noxia corpora tardant,
Terrenique hebetant artus, moribundaque membra.
These seeds of heavenly fire,
With strength innate, would to their source aspire,
But that their earthly limbs obstruct their flight,
And check their soaring to the plains of light.

4. But suppose it pleased the all-wise Creator, for the sin of man, to suffer the souls of men in general to be weighed down in this miserable manner by their corruptible body; why does he permit the excellent treasure which he has entrusted to his own children, to be still lodged in these poor earthen vessels?” Would not this question naturally occur to any reflecting mind? Perhaps it would; and therefore the Apostle immediately furnishes us with a full answer: God has done this, that “the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of us;” that it might be undeniably plain to whom that excellent power belonged; that no flesh might glory in his sight; but that all who have received this treasure might continually cry, “Not unto us, but unto thee, O Lord, be the praise, for thy name and for thy truth’s sake.”

5. Undoubtedly this was the main design of God in this wonderful dispensation; to humble man, to make and keep him little and poor, and base, and vile, in his own eyes. And whatever we suffer hereby, we are well repaid, if it be a means of “hiding pride from man;” of laying us low in the dust, even then, when we are most in danger of being lifted up by the excellent gifts of God!

6. Nay, if we suffer hereby, from the mean habitation of the immortal spirit; if pain, sickness, and numberless other afflictions beside, to which we should not otherwise have been liable, assault us on every side, and at length bear
us down into the dust of death; what are we losers by this? Losers!

No, “In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.” Come on then, disease, weakness, pain, -- afflictions, in the language of men. Shall we not be infinite gainers by them? Gainers for ever and ever! Seeing “these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!”

7. And are we not, by the consciousness of our present weakness, effectually taught wherein our strength lies? How loud does it proclaim, “Trust in the Lord Jehovah; for in him is everlasting strength!” Trust in Him who suffered a thousand times more than ever you can suffer! Hath he not all power in heaven and in earth? Then, what though

The heavenly treasure now we have
In a vile house of clay!
Yet He shall to the utmost save,
And keep it to that day.

_Potto, June 17, 1790_

John Wesley
SERMON 134
_(text from the 1872 edition)_

TRUE CHRISTIANITY DEFENDED
_[The following Sermon was found in a mutilated manuscript among Mr. Wesley’s papers. It is dated June 24, 1741. A Latin copy of the same Discourse has also been discovered. Mr. Pawson, with great care, copied the former, and I have supplied the deficiencies out of the latter. On collating both Sermons, I find several variations, and though not of any great importance, yet sufficient, in my judgment, to vindicate the propriety of translating and publishing the Latin one, not merely as a matter of curiosity, but of utility. The Sermon, no doubt, was written with the design of being preached before the University of Oxford; but whether it ever were preached there, cannot be determined. Adam Clarke._]

“How is the faithful city become an harlot!” Isa. 2:21.

1. “When I bring the sword upon a land, saith the Lord, if the watchman blow the trumpet, and warn the people; then 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. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take away any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand.” (Ezek. 33:2-6.)

2. It cannot be doubted, but that word of the Lord is come unto every Minister of Christ also. “So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: Therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die: If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.” (Ezek. 33:2-6.)

3. Nor ought any man, therefore, to be accounted our enemy because he telleth us the truth: The doing of which is indeed an instance of love to our neighbour, as well as of obedience to God.

Otherwise, few would undertake so thankless a task: For the return they will find, they know already.

The Scripture must be fulfilled: “Me the world hateth,” saith our Lord, “because I testify of it that the deeds thereof are evil.”

4. It is from a full, settled conviction, that I owe this labour of love to my brethren, and to my tender parent, [alma mater: The University of Oxford] by whom I have been nourished for now more than twenty years, and from whom, under God, I have received those advantages of which I trust I shall retain a grateful sense till my spirit
returns to God who gave it; it is, I say, from a full conviction that love and gratitude, as well as that dispensation of the gospel wherewith I am entrusted, require it of me, that even I have undertaken to speak on a needful, though unwelcome, subject. I would indeed have wished that some more acceptable person would have done this. But should all hold their peace, the very stones would cry out, “How is the faithful city become an harlot!”

5. How faithful she was once to her Lord, to whom she had been betrothed as a chaste virgin, let not only the writings of her sons, which shall be had in honour throughout all generations, but also the blood of her martyrs, speak; -- a stronger testimony of her faithfulness than could be given by words, even

By all the speeches of the babbling earth.

But how is she now become an harlot! How hath she departed from her Lord! How hath she denied him, and listened to the voice of strangers! Both,

I. In respect of doctrine; and,
II. Of practice.

I. In respect of doctrine.

1. It cannot be said that all our writers are setters forth of strange doctrines. There are those who expound the oracles of God by the same Spirit wherewith they were written; and who faithfully cleave to the solid foundation which our Church hath laid agreeable thereto; touching which we have His word who cannot lie, that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” There are those also, (blessed be the Author of every good gift!) who, as wise master-builders, build thereon, not hay or stubble, but gold and precious stones, -- but that charity which never faileth.

2. We have likewise cause to give thanks to the Father of Lights, for that he hath not left himself without witness; but that there are those who now preach the gospel of peace, the truth as it is in Jesus. But how few are these in comparison of those (JQKŷMCRJNGWQPVGL) who adulterate the word of God! How little wholesome food have we for our souls, and what abundance of poison! How few are there that, either in writing or preaching, declare the genuine gospel of Christ, in the simplicity and purity wherewith it is set forth in the venerable records of our own Church! And how are we enclosed on every side with those who, neither knowing the doctrines of our Church, nor the Scriptures, nor the power of God, have found out to themselves inventions wherewith they constantly corrupt others also!

3. I speak not now of those (RTYŷVQVQMQKŷVQWŷ5CVCPC) first-born of Satan, the Deists, Arians, or Socinians. These are too infamous among us to do any great service to the cause of their master. But what shall we say of those who are accounted the pillars of our Church, and champions of our faith; who, indeed, betray that Church, and sap the very foundations of the faith we are taught thereby?

4. But how invidious a thing it is to show this! Who is sufficient to bear the weight of prejudice which must necessarily follow the very mention of such a charge against men of so established a character? Nay, and who have, indeed, in many other respects, done great service to the Church of God? Yet must every faithful Minister say, “God forbid that I should accept any man’s person!’ I dare not give any man flattering tithes, nor spare any that corrupt the Gospel. ‘In so doing my Maker would soon take me away.’”

5. Let me, however, be as short as may be upon this head; and I will instance only in two or three men of renown, who have endeavoured to sap the very foundations of our Church, by attacking its fundamental, and, indeed, the fundamental doctrine of all Reformed Churches; viz., justification by faith alone.

One of these, and one of the highest station in our Church, hath written and printed, before his death, several sermons, expressly to prove, that not faith alone, but good works also, are necessary in order to justification. The unpleasing task of quoting particular passages out of them is superseded by the very title of them; which is this: “The Necessity of Regeneration,” (which he at large proves to imply holiness both of heart and life,) “in order to Justification.” [Tillotson’s Sermons, Vol. 1., &C.]

6. It may appear strange to some, that an angel of the Church of God, (as the great Shepherd terms the overseers of it,) and one so highly esteemed both in our own and many other nations, should coolly and calmly thus speak.
But O, what is he in comparison of the great Bishop Bull! Who shall be able to stand, if this eminent scholar, Christian, and Prelate, in his youth wrote and published to the world, and in his riper years defended, the positions that follow? - “A man is said to be justified by works; because good works are the condition, according to the divine appointment, established in the gospel covenant, requisite and necessary to a man’s justification; that is, to his obtaining remission of sins through Christ.” Harm. Apost., p. 4.

A little after, being about to produce testimonies in proof of this proposition, he says, “The first class of these shall be those who speak of good works in a general sense, as the requisite and necessary condition of justification.” Then follow certain texts of Scripture; after which he adds, “Who does not believe that in these scriptures there is an abundance of good works required, which if a man do not perform, he is altogether excluded from the hope of pardon, and remission of sins?” -- Ibid., p. 6.

Having introduced some other things, he adds, “Besides faith, there is no one but may see that repentance is required as necessary to justification. Now, repentance is not one work alone, but is, as it were, a collection of many others: For in its compass the following works are comprehended: -- (1.) Sorrow on account of sin: (2.) Humiliation under the hand of God: (3.) Hatred to sin: (4.) Confession of sin: (5.) Ardent supplication of the divine mercy: (6.) The love of God: (7.) Ceasing from sin: (8.) Firm purpose of new obedience: (9.) Restitution of ill-gotten goods: (10.) Forgiving our neighbour his transgressions against us: (11.) Works of beneficence, or alms-giving. How much these things avail to procure remission of sins from God is sufficiently evident from Dan. 4:27; where the Prophet gives this wholesome advice to Nebuchadnezzar, who was at that time cleaving to his sins: `Redeem [The Bishop translates ()’ -- peruk, with the Vulgate, redeem, or buy off but the proper and literal meaning is, break off. A.C.] your sins by alms-giving, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.’” -- Ibid., p. 10.

7. To instance in one point more: All the Liturgy of the Church is full of petitions for that holiness without which, the Scripture everywhere declares, no man shall see the Lord. And these are all summed up in those comprehensive words which we are supposed to be so frequently repeating: “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name.” It is evident that in the last clause of this petition, all outward holiness is contained: Neither can it be carried to a greater height, or expressed in stronger terms. And those words, “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts,” contain the negative branch of inward holiness; the height and depth of which is purity of heart, by the inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit. The remaining words, “that we may perfectly love thee,” contain the positive part of holiness; seeing this love, which is the fulfilling of the law, implies the whole mind that was in Christ.

8. But how does the general stream of writers and Preachers (let me be excused the invidious task of instancing in particular persons) agree with this doctrine? Indeed, not at all. Very few can we find who simply and earnestly enforce it. But very many who write and preach as if Christian holiness, or religion, were a purely negative thing; as if; not to curse or swear, not to lie or slander, not to be a drunkard, a thief; or a whoremonger, not to speak or do evil, was religion enough to entitle a man to heaven! How many, if they go something further than this, describe it only as an outward thing; as if it consisted chiefly, if not wholly, in doing good, (as it is called,) and using the means of grace! Or, should they go a little farther still, yet what do they add to this poor account of religion? Why, perhaps, that a man should be orthodox in his opinions, and have a zeal for the constitution in Church and state. And this is all: This is all the religion they can allow, without degenerating into enthusiasm! So true it is, that the faith of a devil, and the life of a Heathen, make up what most men call a good Christian!

9. But why should we seek further witnesses of this? Are there not many present here who are of the same opinion? Who believe that a good moral man, and a good Christian, mean the same thing? That a man need not trouble himself any further, if he only practises as much Christianity as was written over the Heathen Emperor’s gate, -- “Do as thou wouldest be done unto;” especially if he be not an infidel, or a heretic, but believes all that the Bible and the Church say is true?

10. I would not be understood, as if I despised these things, as if I undervalued right opinions, true morality, or a zealous regard for the constitution we have received from our fathers. Yet what are these things, being alone? What will they profit us in that day? What will it avail to tell the Judge of all) “Lord, I was not as other men were; not unjust, not an adulterer, not a liar, not an immoral man?” Yea, what will it avail, if we have done all good, as well as done no harm, -- if we have given all our goods to feed the poor, -- and have not charity? How
shall we then look on those who taught us to sleep on and take our rest, though “the love of the Father was not in
us?” or who, teaching us to seek salvation by works, cut us off from receiving that faith freely, whereby alone the
love of God could have been shed abroad in our hearts?

To these miserable corrupters of the gospel of Christ, and the poison they have spread abroad, is chiefly owing,

II. Secondly, that general corruption in practice as well as in doctrine. There is hardly to be found (O tell it not in
Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon!) either the form of godliness, or the power! So is “the faithful city
become an harlot!”

1. With grief of heart I speak it, and not with joy, that scarcely is the form of godliness seen among us. We are all
indeed called to be saints, and the very name of Christians means no less. But who has so much as the
appearance? Take any one you meet; take a second, a third, a fourth, or the twentieth. Not one of them has even
the appearance of a saint, any more than of an angel. Observe his look, his air, his gesture! Does it breathe
nothing but God? Does it bespeak a temple of the Holy Ghost? Observe his conversation; not an hour only, but
day by day. Can you gather from any outward sign, that God dwelleth in his heart? That this is an everlasting
spirit, who is going to God? Would you imagine that the blood of Christ was shed for that soul, and had
purchased everlasting salvation for it; and that God was now waiting till that salvation should be wrought out
with fear and trembling?

2. Should it be said, “Why, what signifies the form of godliness?” we readily answer, Nothing, if it be alone. But
the absence of the form signifies much. It infallibly proves the absence of the power. For though the form may be
without the power, yet the power cannot be without the form.

Outward religion may be where inward is not; but if there is none without, there can be none within.

3. But it may be said, “We have public prayers both morning and evening in all our Colleges.” It is true; and it were
to be wished that all the members thereof; more especially the elder, those of note and character, would, by
constantly attending them, show how sensible they are of the invaluable privilege. But have all who attend them
the form of godliness? Before those solemn addresses to God begin, does the behaviour of all who are present
show that they know before whom they stand? What impression appears to be left on their minds when those
holy offices are ended? And even during their continuance, can it be reasonably inferred from the tenor of their
outward behaviour, that their hearts are earnestly fixed on Him who standeth in the midst of them? I much fear,
were a Heathen, who understood not our tongue, to come into one of these our assemblies, he would suspect
nothing less than that we were pouring out our hearts before the Majesty of heaven and earth. What then shall we
say, (if indeed “God is not mocked,”) but, “What a man soweth, that also shall he reap?”

4. ”On Sundays, however,” say some, “it cannot be denied that we have the form of godliness, having sermons
preached both morning and afternoon, over and above the morning and evening Service.” But do we keep the
rest of the Sabbath-day holy? Is there no needless visiting upon it? No trifling, no impertinence of conversation?
Do neither you yourself do any unnecessary work upon it, nor suffer others over whom you have any power, to
break the laws of God and man herein? If you do, even in this you have nothing whereof to boast. But herein also
you are guilty before God.

5. But if we have the form of godliness on one day in a week, is there not on other days what is quite contrary
thereto? Are not the best of our conversing hours spent in foolish talking and jesting, which are not convenient?
Nay, perhaps, in wanton talking too; such as modest ears could not hear? Are there not many among us found to
eat and drink with the drunken? And if so, what marvel is it that our profaneness should also go up into the
heavens, and our oaths and curses into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth?

6. And even as to the hours assigned for study, are they generally spent to any better purpose? Not if they are
employed in reading (as is too common) plays, novels, or idle tales, which naturally tend to increase our inbred
corruption, and heat the furnace of our unholy desires seven times hotter than it was before? How little preferable
is the laborious idleness of those who spend day after day in gaming or diversions, vilely casting away that time
the value of which they cannot know, till they are passed through it into eternity!

7. Know ye not then so much as this, you that are called moral men, that all idleness is immorality; that there is no
grosser dishonesty than sloth; that every voluntary blockhead is a knave? He defrauds his benefactors, his
parents, and the world; and robs both God and his own soul. Yet how many of these are among us! How many lazy drones, as if only fruges consumere nati! “born to eat up the produce of the soil.” How many whose ignorance is not owing to incapacity, but to mere laziness! How few, (let it not seem immodest that even such a one as I should touch on that tender point,) of the vast number who have it in their power, are truly learned men. Not to speak of the other eastern tongues, who is there that can be said to understand Hebrew? Might I not say, or even Greek? A little of Homer or Xenophon we may still remember; but how few can readily read or understand so much as a page of Clemens Alexandrinus, Chrysostom, or Ephrem Syrus? And as to philosophy, (not to mention mathematics, or the abstruser branches of it,) how few do we find who have laid the foundation, -- who are masters even of logic; who thoroughly understand so much as the rules of syllogizing; the very doctrine of the moods and figures! O what is so scarce as learning, save religion!

8. And indeed learning will be seldom found without religion; for temporal views, as experience shows, will very rarely suffice to carry one through the labour required to be a thorough scholar. Can it then be dissembled, that there is too often a defect in those to whom the care of youth is entrusted? Is that solemn direction sufficiently considered, (Statut. p. 7,) “Let the tutor diligently instruct those scholars committed to his care in strict morality; and especially in the first principles of religion, and in the articles of doctrine?”

And do they, to whom this important charge is given, labour diligently to lay this good foundation? To fix true principles of religion in the minds of youth entrusted with them by their lectures? To recommend the practice thereof by the powerful and pleasing influence of their example? To enforce this by frequent private advice, earnestly and strongly inculcated? To observe the progress, and carefully inquire into the behaviour, of every one of them? In a word, to watch over their souls as they that must give account?

9. Suffer me, since I have begun to speak upon this head, to go a little farther. Is there sufficient care taken that they should know and keep the statutes which we are all engaged to observe? How then is it that they are so notoriously broken every day? To instance only in a few: It is appointed, as to divine offices and preaching, “That ALL shall publicly attend: -- Graduates and scholars shall attend punctually, and continue till all be finished with due reverence from the beginning to the end.” (P. 181.)

It is appointed, “That scholars of every rank shall abstain from all kinds of play where money is contended for; such as cards, dice, and bowls; nor shall they be present at public games of this nature.” (P. 157.)

It is appointed, “That all (the sons of noblemen excepted) shall accustom themselves to black or dark-coloured clothing; and that they shall keep at the utmost distance from pomp and extravagance.” (P. 157.)

It is appointed, “That scholars of every rank shall abstain from alehouses, inns, taverns, and from every place within the city where wine, or any other kind of liquor, is ordinarily sold.” (P.164.)

10. It will be objected, perhaps, that “these are but little things.” Nay, but perjury is not a little thing; nor, consequently, the wilful breach of any rule which we have solemnly sworn to observe.

Surely those who speak thus have forgotten those words: “Thou shalt pledge thy faith to observe all the statutes of this University. So help thee God, and the holy Inspired Gospels of Christ!” (P. 229.)

11. But is this oath sufficiently considered by those who take it; or any of those prescribed by public authority? Is not this solemn act of religion, the calling God to record on our souls, commonly treated as a slight thing? In particular by those who swear by the living God, that “neither entreaties nor reward, neither hatred nor friendship, neither hope nor fear, induce them to give a testimony to any unworthy person?” (P. 88;) and by those who swear, “I know this person to be meet and fit in morals and knowledge for that high degree to which he is presented?” (P. 114.)

12. Yet one thing more. We have all testified before God, “that all and every the Articles of our Church, as also the Book of Common Prayer, and the ordaining of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, are agreeable to the word of God.” And, in so doing, we have likewise testified, “that both the First and the Second Book of Homilies doth contain godly and wholesome doctrine.” But upon what evidence have many of us declared this? Have we not affirmed the thing we know not. If so, however true they may happen to be, we are found false witnesses before God. Have the greater part of us ever used any means to know whether these things are so or not? Have we ever, for one hour, seriously considered the Articles to which we have subscribed? If not, how shamefully do we elude the
design of the very compilers, who compiled them “to remove difference of opinion, and to establish unanimity in the true religion!"

13. Have we half of us read over the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordaining Bishops, Priests, and Deacons? If not, what is it we have so solemnly confirmed? In plain terms, we cannot tell. And as to the two Books of Homilies, it is well if a tenth part of those who have subscribed to them, I will not say, had considered them before they did this, but if they have even read them over to this day! Alas, my brethren! How shall we reconcile these things even to common honesty, to plain heathen morality? So far are those who do them, nay, and perhaps defend them too, from having even the form of Christian godliness!

14. But, waving all these things, where is the power? Who are the living witnesses of this? Who among us (let God witness with our hearts) experimentally knows the force of inward holiness? Who feels in himself the workings of the Spirit of Christ, drawing up his mind to high and heavenly things? Who can witness, -- “The thoughts of my heart God hath cleansed by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit?” Who knoweth that “peace of God which passeth all understanding?” Who is he that “rejoiceth with joy unspeakable and full of glory?” Whose “affections are set on things above, not on things of the earth?” Whose “life is hid with Christ in God?” Who can say, “I am crucified with Christ; yet I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life that I now live in the body, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me?” In whose heart is the “love of God shed abroad, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him?”

15. Is not almost the very notion of this religion lost? Is there not a gross overflowing ignorance of it? Nay, is it not utterly despised? Is it not wholly set at nought, and trodden under foot? Were any one to witness these things before God, would he not be accounted a madman, an enthusiast? Am not I unto you a barbarian who speak thus? My brethren, my heart bleeds for you. O that you would at length take knowledge, and understand that these are the words of truth and soberness! O that you knew, at least in this your day, the things that make for your peace!

16. I have been a messenger of heavy tidings this day. But the love of Christ constraineth me; and to me it was the less grievous, because for you it was safe. I desire not to accuse the children of my people. Therefore, neither do I speak thus in the ears of them that sit on the wall; but to you I endeavour to speak the truth in love, as a faithful Minister of Jesus Christ. And I can now “call you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

17. May the God of all grace, who is longsuffering, of tender mercy, and repenteth him of the evil, fix these things in your hearts, and water the seed he hath sown with the dew of heaven! May he correct whatsoever he seeth amiss in us! May he supply whatsoever is wanting! May he perfect that which is according to his will; and so establish, strengthen, and settle us, that this place may again be a faithful city to her Lord; yea, the praise of the whole earth!

John Wesley
SERMON 139
(text from the 1872 edition)

ON LOVE

Preached at Savannah, February 20, 1736

“Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.” 1 Cor. 13:3.

[1.] There is great reason to fear that it will hereafter be said of most of you who are here present, that this scripture, as well as all those you have heard before, profited you nothing. Some, perhaps, are not serious enough to attend to
it; some who do attend, will not believe it; some who do believe it, will yet think it a hard saying, and so forget it as soon as they can; and, of those few who receive it gladly for a time, some, having no root of humility, or self-denial, when persecution ariseth because of the word, will, rather than suffer for it, fall away. Nay, even of those who attend to it, who believe, remember, yea, and receive it so deeply into their hearts, that it both takes root there, endures the heat of temptation, and begins to bring forth fruit, yet will not all bring forth fruit unto perfection.

The cares or pleasures of the world, and the desire of other things, (perhaps not felt till then,) will grow up with the word, and choke it.

[2.] Nor am I that speak the word of God any more secure from these dangers than you that hear it. I, too, have to bewail “an evil heart of unbelief.” And whenever God shall suffer persecution to arise, yea, were it only the slight one of reproach, I may be the first that is offended. Or, if I be enabled to sustain this, yet, should he let loose the cares of the world upon me, or should he cease to guard me against those pleasures that do not lead to him, and the desire of other things [than knowing and loving him], I should surely be overwhelmed, and, having preached to others, be myself a castaway.

[3.] Why then do I speak this word at all? Why? Because a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me: And, though what I shall do to-morrow I know not, to-day I will preach the gospel.

And with regard to you, my commission runs thus: “Son of man, I do send thee to them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; -- whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.”

[4.] Thus saith the Lord God, “Whosoever thou art who wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” (In order to this, “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”) “Forsake not the assembling together, as the manner of some is.” In secret, likewise, “pray to thy Father who seeth in secret,” and “pour out thy heart before him.” Make my word “a lantern to thy feet, and a light unto thy paths.” Keep it “in thy heart, and in thy mouth, when thou sittest in thy house, when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” “Turn unto me with fasting,” as well as prayer; and, in obedience to thy dying Redeemer, by eating that bread and drinking that cup, “show ye forth the Lord’s death till he comes.” By the power thou shalt through these means receive from on high, do all the things which are enjoined in the Law, and avoid all those things which are forbidden therein, knowing that if ye offend in one point, ye are guilty of all. “To do good also, and to distribute, forget not;” -- yea, while you have time, do all the good you can unto all men. Then “deny thyself, take up thy cross daily;” and, if called thereto, “resist unto blood.” And when each of you can say, “All this have I done,” then let him say to himself farther, (words at which not only such as Felix alone, but the holiest soul upon earth might tremble,) “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.”

It concerns us all, therefore, in the highest degree, to know,

I. The full sense of those words, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned;”

II. The true meaning of the word love; and,

III. In what sense it can be said, that without love all this profiteth us nothing.

I. As to the First: It must be observed that the word used by St. Paul properly signifies, To divide into small pieces, and then to distribute what has been so divided; and, consequently, it implies, not only divesting ourselves at once of all the worldly goods we enjoy, either from a fit of distaste to the world, or a sudden start of devotion, but an act of choice, and that choice coolly and steadily executed. It may imply, too, that this be done not out of vanity, but in part from a right principle; namely, from a design to perform the command of God, and a desire to obtain his kingdom. It must be farther observed, that the word give signifies, actually to deliver a thing according to agreement; and, accordingly, it implies, like the word preceding, not a hasty, inconsiderate action, but one performed with open eyes and a determined heart, pursuant to a resolution before taken. The full sense of the words, therefore, is this; which he that hath cars to hear, let him hear: “Though I should give all the substance of my house to feed the poor; though I should do so upon mature choice and deliberation; though I should spend my life in dealing it out to them with my own hands, yea, and that from a principle of obedience; though I should suffer, from the same view, not only reproach and shame, not only bonds and imprisonment, and all this by my
own continued act and deed, not accepting deliverance, but, moreover, death itself, -- yea, death inflicted in a
manner the most terrible to nature; yet all this, if I have not love, (the love of God, and the love of all mankind,
'shed abroad in my heart by the Hold Ghost given unto me,') it profiteth me nothing."

II. Let us inquire what this love is, -- what is the true meaning of the word? We may consider it either as to its
properties or effects: And that we may be under no possibility of mistake, we will not at all regard the judgment
of men, but go to our Lord himself for an account of the nature of love; and, for the effects of it, to his inspired
Apostle.

The love which our Lord requires in all his followers, is the love of God and man; -- of God, for his own, and of
man, for God’s sake. Now, what is it to love God, but to delight in him, to rejoice in his will, to desire
continually to please him, to seek and find our happiness in him, and to thirst day and night for a fuller
enjoyment of him?

As to the measure of this love, our Lord hath clearly told us, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy
heart.” Not that we are to love or delight in none but him: For he hath commanded us, not only to love our
neighbour, that is, all men, as ourselves; -- to desire and pursue their happiness as sincerely and steadily as our
own, -- but also to love many of his creatures in the strictest sense; to delight in them, to enjoy them: Only in
such a manner and measure as we know and feel, not to indispose but to prepare us for the enjoyment of Him.

Thus, then, we are called to love God with all our heart.

The effects or properties of this love, the Apostle describes in the chapter before us. And all these being
infallible marks whereby any man may judge of himself, whether he hath this love or hath it not, they deserve
our deepest consideration.

“Love suffereth long,” or is longsuffering. If thou love thy neighbour for God’s sake, thou wilt bear long with his
infirmities: If he want wisdom, thou wilt pity and not despise him: If he be in error, thou wilt mildly endeavour
to recover him, without any sharpness or reproach: If he be overtaken in a fault, thou wilt labour to restore him
in the spirit of meekness: And if, haply, that cannot be done soon, thou wilt have patience with him; if God,
peradventure, may bring him, at length to the knowledge and love of the truth. In all provocations, either from
the weakness or malice of men, thou wilt show thyself a pattern of gentleness and meekness; and, be they ever so
often repeated, wilt not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let no man deceive you with vain
words: He who is not thus long-suffering, hath not love.

Again: “Love is kind.” Whosoever feels the love of God and man shed abroad in his heart, feels an ardent and
 uninterrupted thirst after the happiness of all his fellow-creatures. His soul melts away with the very fervent
desire which he hath continually to promote it; and out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. In his
tongue is the law of kindness. The same is impressed on all his actions. The flame within is continually working
itself away, and spreading abroad more and more, in every instance of good-will to all with whom he hath to do.
So that whether he thinks or speaks, or whatever he does, it all points to the same end, -- the advancing, by every
possible way, the happiness of all his fellow-creatures. Deceive not, therefore, your own souls: He who is not
thus kind, hath not love.

Farther: “Love envieth not.” This, indeed, is implied, when it is said, “Love is kind.” For kindness and envy are
inconsistent: They can no more abide together than light and darkness. If we earnestly desire all happiness to all,
we cannot be grieved at the happiness of any. The fulfilling of our desire will be sweet to our soul; so far shall
we be from being pained at it. If we are always doing what good we can for our neighbour, and wishing we could
do more, it is impossible that we should repine at an good he receives: Indeed, it will be the very joy of our heart.
However, then, we may flatter ourselves, or one another, he that envieth hath not love.

It follows, “Love vaunteth not;” or rather, is not rash or hasty in judging: For this is indeed the true
meaning of the word. As many as love their neighbour for God’s sake, will not easily receive an ill opinion of
any to whom they wish all good, spiritual as well as temporal. They cannot condemn him even in their heart
without evidence; nor upon slight evidence neither; nor, indeed upon any, without first, if it be possible, having
him and his accuser face to face, or at the least acquainting him

with the accusation, and letting him speak for himself. Every one of you feels that he cannot but act thus, with
regard to one whom he tenderly loves. Why, then, he who doth not act thus hath not love.

I only mention one more of the properties of this love: “Love is not puffed up.” You cannot wrong one you love: Therefore, if you love God with all your heart, you cannot so wrong him as to rob him of his glory, by taking to yourself what is due to him only. You will own that all you are, and all you have, is his; that without him you can do nothing; that he is your light and your life, your strength and your all; and that you are nothing, yea, less than nothing, before him. And if you love your neighbour as yourself, you will not be able to prefer yourself before him. Nay, you will not be able to despise any one, any more than to hate him. [Nay, you will think every man better than yourself.] As the wax melteth away before the fire, so doth pride melt away before love. All haughtiness, whether of heart, speech, or behaviour, vanishes away where love prevails. It bringeth down the high looks of him who boasted in his strength, and maketh him as a little child; diffident of himself, willing to hear, glad to learn, easily convinced, easily persuaded. And whosoever is otherwise minded, let him give up all vain hope: He is puffed up, and so hath not love.

III. It remains to inquire, in what sense it can be said that “though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, yea, though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.” The chief sense of the words is, doubtless, this: That whatsoever we do, and whatsoever we suffer, if we are not renewed in the spirit of our mind, by “the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us,” we cannot enter into life eternal. None can enter there, unless in virtue of covenant which God hath given unto man in the Son of his love.

But, because general truths are less apt to affect us, let consider one or two particulars, with regard to which all we can do or suffer, if we have not love, profiteth us nothing. And, First, all without this profiteth not, so as to make life happy; nor, Secondly, so as to make death comfortable.

And, First, without love nothing can so profit us as to make our lives happy. By happiness I mean, not a slight, trilling pleasure, that perhaps begins and ends in the same hour; but such a state of well-being as contents the soul, and gives it a steady, lasting satisfaction. But that nothing without love can profit us, as to our present happiness, will appear from this single consideration: You cannot want it, in any one single instance, without pain; and the more you depart from it, the pain is the greater. Are you wanting in longsuffering? Then, so far as you fall short of this, you fall short of happiness. The more the opposite tempers – anger, fretfulness, revenge – prevail, the more unhappy you are. You know it; you feel it; nor can the storm be allayed, or peace ever return to your soul, unless meekness, gentleness, patience, or, in one word, love, take possession of it. Does any man find in himself ill-will, malice, envy, or any other temper opposite to kindness? Then is misery there; and the stronger the temper, the more miserable he is. If the slothful man may be said to eat his own flesh, much more the malicious, or envious. His soul is the very type of hell; -- full of torment as well as wickedness. He hath already the worm that never dieth, and he is hastening to the fire that never can be quenched. Only as yet the great gulf is not fixed between him and heaven. As yet there is a Spirit ready to help his infirmities; who is still willing, if he stretch out his hands to heaven, and bewail his ignorance and misery, to purify his heart from vile affections, and to renew it in the love of God, and so lead him by present, up to eternal, happiness.

Secondly. Without love, nothing can make death comfortable.

By comfortable I do not mean stupid, or senseless. I would not say, he died comfortably who died by an apoplexy, or by the shot of a cannon, any more than he who, having his conscience seared, died as unconcerned as the beasts that perish. Neither do I believe you would envy any one the comfort of dying raving mad. But, by a comfortable death, I mean, a calm passage out of life, full of even, rational peace and joy. And such a death, all the acting and all the suffering in the world cannot give, without love.

To make this still more evident, I cannot appeal to your own experience; but I may to what we have seen, and to the experience of others. And two I have myself seen going out of this life in what I call a comfortable manner, though not with equal comfort. One had evidently more comfort than the other, because he had more love.

I attended the first during a great part of his last trial, as well as when he yielded up his soul to God. He cried out, “God doth chasten me with strong pain; but I thank him for all; I bless him for all; I love him for all!” When asked, not long before his release, “Are the consolations of God small with you?” he replied aloud, “No, no, no!” Calling all that were near him by their names, he said, “Think of heaven, talk of heaven: All the time is lost when we are not thinking of heaven.” Now, this was the voice of love; and, so far as that prevailed, all was
comfort, peace, and joy. But as his love was not perfect, so neither was his comfort. He intervals of [anger or] fretfulness, and therein of misery; giving by both an incontestable proof that love can sweeten both life and death. So when that is either absent from, or obscured in, the soul, there is no peace or comfort there.

It was in this place that I saw the other good soldier of Jesus Christ grappling with his last enemy, death. And it was, indeed, a spectacle worthy to be seen, of God, and angels, and men. Some of his last breath was spent in a psalm of praise to Him who was then giving him the victory; in assurance whereof be began triumph even in the heat of the battle. When he was asked, “Hast thou the love of God in thy heart?” he lifted up his eyes and hands, and answered, “Yes, yes!” with the whole strength he had left. To one who inquired if he was afraid of the devil, whom he had just mentioned as making his last attack upon him, he replied, “No, no: My loving Saviour hath conquered every enemy: He is with me. I fear nothing.” Soon after, he said, “The way to our loving Saviour is sharp, but it is short.” Nor was it long before he fell into a sort of slumber, wherein his soul sweetly returned to God that gave it.

Here, we may observe, was no mixture of any passion or temper contrary to love; therefore, there was no misery; perfect love casting out whatever might have occasioned torment. And whosoever thou art who hast the like measure of love, thy last end shall be like his.

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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