Wesleyan Holiness Sermons

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

SERMON 1
(text from the 1872 edition)

SALVATION BY FAITH

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

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

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

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

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

3. If then sinful men find favour with God, it is “grace upon grace!” If God vouchsafe still to pour fresh blessings upon us, yea, the greatest of all blessings, salvation; what can we say to these things, but, “Thanks be vouchsafe still to pour fresh blessings upon us, yea, the greatest of all blessings, salvation; what can we say to these things, but, “Thanks be to life, and breath, and all things. For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at God’s hand. “All our works, Thou, O God, hast wrought in us.” These, therefore, are so many more instances of free mercy: and whatever righteousness may be found in man, this is also the gift of God.

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

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

4. And being saved from guilt, they are saved from fear. Not indeed from a filial fear of offending; but from all servile fear; from that fear which hath torment; from fear of punishment; from fear of the wrath of God, whom they now no longer regard as a severe Master, but as an indulgent Father.

“They have not received again the spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father: the Spirit itself also bearing witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God." They are also saved from the fear, though not from the possibility, of falling away from the grace of God, and coming short of the great and precious promises. Thus have they "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. They rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, through the Holy Ghost, which is given unto them." And thereby they are persuaded (though perhaps not at all times, nor with the same fullness of persuasion), that "neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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

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

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

III. The first usual objection to this is,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. When no more objections occur, then we are simply told that salvation
by faith only ought not to be preached as the first doctrine, or, at least,
ot to be preached at all. But what saith the Holy Ghost? “Other
foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ.”
So then, that “whosoever believeth on him shall be saved,” is, and must
be, the foundation of all our preaching; that is, must be preached first.
“Well, but not to all.” To whom, then are we not to preach it? Whom
shall we except? The poor? Nay; they have a peculiar right to have the
waters: Come ye, and buy, without money and without price.”

2. Again: the common heathens allowed, that some regard was to be paid
to truth, as well as to justice. And, accordingly, they not only held
overreach either the poor or rich, in whatsoever commerce they had
overoppress the poor, neither to use extortion toward any; not to cheat or
not to take away their neighbour's goods, either by robbery or theft; not
to bear false witness amongst his companions. Yet still, such as the
common heathens expected one of another, and many of them actually practised.
For this the tenor of our commission runs, “Go and preach the gospel
to every creature.” If any man wrest it, or any part of it, to his destruction,
he must bear his own burden. But still, “as the Lord liveth, whatsoever
the Lord saith unto us, that we will speak.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Secondly. What in being altogether, a Christian.

I.

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

AND many there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was
in the world, there have been many in every age and nation who were
almost persuaded to be Christians. But seeing it avails nothing before God
to go only thus far, it highly imports us to consider,
First. What is implied in being almost,
in abomination who was forsworn, who called God to witness to a lie; but him also who was known to be a slanderer of his neighbour, who falsely accused any man. And indeed, little better did they esteem wilful liars of any sort, accounting them the disgrace of human kind, and the pests of society.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(III.)

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

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

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

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

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

12. Brethren, great is “my boldness towards you in this behalf.” And “forgive me this wrong,” if I declare my own folly upon the house-top, for yours and the gospel’s sake. --Suffer me, then, to speak freely of all things; buying up every opportunity of doing all good to others, and, God is my record, before whom I stand, for your and the gospel’s sake.

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

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

(II.)

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

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

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

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

(III.)

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

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

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

[Homily on the Salvation of Man.]

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

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

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

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

9. But, supposing you had, do good designs and good desires make a Christian? By no means, unless they are brought to good effect. “Hell is paved,” saith one, “with good intentions.” The great question of all, then, still remains. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart? Can you cry out, “My God, and my All”? Do you desire nothing but him? Are you happy in God? Is he your glory, your delight, your crown of all? Do you then love your brother, as in the presence of that God before whom “hell and destruction are without a covering--how much more the hearts of the children of men?” --that each of you would ask his own heart, “Am I of that number? Do I so far practise justice, mercy, and truth, as even the rules of heathen honesty require? If so, have I the very outside of a Christian? The form of godliness? Do I abstain from evil, --from whatsoever is forbidden in the written Word of God? Do I, whatever good my hand findeth to do, do it with my might? Do I seriously use all the ordinances of God at all opportunities? And is all this done with a sincere design and desire to please God in all things?”

10. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who now standeth in the midst of us, knoweth, that if any man die without this faith and this love, good it were for him that he had never been born. Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and call upon thy God: call in the day when he may be found. Let him not rest, till he make his “goodness to pass before thee;” till he proclaim unto thee the name of the Lord, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin.” Let no man persuade thee, by vain words, to rest short of this prize of thy high calling. But cry unto him day and night, who, “while we were without strength, died for the ungodly,” until thou knowest in whom thou hast believed, and canst say, “My Lord, and my God!” Remember, “always to pray, and not to faint,” till thou also canst lift up thy hand unto heaven, and declare to him that liveth for ever and ever, “Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.”
AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST

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

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

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

First. Describe the sleepers, to whom they are spoken:

Secondly. Enforce the exhortation, “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.” And,

Thirdly. Explain the promise made to such as do awake and arise: “Christ shall give thee light.”

I.

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

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

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

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

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

6. This is he, who, “having a form of godliness, denies the power thereof;” yea, and probably reviles it, wheresoever it is found, as mere extravagance and delusion. Meanwhile, the wretched self-deceiver thanks God, that he is “not as other men are; adulterers, unjust, extortions;” no, he doeth no wrong to any man. He “fasts twice in a week,” uses all the means of grace, is constant at church and sacrament, yea, and “gives tithes of all that he has;” does all the good that he can “touching the righteousness of the law,” he is “blameless”: he wants nothing of godliness, but the power; nothing of religion, but the spirit; nothing of Christianity, but the truth and the life.

7. But know ye not, that, however highly esteemed among men such a Christian as this may be, he is an abomination in the sight of God, and an heir of every woe which the Son of God, yesterday, to-day, and for ever, denounces against “scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites”? He hath “made clean the outside of the cup and the platter,” but within is full of all filthiness. “An evil disease cleaveth still unto him, so that his inward parts are very wickedness.” Our Lord fitsly compares him to a “painted sepulchre,” which “appears beautiful without;” but, nevertheless, is “full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanneness.” The bones indeed are no longer dry; the sinews and flesh are come upon them, and the sin covers them above: but there is no breath in them, no Spirit of the living God. And, “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” “Ye are Christ’s,” if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you: but, if not, God knoweth that ye abide in death, even until now.

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

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

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

11. And hence, having no spiritual senses, no inlets of spiritual knowledge, the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: nay, he is so far from receiving them, that whatsoever is spiritually discerned is mere foolishness unto him. He is not content with being utterly ignorant of spiritual things, but he denies the very existence of them. And spiritual sensation itself is to him the foolishness of folly. “How,” saith he, “can these things be? How can any man know that he is alive to God?” Even as you know that your body is now alive. Faith is the life of God; shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto us! And, according to the divine consciousness, that witness of God, which is more and greater than ten thousand human witnesses.

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

II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. In what state is thy soul? Was God, while I am yet speaking, to require of thee, art thou ready to meet death and judgment? Canst thou stand in his sight, who is of “purer eyes than to behold iniquity”? Art thou “meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light”?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. And even among those who have kept themselves pure from those
grosser abominaions; how much anger and pride how much sloth and
idleness, how much softness and effeminacy how much luxury and self-
indulgence, how much covetousness and ambition, how much thirst of
praise, how much love of the world, how much fear of man, is to be
found! Meanwhile, how little of true religion! For, where is he that
loveth either God or his neighbour, as he hath given us commandment?
On the one hand, are those who have not so much as the form of
godliness; on the other, those who have the form only: there stands the
open, there the painted, sepulchre. So that in very deed, whosoever were
godliness; on the other, those who have the form only: there stands the
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unto us quickly, and remove our candlestick out of its place, except we repent and do the first works;” unless we return to the principles of the Reformation, the truth and simplicity of the gospel. Perhaps we are now resisting the last effort of divine grace to save us. Perhaps we have well-nigh “filled up the measure of our iniquities,” by rejecting the counsel of God against ourselves, and casting out his messengers.

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

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

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

SERMON 4

(TEXT OF THE 1872 EDITION)

SCRIPTURAL CHRISTIANITY

[This Sermon was originally published in a separate pamphlet, accompanied by the following address “to the reader,” to which was affixed the author’s signature: “It was not my design, when I wrote, ever to print the latter part of the following Sermon: But the false and scurrilous accounts of it which have been published, almost in every corner of the nation, constrain me to publish the whole, just as it was preached; that men of reason may judge for themselves.--ED.]

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

Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. Ezek. 33:4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. As beginning to exist in individuals:

II. As spreading from one to another:

III. As covering the earth.

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

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

Suppose, then, one of those who heard the Apostle Peter preaching repentance and remission of sins, was pricked to the heart, was convinced of sin, repented, and then believed in Jesus. By this faith of the operation of God, which was the very substance, or subsistence, of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1.) the demonstrative evidence of invisible things, he instantly received the Spirit of adoption, whereby he now cried, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). Now first it was that he could call Jesus Lord, by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12:3), the Spirit itself bearing witness with his spirit, that he was a child of God (Rom. 8:16). Now it was that he could truly say, “I live not, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

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

3. His soul, therefore, magnified the Lord, and his spirit rejoiced in God
he that thus loved God could not but love his brother also; and “not in word only, but in deed and in truth.” “If God,” said he, “so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11); yea, every soul of man, as “the mercy of God is over all his works” (Ps. 145:9). Agreeably hereto, the affection of this lover of God embraced all mankind for his sake: not excepting those whom he had never seen in the flesh, or those of whom he knew nothing more than that they were “the offspring of God,” for whose souls his Son had died; not excepting the “evil” and “unthankful,” and least of all his enemies, those who hated, or persecuted, or desperately used him for his Master’s sake. These had a peculiar place, both in his heart and in his prayers. He loved them “even as Christ loved us.”

6. And “love is not puffed up” (1 Cor. 13:4). It abases to the dust every soul wherein it dwells. Accordingly, he was lowly of heart, little, mean, and vile in his own eyes. He neither sought nor received the praise of men, but that which cometh of God only. He was meek and long-suffering, gentle to all, and easy to be entreated. Faithfulness and truth never forsook him: they were “bound about his neck, and wrote on the table of his heart.” By the same spirit he was enabled to be temperate in all things, restraining his soul even as a weaned child. He was “crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him;” superior to “the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life.” By the same almighty love was he saved, both from passion and pride; from lust and vanity; from ambition and covetousness; and from every temper which was not in Christ.

7. It may be easily believed, he who had this love in his heart would work no evil to his neighbour. It was impossible for him, knowingly and designedly, to do harm to any man. He was at the greatest distance from cruelty and wrong, from any unjust or unkind action. With the same care did he “set a watch before his mouth, and keep the door of his lips,” lest he should offend in tongue, either against justice, or against mercy or truth. He put away all lying, falsehood; and fraud; neither was guile found in his mouth. He spake evil of no man; nor did an unkind word ever come out of his lips.

8. And as he was deeply sensible of the truth of that word “Without me ye can do nothing,” and, consequently, of the need he had to be watered of God every moment; so he continued daily in all the ordinances of God, the stated channels of his grace to man; “in the Apostles’ doctrine,” or teaching, receiving that food of the soul with all readiness of heart; in “the breaking of bread,” which he found to be the communion of the body of Christ; and “in the prayers” and praises offered up by the great congregation. And thus, he daily grew in grace, increasing in strength, in the knowledge and love of God.

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

10. Such was Christianity in its rise. Such was a Christian in ancient days. Such was every one of those who, when they heard the threatenings of the chief priests and elders, “lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and were all filled with the Holy Ghost. The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul:” So did the love of him in whom they had believed constrain them to love one another! “Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own but they had all things common:” So fully were they crucified to the world, and the world crucified to them! “And they continued steadfastly with one accord in the Apostles’ doctrine, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). “And great grace was upon them all; neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the Apostles’ feet: And distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” (Acts 4:31-35.)
they testified of it, that the works thereof were evil” (John 7:7). The men of pleasure were offended, not only because these men were made, as it were, to reprove their thoughts ("He professeth," said they, "to have the knowledge of God; he calleth himself the child of the Lord, his life is not like other men's; his ways are of another fashion; he abstaineth from our ways, as from filthiness; he maketh his boast, that God is his Father" Wis. 2:13-16;) but much more, because so many of their companions were taken away, and would no more run with them to “the same excess of riot.” (1 Pet. 4:4.) The men of reputation were offended, because, as the gospel spread, they declined in the esteem of the people; and because many no longer dared to give them flattering titles, or to pay man the homage due to God only. The men of trade called one another together, and said, "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth: but ye see and hear that these men have persuaded and turned away much people; so that this our craft is in danger to be set at nought" (Acts 19:25ff.). Above all, the men of religion, so called, the men of outside religion, “the saints of the world,” were offended, and ready at every opportunity to cry out, "Men of Israel, help! We have found these men pestilent fellows, movers of sedition throughout the world" (Acts 24:5). “These are the men that teach all men everywhere against the people, and against this place” (Acts 21:28).

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

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

8. Now it was that the pillars of hell were shaken, and the kingdom of God spread more and more. Sinners were everywhere “turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” he gave his children “such a mouth, and such wisdom, as all their adversaries could not resist;” and their lives were of equal force with their words; But above all, their sufferings spake to all the world. They “approved themselves the servants of God, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours; in perils in the sea, in perils in the wilderness, in weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor. 6:4ff.). And when, having fought the good fight, they were led as sheep to the slaughter, and offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith, then the blood of each found a voice, and the heathen owned, “He being dead, yet spaketh.”

9. Thus did Christianity spread itself in the earth. But how soon did the tares appear with the wheat, and the mystery of iniquity work, as well as the mystery of godliness! How soon did Satan find a seat, even in the temple of God, “till the woman fled into the wilderness,” and “the faithful were again minished from the children of men!” here we tread a beaten path: the still unceasing corruptions of the succeeding generations have been largely described, from time to time, by those witnesses God raised up, to show that he had “built his church upon a rock, and the gates of hell should not” wholly “prevail against her.” (Matt. 16:18.)

III.

1. But shall we not see greater things than these? Yea, greater than have been yet from the beginning of the world. Can Satan cause the truth of God to fail, or his promises to be of none effect? If not, the time will come when Christianity will prevail over all, and cover the earth. Let us stand a little, and survey (the Third thing which was proposed) this strange sight, a Christian World. Of this the Prophets of old inquired and searched diligently (1 Pet. 1:10, 11ff.): of this the Spirit which was in them testified: “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.” (Isa. 2:1-4.) “In that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, which shall stand for an Ensign of the people.

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

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

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

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

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

It follows, that no unkind word can ever be heard among them, no stripe of tongues, no contention of any kind, no railing or evil-speaking, but every one “opens his mouth with wisdom, and in his tongue there is the law of kindness.” Equally incapable are they of fraud or guile: their love is without dissimulation: Their words are always the just expression of their thoughts, opening a window into their breast, that whosoever desires may look into their hearts, and see that only love and God are there.
6. Thus, where the Lord Omnipotent taketh to himself his mighty power and reigneth, doth he "subdue all things to himself," cause every heart to overflow with love, and fill every mouth with praise. "Happy are the people that are in such a case: yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God" (Psalm 144:15.) "Arise, shine;" (saith the Lord;) "for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." "Thou hast known that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty God of Jacob. I have made thy officers peace, and thy executors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation and thy gates Praise." "Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory" (Isa. 60:1, 16-19).

IV. Having thus briefly considered Christianity, as beginning, as going on, and as covering the earth, it remains only that I should close the whole with a plain, practical application.

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

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

3. Brethren, "I am persuaded better things of you, though I thus speak." Let me ask you then, in tender love, and in the spirit of meekness, Is this city a Christian city? Is Christianity, scriptural Christianity, found here? Are we, considered as a community of men, so "filled with the Holy Ghost," as to enjoy in our hearts, and show forth in our lives, the genuine fruits of that Spirit? Are all the Magistrates, all heads and Governors of Colleges and Halls, and their respective Societies (not to speak of the inhabitants of the town), "of one heart and one soul? Is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts?"

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

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

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

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

8. Many of us are more immediately consecrated to God, called to minister in holy things. Are we then patterns to the rest, "in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12)? Is there written on our forehead and on our heart, "Holiness to the Lord?" From what motives did we enter upon this office? Was it indeed with a heart "full of God;" and yet consistent with the character of "the love of God filling their hearts, and constraining them to love their neighbour as themselves?" Who, that were dead in trespasses and sins, "made us able ministers of the new covenant?" Where then are the "seals of our apostleship?" Who, among men? "I have said, Ye are gods," ye magistrates and rulers; ye are by office so nearly allied to the God of heaven! In your several stations and degrees, ye are to show forth unto us "the Lord our Governor." Are all the thoughts of your hearts, all your tempers and desires, suitable to your high calling? Are all your words like unto those which come out of the mouth of God? Is there in all your actions dignity and love? --a greatness which words cannot express, which can flow only from a heart "full of God;" and yet consistent with the character of "man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm?"

Are you lively portraiture of him whom ye are appointed to represent among men? "I have said, Ye are gods," ye magistrates and rulers; ye are by office so nearly allied to the God of heaven! In your several stations and degrees, ye are to show forth unto us "the Lord our Governor." Are all the thoughts of your hearts, all your tempers and desires, suitable to your high calling? Are all your words like unto those which come out of the mouth of God? Is there in all your actions dignity and love? --a greatness which words cannot express, which can flow only from a heart "full of God;" and yet consistent with the character of "man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm?"
Are we dead to the world, and the things of the world, “laying up all our treasure in heaven?” Do we lord over God’s heritage? Or are we the least, the servants of all? When we bear the reproach of Christ, does it sit heavy upon us? Or do we rejoice therein? When we are smitten on the one cheek, do we resent it? Are we impatient of affronts? Or do we turn the other also; not resisting the evil, but overcoming evil with good? Have we a bitter zeal, inciting us to strive sharply and passionately with them that are out of the way? Or is our zeal the flame of love, so as to direct all our words with sweetness, lowliness, and meekness of wisdom?

9. Once more: what shall we say concerning the youth of this place? Have you either the form or the power of Christian godliness? Are you humble, teachable, admirers; or still, self-willed, heady, and highminded? Are you obedient to your superiors as to parents? Or do you despise those to whom you owe the tenderest reverence? Are you diligent in your easy business, pursuing your studies with all your strength? Do you redeem the time, crowding as much work into every day as it can contain? Rather, are ye not conscious to yourselves, that you waste away day after day, either in reading what has no tendency to Christianity, or in gaming, or in--you know not what? Are you better managers of your fortune than of your time? Do you, out of principle, take care to owe no man anything? Do you “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy;” to spend it in the more immediate worship of God? When you are in his house, do you consider that God is there? Do you behave “as seeing him that is invisible?” Do you know how to possess your bodies in sanctification and honour?” Are not drunkenness and uncleanness found among you? Yea, are there not of you who “glory in their shame?” Do not many of you “take the name of God in vain;” perhaps habitually, without either remorse or fear? Yea, are there not a multitude of you that are forsworn? I fear, a swiftly-increasing multitude Be not surprised, brethren. Before God, and this congregation, I own myself to have been of the number, solemnly swearing to observe all those customs, which I then knew nothing of; and those statutes, which I did not so much as read over, either then, or for some years after. What is perjury, if this is not? But if it be, O what a weight of sin, yea, sin of no common dye, lieth upon us! And doth not the Most High regard it?

10. May it not be one of the consequences of this, that so many of you are a generation of triflers; triflers with God, with one another, and with your own souls? For, how few of you spend, from one week to another, a single hour in private prayer! How few have any thought of God in the general tenor of your conversation! Who of you is in any degree acquainted with the work of his Spirit, his supernatural work in the souls of men? Can you bear, unless now and then in a church, any talk of the Holy Ghost? Would you not take it for granted, if one began such a conversation, that it was either hypocrisy or enthusiasm? In the name of the Lord God Almighty, I ask, what religion are you of? Even the talk of Christianity, ye cannot, will not bear. O my brethren, what a Christian city is this! “It is time for Thee, Lord, to lay to Thine hand!”

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

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

John Wesley
SERMON 6

(TEXT FROM THE 1872 EDITION)

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. The righteousness, then, which is of the law, speaketh on this wise: “Thou, O man of God, stand fast in love, in the image of God wherein thou art made. If thou wilt remain in life, keep the commandments, which are now written in thy heart. Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. Love, as thyself, every soul that he hath made. Desire nothing but God. Aim at God in every thought, in every word and work. Swerve not, in one motion of body or soul, from him, thy mark, and the prize of thy high calling; and let all that is in thee praise his holy name, every power and faculty of thy soul, in every kind, in every degree, and at every moment of thine existence. This do, and thou shalt live: Thy light shall shine, thy love shall flame more and more, till thou art received up into the house of God in the heavens, to reign with him for ever and ever.”

6. “But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? That is, to bring down Christ from above;” (as though it were some impossible task which God required thee previously to perform in order to thine acceptance;) “or, Who shall descend into the deep? That is, to bring up Christ from the dead;” (as though that were still remaining to be done, for the sake of which thou wert to be accepted;) “but what saith it? The word,” according to the tenor of which thou mayest now be accepted as an heir of life eternal, “is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach,” -- the new covenant which God hath now established with sinful man, through Christ Jesus.

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. What is the difference then between the “righteousness which is of the law,” and the “righteousness which is of faith ? -- between the first covenant, or the covenant of works, and the second, the covenant of grace? The essential, unchangeable difference is this: The one supposes him to whom it is given to be already holy and happy, created in the image and enjoying the favour of God; and prescribes the condition whereon he may continue therein, in love and joy, life and immortality: The other supposes him to whom it is given to be now unholy and unhappy, fallen short of the glorious image of God, having the wrath of God abiding on him, and hastening, through sin, whereby his soul is dead, to bodily death, and death everlasting; and to man in this state it prescribes the condition whereon he may regain the pearl he has lost, may recover the favour and image of God, may retrieve the life of God in his soul, and be restored to the knowledge and the love of God, which is the beginning of life eternal.
12. Again: The covenant of works, in order to man’s continuance in the favour of God, in his knowledge and love, in holiness and happiness, required of perfect man a perfect and uninterrupted obedience to every point of the law of God. Whereas, the covenant of grace, in order to man’s recovery of the favour and the life of God, requires only faith; living faith in Him who, through God, justifies him that obeyed not.

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

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

II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Now, whatsoever considerations prove the folly of trusting in the “righteousness which is of the law,” prove equally the wisdom of submitting to the “righteousness which is of God by faith.” This were easy to be shown with regard to each of the preceding considerations. But to prove this, the wisdom of the first step hereto, the disclaiming of “righteousness which is of the law,” prove equally the wisdom of accepting of God’s grace, and entrenching one’s self in the assurance of his love.

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

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

9. To mention but one consideration more. It is wisdom to aim at the best end by the best means.

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

III.

1. Whosoever therefore thou art, who desirest to be forgiven and reconciled to the favour of God, do not say in thy heart, “I must first do this; I must first conquer every sin; break off every evil word and work, and do all good to all men; or, I must first go to church, receive the Lord’s Supper, hear more sermons, and say more prayers.” Alas, my brother! Thou art clean gone out of the way.

Thou art still “ignorant of the righteousness of God,” and art “seeking to establish thy own righteousness,” as the ground of thy reconciliation. Knowest thou not, that thou canst do nothing but sin, till thou art reconciled to God? Wherefore, then, dost thou say, “I must do this and this first, and then I shall believe?” Nay, but first believe! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Propitiation for thy sins. Let this good foundation first be laid, and then thou shalt do all things well.

2. Neither say in thy heart, “I cannot be accepted yet, because I am not good enough.” Who is good enough -- who ever was -- to merit acceptance at God’s hands? Was ever any child of Adam good enough for this? Or will any till the consummation of all things? And as for thee, thou art not good at all: There dwelleth in thee no good thing. And thou never wilt be, till thou believe in Jesus.

Rather, thou wilt find thyself worse and worse. But is there any need of being worse, in order to be accepted? Art thou not bad enough already? Indeed thou art, and that God knoweth. And thou thyself canst not deny it. Then delay not. All things are now ready. “Arise, and wash away thy sins.” The fountain is open. Now is the time to wash thee white in the blood of the Lamb. Now he shall “purge” thee as “with hyssop,” and thou shalt “be clean.” He shall “wash” thee, and thou shalt “be whiter than snow.”

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

O Lamb of God, was ever pain,
Was ever love like thine?
Look steadily upon him, till he looks on thee, and breaks thy hard heart.
Then shall thy “head” be “waters,” and thy “eyes” fountains of tears.

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

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

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

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

6. To conclude. Whosoever thou art, O man, who hast the sentence of death in thyself, who feelest thyself a condemned sinner, and hast the wrath of God abiding on thee: Unto thee saith the Lord, not, “Do this,” -- perfectly obey all my commands, -- “and live;” but, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” The word of faith is nigh unto thee:” Now, at this instant, in the present moment, and in thy present state, sinner as thou art, just as thou art, believe the gospel; and “I will be merciful unto thy unrighteousness, and thy iniquities will I remember no more.”

John Wesley
SERMON 7

[Text from the 1872 edition]

THE WAY TO THE KINGDOM

“The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Mark 1:15

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

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

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

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

Supposing these to be ever so decent and significant, ever so expressive of inward things: supposing them ever so helpful, not only to the vulgar, whose thought reaches little farther than their sight; but even to men of understanding, men of strong capacities, as doubting they may sometimes be: Yea, supposing them, as in the case of the Jews, to be appointed by God himself; yet even during the period of time wherein that appointment remains in force, true religion does not principally consist therein; nay, strictly speaking, not at all. How much more must this hold concerning such rites and forms as are only of human appointment! The religion of Christ rises infinitely higher, and lies immensely deeper, than all these. These are good in their place; just so far as they are in fact subservient to true religion. And it were superstition to object against them, while they are applied only as occasional helps to human weakness. But let no man carry them farther.

Let no man dream that they have any intrinsic worth; or that religion cannot subsist without them. This were to make them an abomination to the Lord.

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

6. I say of the heart. For neither does religion consist Orthodoxy, or right opinions; which, although they are not properly outward things, are not in the heart, but the understanding. A man may be orthodox in every point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever-blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God; he may assent to all the others against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend in the heart, but the understanding. A man may be orthodox in every point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever-blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God; he may assent to all the others against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend in the heart, but the understanding. A man may be orthodox in every point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever-blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God; he may assent to all the others against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend

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

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

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

9. But true religion, or a heart right toward God and man, implies happiness as well as holiness.

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

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

12. This holiness and happiness, joined in one, are sometimes styled, in the inspired writings, “the kingdom of God,” (as by our Lord in the text,) and sometimes, “the kingdom of heaven.” It is termed “the kingdom of God,” because it is the immediate fruit of God’s reigning in the soul. So soon as ever he takes unto himself his mighty power, and sets up his throne in our hearts, they are instantly filled with this “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” It is called “the kingdom of heaven” because it is (in a degree) heaven opened in the soul. For whosoever they are that experience this, they can aver before angels and men, Everlasting life is won,

Glory is on earth begun, according to the constant tenor of Scripture,
which everywhere bears record, God “hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son” (reigning in his heart) “hath life,” even life everlasting. (1 John 5:11, 12.) For “this is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3.) And they, to whom this is given, may confidently address God, though they were in the midst of a fiery furnace.

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

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

II.

1. This is the way: walk ye in it. And, First, “repent;” that is, know yourself. This is the first repentance, previous to faith; even conviction, or self-knowledge. Awake, then, thou that sleepest. Know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art. Know that corruption of thy inmost nature, whereby thou art very far gone from original righteousness, whereby “the flesh lusteth” always “contrary to the Spirit,” through that “carnal mind” which “is enmity against God,” which “is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Know that thou art corrupted in every power, in every faculty of thy soul; that thou art totally corrupted in every one of these, all the foundations being out of course. The eyes of thine understanding are darkened, so that they cannot discern God, or the things of God. The clouds of ignorance and error rest upon thee, and cover thee with the shadow of death. Thou knowest nothing yet as thou oughtest to know, neither God, nor the world, nor thyself. Thy will is no longer the will of God, but is utterly perverse and distorted, averse from all good, from all which God loves, and prone to all evil, to every abomination which God hateth. Thy affections are alienated from God, and scattered abroad over all the earth. All thy passions, both thy desires and aversions, thy joys and sorrows, thy hopes and fears, are out of frame, are either undue in their degree, or placed on undue objects. So that there is no soundness in thy soul; but “from the crown of the head, to the sole of the foot,“ (to use the strong expression of the Prophet,) there are only “wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores.”

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

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

4. And knowest thou not that “the wages of sin is death?” — death, not only temporal, but eternal.

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

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

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

7. If to this lively conviction of thy inward and outward sins, of thy utter guiltiness and helplessness, there be added suitable affections, --sorrow of heart, for having despised thy own mercies, -- remorse, and self-condemnation, having thy mouth stopped, -- shame to lift up thine eyes to heaven, -- fear of the wrath of God abiding on thee, of his curse hanging over thy head, and of the fiery indignation ready to devour those who forget God, and obey not our Lord Jesus Christ, -- earnest desire to escape from that indignation, to cease from evil, and learn to
8. The gospel, (that is, good tidings, good news for guilty, helpless sinners,) in the largest sense of the word, means, the whole revelation made to men by Jesus Christ; and sometimes the whole account of what our Lord did and suffered while he tabernacled among men. The substance of all is, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;” or, “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end we might not perish, but have everlasting life;” or, “He was bruised for our transgressions, he was wounded for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

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

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

11. Dost thou thus believe? Then the peace of God is in thy heart, and sorrow and sighing flee away. Thou art no longer in doubt of the love of God; it is clear as the noon-day sun. Thou criest out, “My song shall be of deliverance, not of despair!” “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” One step more and thou shalt enter in. Thou dost “repent.” Now, “believe the gospel.”

12. Dost thou now believe? Then “the love of God is now shed abroad in thy heart.” Thou lovest God, thou lovest thy brother also. And being filled with “love, peace, joy,” thou art also filled with “long-suffering, gentleness, faithfulness,” and all the other fruits of the spirit; in a word, with whatever dispositions are holy, are fidelity, goodness, meekness, temperance,” and all the other fruits of the Spirit, may remember the time when ye were as they, when ye were wallowing daily in your sins and in your blood; till, in due time, ye received the spirit of fear; “ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear;” but, because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Such is the state of every natural man; whether he be a gross, scandalous transgressor, or a more reputable and decent sinner, having the form, though not the power of godliness. But how can such an one be convinced of sin? How is he brought to repent? To be under the law? To receive the spirit of bondage unto fear? This is the point which in next to be considered.
bring forth good fruit," he deservers to be cast into the fire that never shall be quenched. He feels that “the wages,” the just reward of “sin,” of his sin above all, “is death;” even the second death; the death which dieth not; the destruction of body and soul in hell.

5. Here ends his pleasing dream, his delusive rest, his vain security. His joy now vanishes as a cloud; pleasures, once loved, delight no more. They pall upon the taste: He loathes the nauseous sweet; he is weary to bear them. The shadows of happiness flee away, and sink into oblivion: So that he is stripped of all, and wanders to and fro, seeking rest, but finding none.

6. The fumes of those opiates being now dispelled, he feels the anguish of a wounded spirit. He finds that sin let loose upon the soul (whether it be pride, anger, or evil desire, whether self-will, malice, envy, revenge, or any other) is perfect misery: He feels sorrow of heart for the blessings he has lost, and the curse which is come upon him: remorse for having thus destroyed himself, and despised his own mercies; fear, from a lively sense of the wrath of God, and of the consequences of his wrath, of the punishment which he has justly deserved, and which he sees hanging over is head: -- fear of death, as being to him the gate of hell, the entrance of death eternal; -- fear of the devil, the executioner of the wrath and righteous vengeance of God; -- fear of men, who, if they were able to kill his body, would thereby plunge both body and soul into hell; fear, sometimes arising to such a height, that the poor, the sinful, guilty soul, is terrified with everything, with nothing, with shades, with a leaf shaken of the wind. Yea, sometimes it may even border upon distraction, making a man “drunken though not with wine,” suspending the exercise of the memory, of the understanding, of all the natural faculties. Sometimes it may approach to the very brink of despair; so that he who trembles at the name of death, may yet be ready to plunge into it every moment, to “choose strangling rather than life.” Well may such a man roar, like him of old, for the very disquietness of his heart. Well may he cry out, “The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

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

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

9. This whole struggle of one who is “under the law,” under the “spirit of fear and bondage,” is beautifully described by the Apostle in the foregoing chapter, speaking in the person of an awakened man. “I,” saith he, “was alive without the law once.” (Verse 9:) I had much life, wisdom, strength, and virtue; so I thought: “But, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” When the commandment, in its spiritual meaning, came to my heart, with the power of God, my inbred sin was stirred up, fretted, inflamed, and all my virtue died away. “And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.” (Verses 10,11:) It came upon me unaware; slew all my hopes; and plainly showed, in the midst of life I was in death.

“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” (Verse 12:) I no longer lay the blame on this, but on the corruption of my own heart. I acknowledge that “the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin.” (Verse 14:) I now see both the spiritual nature of the law; and my own carnal, devilish heart “sold under sin,” totally enslaved: (Like slave bought with money, who were absolutely at their master’s disposal:) “For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, I do not, but what I hate, that I do.” (Verse 15:) Such is the bondage under which I groan; such the tyranny of my hard master. “To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.” (Verses 18, 19:) “I find a law,” an inward constraining power, “that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in ‘or consent to’ the ‘law of God, after the inward man:’” (Verse 21.) In my “mind,” (So the Apostle explains himself in the words that immediately follow; and so, QGUYCPWJTYYQL, the inward man, is understood in all other Greek writers:) “But I see another law in my members,” another constraining power, “warring against the law of my mind,” or inward man, “and bringing me into captivity to the law” or power “of sin;” (Verse 23:) Dragging me, as it were, at my conqueror’s chariot-wheels, into the very thing which my soul abhors. “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Verse 24:) Who shall deliver me from this helpless, dying life, from this bondage of sin and misery? Till this is done, “I myself” (or rather, that I, CWVQLGYI, that man I am now personating) “with the mind,” or inward man, “serve the law of God;” my mind, my conscience is on God’s side; “but with my flesh,” with my body, “the law of sin,” (verse 25;) being hurried away by a force I cannot resist.

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

III.

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

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

3. Heavenly, healing light now breaks in upon his soul. He “looks on him whom he had pierced;” and “God, who out of darkness commandeth light to shine, shineth in his heart.” He sees the light of the glorious love of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. He hath a divine “evidence of things not seen” by sense, even of the “deep things of God;” more particularly of the love of God, of his pardoning love to him that believes in Jesus. Overpowered with the sight, his whole soul cried out, “My Lord and my God;” For he sees all his iniquities laid on Him, who “bare them in his own body on the tree;” he beholds the Lamb of God taking away his sins. How clearly now does he discern, that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; making him sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him;” -- and that he himself is reconciled to God, by that blood
4. Here end both the guilt and power of sin. He can now say, “I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: And the life which I now live in the flesh,” (even in this mortal body,) “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Here end remorse, and sorrow of heart, and the anguish of a wounded spirit. “God turned his heaviness into joy.” He made sore, and now his hands bind up. Here ends also that bondage unto fear; for “his heart standeth fast, believing in the Lord.” He cannot fear any longer the wrath of God; for he knows it is now turned away from him, and looks upon Him no more as an angry Judge, but as a loving Father. He cannot fear the devil, knowing he has “no power, except it be given him from above.” He fears not hell; being an heir of the kingdom of heaven: Consequently, he has no fear of death; by reason whereof he was in time past, for so many years, “subject to bondage.” Rather, knowing that “if the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, he hath a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; he groaneth earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with that house which is from heaven.” He groans to shake off this house of earth, that “mortality” may be “swallowed up of life;” knowing that God “hath wrought him for the self-same thing; who hath also given him the earnest of his Spirit.”

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

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

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

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

IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Wesley

ON SIN IN BELIEVERS

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

I.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II.

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

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

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

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

III.

1. “But was he not then freed from all sin, so that there is no sin in his heart?” I cannot say this; I cannot believe it; because St. Paul says the contrary. He is speaking to believers, and describing the state of believers in general, when he says, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: These are contrary the one to the other.”
2. Again: When he writes to the believers at Corinth, to those who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, (1 Cor. 1:2) he says, “I, brethren, could not speak unto you, as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. Ye are yet carnal: For whereas there is among you envying and strife, are ye not carnal?” (1 Cor. 3:1-3) Now here the Apostle speaks unto those who were unquestionably believers, -- whom, in the same breath, he styles his brethren in Christ, -- as being still, in a measure, carnal. He affirms, there was envying, (an evil temper,) occasioning strife among them, and yet does not give the least intimation that they had lost their faith. Nay, he manifestly declares they had not; for then they would not have been babes in Christ. And (what is most remarkable of all) he speaks of being carnal, and babes in Christ, as one and the same thing; plainly showing that every believer is (in a degree) carnal, while he is only a babe in Christ.

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

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

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

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

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

7. And as this position, “There is no sin in a believer, no carnal mind, no bent to backsliding,” is thus contrary to the word of God, so it is to the experience of his children. These continually feel an heart bent to backsliding; a natural tendency to evil; a proneness to depart from God, and cleave to the things of earth. They are daily sensible of sin remaining in their heart, -- pride, self-will, unbelief; and of sin cleaving to all they speak and do, even their best actions and holiest duties. Yet at the same time they “know that they are of God;” they cannot doubt of it for a moment. They feel his Spirit clearly “witnessing with their spirit, that they are the children of God.” They "rejoice in God through Christ Jesus, by whom they have now received the atonement.” So that they are equally assured, that sin is in them, and that “Christ is in them the hope of glory.”

8. "But can Christ be in the same heart where sin is?" Undoubtedly he can; otherwise it never could be saved therefrom. Where the sickness is, there is the Physician, Carrying on his work within, Striving till he cast out sin.

Christ indeed cannot reign, where sin reigns; neither will he dwell where any sin is allowed. But he is and dwells in the heart of every believer, who is fighting against all sin; although it be not yet purified, according to the purification of the sanctuary.

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

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

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

IV.

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

I have put this objection as strong as possible, that its full weight may appear. Let us now examine it, part by part. And, 1. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, is altogether good.” I allow the text, but not the comment. For the text affirms this, and no more, -- that every man who is “born of the Spirit,” is a spiritual man. He is so: But so he may be, and yet not be altogether spiritual. The Christians at Corinth were spiritual men; else they had been no Christians at all; and yet they were not altogether spiritual: they were still, in part, carnal. -- “But they were fallen from grace.” St. Paul says, No. They were even then babes in Christ. 2. “But a man cannot be clean, sanctified, holy, and at the same time unclean, unsanctified, unholy.” Indeed he may. So the Corinthians were. “Ye are washed,” says the Apostle, “ye are sanctified;” namely, cleansed from “fornication, idolatry, drunkenness,” and all other outward sin; (1 Cor. 6:9, 10, 11;) and yet at the same time, in another
sense of the word, they were unsanctified; they were not washed, not inwardly cleansed from envy, evil surmising, partiality. -- “But sure, they had not a new heart and an old heart together.” It is most sure they had, for at that very time, their hearts were truly, yet not entirely, renewed. Their carnal mind was nailed to the cross; yet it was not wholly destroyed. -- “But could they be unholy while they were ‘temples of the Holy Ghost?’” Yes; that they were temples of the Holy Ghost, is certain; (1 Cor. 6:19;) and it is equally certain, they were, in some degree, carnal, that is, unholy.

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

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

4. “But believers walk after the Spirit.” [What follows for some pages is an answer to a paper, published in the Christian Magazine, p. 577-582. I am surprised Mr. Dodd should give such a paper a place in his Magazine, which is directly contrary to our Ninth Article. -- Editor] (Rom. 8:1.) and the Spirit of God dwells in them; consequently, they are delivered from the guilt, the power, or, in one word, the being of sin.” These are coupled together, as if they were the same thing. But they are not the same thing. The guilt is one thing, the power another, and the being yet another. That believers are delivered from the guilt and power of sin we allow; that they are delivered from the being of it we deny. Nor does it in any wise follow from these texts. A man may have the Spirit of God dwelling in him, and may “walk after the Spirit,” though he still feels “the flesh lustling against the Spirit.”

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

6. “But are not Christians ‘come to the heavenly Jerusalem,’ where nothing defiled can enter?” (Heb. 12:22;) Yes; “and to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect;” That is, Earth and heaven all agree; All is one great family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It implies the contending with a power that has the possession of our strength; maintains his usurpation of our hearts; and there prosecutes the war in defiance of our Redeemer.” Not so: The supposing sin is in us, does not imply that it has the possession of our strength; no more than a man crucified has the possession of those that crucify him. As little does it imply, that “sin maintains its usurpation of our hearts.” The usurper is dethroned. He remains indeed where he once reigned; but remains in chains. So that he does, in some sense, “prosecute the war;” yet he grows weaker and weaker; while the believer goes on
12. "I am not satisfied yet: He that has sin in him, is a slave to sin. Therefore you suppose a man to be justified, while he is a slave to sin. Now, if you allow men may be justified while they have pride, anger, or unbelief in them; nay, if you aver, these are (at least for a time) in all that are justified; what wonder that we have so many proud, angry, unbelieving believers!

I do not suppose any man who is justified is a slave to sin: Yet I do suppose sin remains (at least for a time) in all that are justified.

"But, if sin remains in a believer, he is a sinful man: If pride, for instance, then he is proud; if self-will, then he is self-willed: if unbelief, then he is an unbeliever; consequently, no believer at all.

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

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

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

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

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

John Wesley
SERMON 14

THE REPENTANCE OF BELIEVERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II.

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

For, till we are sensible of our disease, it admits of no cure. But, supposing we do thus repent, then are we called to “believe the gospel.”
2. And this also is to be understood in a peculiar sense, different from that wherein we believed in order to justification. Believe the glad tidings of great salvation, which God hath prepared for all people. Believe that he who is "the brightness of his Father’s glory, the express image of his person," is "able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God through him." He is able to save you from all the sin that still remains in your heart. He is able to save you from all the sin that cleaves to all your words and actions. He is able to save you from sins of omission, and to supply whatever is wanting in you. It is true, this is impossible with man; but with God-Man all things are possible. For what can be too hard for him who hath "all power in heaven and in earth?" Indeed, his bare power to do this is not a sufficient foundation for our faith that he will do it, that he will thus exert his power, unless he hath promised it. But this he has done: he has promised it over and over, in the strongest terms. He has given us these "exceeding great and precious promises," both in the Old and the New Testament. So we read in the law, in the most ancient part of the oracles of God, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." (Deut. 30:6.) So in the Psalms, "He shall redeem Israel," the Israel of God, "from all his sins." So in the Prophet, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. And I will put My Spirit within you, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them. I will also save you from all your uncleanesses" (Ezek. 36:25, &c.) So likewise in the New Testament, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, -- to perform the oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies should serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." (Luke 1:68, &c.)

3. You have therefore good reason to believe, he is not only able, but willing to do this; to cleanse you from all your filthiness of flesh and spirit; to "save you from all your uncleanesses." This is the thing which you now long for; this is the faith which you now particularly need, namely, that the Great Physician, the Lover of my soul, is willing to make me clean. But is he willing to do this to-morrow, or to-day? Let him answer for himself: "To-day, if ye will hear My voice, harden not your hearts." If you put it off till to-morrow, you harden your hearts; you refuse to hear his voice. Believe, therefore, that he is willing to save you to-day. He is willing to save you now. "Behold, now is the accepted time." He now saith, "Be thou clean!" Only believe, and you also will immediately find, "all things are possible to him that believeth."

4. Continue to believe in him that loved thee, and gave himself for thee; that bore all thy sins in his own body on the tree; and he saveth thee from all condemnation, by his blood continually applied. Thus it is that we continue in a justified state. And when we go "from faith to faith," we still retain a depth of sin; and it is the consciousness of this which is still in its nature "enmity against God;" that a whole body of inward sin remains in our heart, weakened indeed, but not destroyed; shows, beyond all possibility of doubt, the absolute necessity of a farther change. We allow, that at the very moment of justification, we are born again: In that instant we experience that inward change from "darkness into marvellous light:" from the image of the brute and the devil, into the image of God; from the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, to the mind which was in Christ Jesus. But are we then entirely changed? Are we wholly transformed into the image of him that created us? Far from it: we still retain a depth of sin; and it is the consciousness of this which constrains us to groan, for a full deliverance, to him that is mighty to save. Hence it is, that those believers who are not convinced of the deep corruption of their hearts, or but slightly, and, as it were, notionally convinced, have little concern about entire sanctification. They may possibly hold the opinion, that such a thing is to be, either at death, or some time they know not when, before it. But they have no great uneasiness for the want of it, and no great hunger or thirst after it. They cannot, until they know themselves better, until they repent in the sense above described, until God unveils the inbred monster’s face, and shows them the real state of their souls. Then only, when they feel the

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

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

III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nay, it is not impossible, some of these holy men did, at length, themselves fall into this opinion; in particular those who, not by choice, but by the providence of God, were cut off from all these ordinances; perhaps wandering up and down, having no certain abiding-place, or dwelling in dens and caves of the earth. These, experiencing the grace of God in themselves, though they were deprived of all outward means, might infer that the same grace would be given to them who of set purpose abstained from them.

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

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

II.

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

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

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

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

2. But we allow, that the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion; that, consequently, all these means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity; that if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God, they are not acceptable in his sight; yea, rather, they are an abomination before him, a stink in his nostrils; he is weary to bear them. Above all, if they are used as a kind of commutation for the religion they were before him, a stink in his nostrils; he is weary to bear them. Above all, if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God, they are mere weak and beggarly elements. Whosoever, therefore, imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever, does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God. We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord’s Supper; but that it is God alone who is the Giver of every good gift, the Author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby, through any of these, there is any blessing conveyed to our soul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Lord’s direction, with regard to the use of this means, is likewise plain and clear. “Search the Scriptures,” saith he to the unbelieving Jews, “for they testify of me.” (John 5:39.) And for this very end did he direct them to search the Scriptures, that they might believe in him. The objection, that “this is not a command, but only an assertion, that they did search the Scriptures,” is shamelessly false. I desire those who urge it, to let us know how a command can be more clearly expressed, than in those terms, (TGWPCVGyVCUYitCHCU.) It is as peremptory as so many words can make it.

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

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

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

(2 Tim. 3:15.) The same truth (namely, that this is the great means God has ordained for conveying his manifold grace to man) is delivered, in the fullest manner that can be conceived, in the words which immediately follow: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;” consequently, all Scripture is infallibly true; “and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;” to the end “that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.)

9. It should be observed, that this is spoken primarily and directly of the Scriptures which Timothy had known from a child; which must have been those of the Old Testament, for the New was not then wrote. How far then was St. Paul (though he was “not a whit behind the very chief of the Apostles,” nor, therefore, I presume, behind any man now upon earth) from making light of the Old Testament! Behold this, lest ye one day “wonder and perish,” ye who make so small account of one half of the oracles of God! Yea, and that half of which the Holy Ghost expressly declares, that it is “profitable,” as a means ordained of God, for this very thing, “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;” to the end, “the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first and chief of these is, “You cannot use these means (as you call them) without trusting in them.” I pray, where is this written? I expect you should show me plain Scripture for your assertion: Otherwise I dare not receive it; because I am not convinced that you are wiser than God.

If it really had been as you assert, it is certain Christ must have known it. And if he had known it, he would surely have warned us; he would have revealed it long ago. Therefore, because he has not, because there is no tittle of this in the whole revelation of Jesus Christ, I am as fully assured your assertion is false, as that this revelation is of God.

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

“Nay, if you are troubled when you leave them off, it is plain you trusted in them.” By no means.

If I am troubled when I wilfully disobey God, it is plain his Spirit is still striving with me; but if I am not troubled at wilful sin, it is plain I am given up to a reprobate mind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This was the salvation of God, which they stood still to see, by marching forward with all their might!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. By observing this order of God, we may learn what means to recommend to any particular soul.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

John Wesley
SERMON 17

(text from the 1872 edition)

THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11. Yet lackest thou one thing, whosoever thou art, that to a deep humility, and a steadfast faith, hast joined a lively hope, and thereby in a good measure cleansed thy heart from its inbred pollution. If thou wilt be perfect, add to all these, charity; add love, and thou hast the circumcision of the heart “Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment.” Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. “Whatevther things are just, whatevther things are pure, whatevther things are amiable,” or honorable, “if there be any virtue, if there be any praise,” they are all comprised in this one word, -- love. In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”

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

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

To suppose this, is to suppose the Fountain of holiness is directly the author of sin; since he has inseparably annexed pleasure to the use of those creatures which are necessary to sustain the life he has given us. This, therefore, can never be the meaning of his command. What the real sense of it is, both our blessed Lord and his Apostles tell us too frequently, and too plainly, to be misunderstood. They all with one mouth bear witness, that the true meaning of those several declarations, “The Lord thy God is one Lord;” “Thou shalt have no other Gods but me;” “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength;” “Thou shalt cleave unto him;” “The desire of thy soul shall be to His name;” -- is no other than this: The one perfect Good shall be your one ultimate end.

One thing shall ye desire for its own sake, -- the fruition of Him that is All in All. One happiness shall ye propose to your souls, even an union with Him that made them; the having “fellowship with the Father and the Son;’ the being joined to the Lord in one Spirit. One design you are to pursue to the end of time, -- the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things, so far as they tend to this. Love the creature as it leads to the Creator. But in every step you take, be this the glorious point that terminates your view. Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work, be subordinate to this. Whatever ye desire or fear, whatever ye seek or shun, whatever ye think, speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole End, us well as Source, of your being.

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

II.

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

No man I say, has A title to the praise of God, till he feels his want of God; nor indeed, till he seeketh that “honor which cometh of God only;” and neither desires nor pursues that which cometh of man, unless so far only as it tends to this.
2. Another truth, which naturally follows from what has been said, is, that none shall obtain the honor that cometh of God, unless his heart be circumcised by faith; even a “faith of the operation of God;” Unless, refusing to be any longer led by his senses, appetites, or passions, or even by that blind leader of the blind, so idolized by the world, natural reason, he lives and walks by faith; directs every step, as “seeking Him that is invisible;” “looks not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal;” and governs all his desires, designs, and thoughts, all his actions and conversations, as one who is entered in within the veil, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God.

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

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

5. From what has been said, we may, Thirdly, learn, that it is true only “led by the Spirit,” unless that “Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God;” unless he see the prize and the crown before him, and “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” So greatly have they erred who have taught that, in serving God, we ought not to have a view to his own happiness! Nay, but we are often and expressly taught of God, to own happiness! Nay, but we are often and expressly taught of God, to “lay.”

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

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

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

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

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

John Wesley
SERMON 18
(text of the 1872 edition)

THE MARKS OF THE NEW BIRTH

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

1. How is every one that is “born of the Spirit,” -- that is, born again, -- born of God? What is meant by the being born again, the being born of God, or being born of the Spirit? What is implied in the being a son or a child of God, or having the Spirit of adoption? That these privileges, by the free mercy of God, are ordinarily annexed to baptism (which is thence termed by our Lord in a preceding verse, the being “born of water and of the Spirit”) we know; but we would know what these privileges are: What is the new birth?
2. Perhaps it is not needful to give a definition of this, seeing the Scripture gives none. But as the question is of the deepest concern to every child of man; since, “except a man be born again,” born of the Spirit, “he cannot see the kingdom of God;” I propose to lay down the marks of it in the plainest manner, just as I find them laid down in Scripture.

1.

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

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

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

4. An immediate and constant fruit of this faith whereby we are born of God, a fruit which can in no wise be separated from it, nor, not for an hour, is power over sin; -- power over outward sin of every kind; over every evil word and work; for wheresoever the blood of Christ is thus applied, it “purgeth the conscience from dead works;” -- and over inward sin; for it purifieth the heart from every unholy desire and temper. This fruit of faith St. Paul has largely described, in the sixth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. “How shall we,” saith he, “who by faith “are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” “Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” -- “Likewise, reckon ye yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign” even “in your mortal body;” “but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.” “For sin shall not have dominion over you.” -- God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, -- but being made free, - the plain meaning is, God be thanked that though ye were, in time past, the servants of sin, yet now -- “being free from sin, ye are become the servants of righteousness.”

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

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

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

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

1. A Second scriptural mark of those who are born of God, is hope. Thus St. Peter, speaking to all the children of God who were then scattered abroad, saith, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope.” (1 Peter 1:3.) GNKFC5YUCP, a lively or living hope, saith the Apostle; because there is also a dead hope, as well as a dead faith; a hope which is not from God, but from the enemy of God and man; -- as evidently appears by its fruits; for, as it is the offspring of pride, so it is the parent of every evil word and work; whereas, every man that hath in him this living hope, is “holy as He that calleth him is holy.” Every man that can truly say to his brethren in Christ, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and we shall see him as he is,” “purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

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

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

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

4. The variation of the phrase in the fifteenth verse is worthy our observation: “Ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!” Ye, as many as are the sons of God, have, in virtue of your sonship, received that selfsame Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father; We, the Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, (for so the word may not improperly be understood,) we, through whom you have believed, the “ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” As we and you have one Lord, so we have one Spirit: As we have one faith, so we have one hope also. We and you are sealed with one Spirit, by whom you have “in whom we cry, Abba, Father!” We, the Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, (for so the word may not improperly be understood,) we, through whom you have received that selfsame Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father, “then your heart shall rejoice;” yea, “your joy shall be full,” and “that joy no man taketh from you.” (John 16:22.) “We joy in God,” will ye say, “through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement;” “by whom we have access into this grace,” this state of grace, of favour, or reconciliation with God, “wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2.) “Ye,” saith St. Peter, whom God hath “begotten again unto a lively hope, are kept by the power of God unto salvation: Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ: In whom, though now ye see him not, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” (1 Peter 1:5, &c.) Unspeaking indeed! It is not for the tongue of man to describe this joy in the Holy Ghost. It is “the hidden manna, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it.” But this we know, it not only remains, but overflows, in the depth of affliction. “Are the consolations of God small” with his children, when all earthly comforts fail? Not so. But when sufferings most abound, the consolations of his Spirit do much more abound; insomuch that the sons of God “laugh at destruction when it cometh;” at want, pain, hell, and the grave; as knowing Him who “hath the keys of death and hell,” and will shortly “cast them into the bottomless pit,” as hearing even now the great voice out of heaven, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.” (Rev. 21:3, 4.)

III.

1. A Third scriptural mark of those who are born of God, and the greatest of all, is love; even “the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them.” (Rom. 5:5.) “Because they are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son in their hearts, crying, Abba, Father!” (Gal. 4:6.) By this Spirit, continually looking up to God as their reconciled and loving Father, they cry to him for their daily bread, for all things needful, whether for their souls or bodies. They continually pour out their hearts before him, knowing “they have the petitions which they ask of him.” (1 John 5:15.) Their delight is in him. He is the joy of their heart; their “shield,” and their “exceeding great reward.” The desire of their soul is toward him; it is their “meat and drink to do his will;” and they are “satisfied as with marrow and fatness, while their mouth praizeth him with joyful lips.” (Psalm 63:5.)

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

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

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

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

IV.

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

2. Who then are ye that are thus born of God? Ye “know the things which are given to you of God.” Ye well know that ye are the children of God, and “can assure your hearts before him.” And every one of you who has observed these words cannot but feel, and know of a truth, whether at this hour, (answer to God, and not to man!) you are thus a child of God or no. The question is not, what you was made in baptism; (do not evade;) but, What are you now? Is the Spirit of adoption now in your heart? To your own heart let the appeal be made. I ask not, whether you was born of water and of the Spirit; but are you now the temple of the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in you? I allow you was “circumcised with your foreskins,” (Gal. 4:1.) “Ye children of the resurrection,” (Rev. 1:5.) “Ye were washed in water, but ye will be made “clean of the heart,” (1 Pet. 1:22, 23.) “Ye are born again, ye children of God.” Alas, that consequence will by no means hold. How can ye escape the damnation of hell?”

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

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

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

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

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

John Wesley
SERMON 20

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. What is the righteousness of Christ:

II. When, and in what sense, it is imputed to us:

And conclude with a short and plain application.

I. What is the righteousness of Christ:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. It is true believers may not all speak alike; they may not all use the same language. It is not to be expected that they should: we cannot reasonably require it of them. A thousand circumstances may cause them to vary from each other, in the manner of expressing themselves: But a difference of expression does nor necessarily imply a difference of sentiment. Different persons may use different expressions, and yet mean the same thing. Nothing is more common than this, although we seldom make sufficient allowance for it. Nay, it is not easy for the same persons, when they speak of the same thing at a considerable distance of time, to use exactly the same expressions, even though they retain the same sentiments: How then can we be rigorous in requiring others to use just the same expressions with us?

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

4. Let us then make all that allowance to others, which, were we in their place, we would desire for ourselves. Who is ignorant (to touch again on that circumstance only) of the amazing power of education? And who that knows it, can expect, suppose, a member of the Church of Rome, either to think or speak clearly on this subject? And yet, if we had heard even dying Bellarmine cry out,— when he was asked, “Unto which of the saints wilt thou turn?” — Fidere meritis Christi tutissimam; “It is safest to trust in the merits of Christ;” would we have affirmed that, not withholding his wrong opinions, he had no share in his righteousness?

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

I say again, not for the sake of anything in them, or done by them, of their own righteousness or works: “Not for works of righteousness which we have done, but of his own mercy he saved us.” “By grace ye are saved through faith, -- not of works, lest any man should boast;” but wholly and solely for the sake of what Christ hath done and suffered for us. We are “justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.”

And this is not only the means of our obtaining the favour of God, but of our continuing therein. It is thus we come to God at first; it is by the same we come unto him ever after. We walk in one and the same new and living way, till our spirit returns to God.

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

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

My beauty are, my glorious dress:
'Midst flaming worlds in these array'd,
With joy shall I lift up my head.
The whole hymn expresses the same sentiment, from the beginning to the end.

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

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

‘Christ by his obedience, procured and merited for us grace or favour with God the Father.’

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

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

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

My beauty are, my glorious dress.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But is not this bending the bow too much the other way? Why should you condemn all who do not speak just as you do? Why should you quarrel with them, for using the phrases they like, any more than they with you for taking the same liberty? Or, if they do quarrel with you upon that account, do not imitate the bigotry which you blame. At least, allow them the liberty of taking the same liberty? Or, if they do quarrel with you upon that account, do not condemn all who do not speak just as you do? Why should you quarrel with them, for using the phrases they like, any more than they with you for taking the same liberty? Why should you quarrel with them, for using the phrases they like, any more than they with you for taking the same liberty? Why should you quarrel with them, for using the phrases they like, any more than they with you for taking the same liberty? Why should you quarrel with them, for using the phrases they like, any more than they with you for taking the same liberty?
I. In the first place I shall endeavor to show in what sense Christians are not perfect. And both from experience and Scripture it appears, First, that they are not perfect in knowledge: they are not so perfect in this life as to be free from ignorance. They know, it may be, in common with other men, many things relating to the present world; and they know, with regard to the world to come, the general truths which God hath revealed. They know, likewise, (what the natural man receiveth not, for these things are spiritually discerned,) “what manner of love” it is wherewith “the Father” hath loved them, “that they should be called the sons of God.” [1 John 3:1] They know the mighty working of his Spirit in their hearts; [Eph. 3:16] and the wisdom of his providence, directing all their paths, [Prov. 3:6] and causing all things to work together for their good. [Rom. 8:28] Yea, they know in every circumstance of life what the Lord requireth of them, and how to keep a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man. [Acts 24:16]

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

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

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

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

3. They may not, therefore, lay these expressions aside, seeing they are the words of God, and not of man. But we may and ought to explain the meaning of them, that those who are sincere of heart may not err to the right hand or to the left, from the mark of the prize of their high calling. And this is the more needful to be done because in the verse already repeated the Apostle speaks of himself as not perfect. “Not,” saith he, “as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Phil. 3:12. And yet immediately after, in the same foundation with you. And, indeed, “other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ.” I build inward and outward holiness thereon, as you do, even by faith. Do not, therefore, suffer any distaste, or unkindness, no, nor any shyness or coldness in your heart. If there were a difference of opinion, where is our religion, if we cannot think freely of conscience herein:

First, in what sense Christians are not; and,

Secondly, in what sense they are, perfect.

We may not, therefore, lay these expressions aside, seeing they are the words of Christ, and not of man. But we may and ought to explain the meaning of them, that those who are sincere of heart may not err to the right hand or to the left, from the mark of the prize of their high calling. And this is the more needful to be done because in the verse already repeated the Apostle speaks of himself as not perfect. “Not,” saith he, “as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Phil. 3:12. And yet immediately after, in the same foundation with you. And, indeed, “other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ.” I build inward and outward holiness thereon, as you do, even by faith. Do not, therefore, suffer any distaste, or unkindness, no, nor any shyness or coldness in your heart. If there were a difference of opinion, where is our religion, if we cannot think freely of conscience herein:

First, in what sense Christians are not; and,

Secondly, in what sense they are, perfect.
better, or wicked men to be worse, than they are, but by believing them to have been or to be good men who were or are very wicked; or perhaps those to have been or to be wicked men, who were or are holy and unprovable.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. The very least which can be implied in these words, is, that the persons spoken of therein, namely, all real Christians, or believers in Christ, are made free from outward sin. And the same freedom, which St. Paul here expresses in such variety of phrases, St. Peter expresses in that one: (1 Pet. 4:1, 2) “He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, -- that he no longer should live to the desires of men, but to the will of God.” For this ceasing from sin, if it be interpreted in the lowest sense, as regarding only the outward behaviour, must denote the ceasing from the outward act, from any outward transgression of the
5. But most express are the well-known words of St. John, in the third chapter of his First Epistle, verse 8, &c.: “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot sin because he is born of God.” [1 John 3:8, 9]

And those in the fifth: (1 John 5:18) “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”

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

7. And a sort of reason there is, which has been frequently brought to force.) [Matt. 11:12] or, “the kingdom of God,” as St. Luke expresses it, to refute it. There can, therefore, no doubt be made, but “the kingdom of God is greater than any man upon earth! To mention this is sufficiently to this consequence we utterly deny: It will never follow from those premises.

It may be granted, First, that David, in the general course of his life, was one of the holiest men among the Jews; and, Secondly, that the holiest men among the Jews did sometimes commit sin. But if you would hence infer, that all Christians do and must commit sin as long as they live; this consequence we utterly deny: It will never follow from those premises.

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

In these words, then, our Lord declares two things: First, that before his coming in the flesh, among all the children of men there had not been one greater than John the Baptist; whence it evidently follows, that neither Abraham, David, nor any Jew was greater than John. Our Lord, Secondly, declares that he which is least in the kingdom of God (in that kingdom which he came to set up on earth, and which the violent now began to take by force) is greater than he: -- Not a greater Prophet as some have interpreted the word, for this is palpably false in fact; but greater in the grace of God, and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we cannot measure the privileges of real Christians by those formerly given to the Jews. Their “ministration,” (or dispensation,) we allow “was glorious;” but ours “exceeds in glory.” [2 Cor. 3:7-9]

So that whosoever would bring down the Christian dispensation to the Jewish standard, whosoever gleans up the examples of weakness, recorded in the Law and the Prophets, and thence infers that they who have “put on Christ” [Gal. 3:27] are ended with no greater strength, doth greatly err, neither “knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” [Matt. 22:29]

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

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

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

12. That this great salvation from sin was not given till Jesus was glorified, St. Peter also plainlytestifies; where, speaking of his brethren in the flesh, as now “receiving the end of their souls, the salvation of their souls,” he adds, (1 Peter 1:9, 10, &c.) “Of which salvation the Prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace” that is, the gracious dispensation, “that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was
13. Those who have duly considered these things must allow, that the privileges of Christians are in no wise to be measured by what the Old Testament records concerning those who were under the Jewish dispensation; seeing the fulness of times is now come; the Holy Ghost is now given; the great salvation of God is brought unto men, by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is now set up on earth; concerning which the Spirit of God declared of old, (so far is David from being the pattern or standard of Christian perfection,) “He that is feeble among them at that day, shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.” (Zech. 12:8.)

14. If, therefore, you would prove that the Apostle’s words, “He that is born of God sinneth not,” [1 John 5:18] are not to be understood according to their plain, natural, obvious meaning, it is from the New Testament you are to bring your proofs, else you will fight as one that beateth the air. [1 Cor. 9:26] And the first of these which is usually brought is taken from the examples recorded in the New Testament. “The Apostles themselves,” it is said, “committed sin; nay, the greatest of them, Peter and Paul: St. Paul, by his sharp contention with Barnabas; [Acts 15:39] and St. Peter, by his dissimulation at Antioch.” [Gal. 2:11] Well: Suppose both Peter and Paul did then commit sin; what is it you would infer from hence? That all the other Apostles committed sin sometimes? There is no shadow of proof in this. Or would you thence infer, that all the other Christians of the apostolic age committed sin? Worse and worse: This is such an inference as, one would imagine, a man in his senses could never have thought of. Or will you argue thus: “If two of the Apostles did once commit sin, then all other Christians, in all ages, do and will commit sin as long as they live?” Atas, my brother! A child of common understanding would be ashamed of such reasoning as this. Least of all can you with any colour of argument infer, that any man must commit sin at all. No: God forbid we should thus speak! No necessity of sinning was laid upon them. The grace of God was surely sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly will I glory in these “my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in...” [2 Cor. 12:9]

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

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

Therefore, from hence it can never be proved that any Christian must commit sin. Secondly, the ancient Fathers inform us, it was bodily pain: “a violent headache, saith Tertullian; (De Pudic.)” to which both Chrysostom and St. Jerome agree. St. Cyprian [De Mortalitate] expresses it, a little more generally, in those terms: “Many and grievous torments of the flesh and of the body.” [Carnis et corporis multa ac gravia tormenta.] Thirdly, to this exactly agree the Apostle’s own words, “A thorn to the flesh to smite, be not buffeted me.” “My strength is made perfect in weakness;” -- Which same words occur no less than four times in these two verses only. But, Fourthly, whatsoever it was, it could not be either inward or outward sin. It could no more be inward stirrings, than outward expressions, of pride, anger, or lust. This is manifest, beyond all possible exception from the words that immediately follow: “Most gladly will I glory in these “my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me.” [2 Cor. 12:9]

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

18. So clearly does St. James explain himself, and fix the meaning of his own words. Yet, lest any one should still remain in doubt, St. John, writing many years after St. James, puts the matter entirely out of dispute, by the express declarations above recited. But here a fresh difficulty may arise: How shall we reconcile St. John with himself? In one place he declares, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit
19. As great a difficulty as this may at first appear, it vanishes away, if we observe, First, that the tenth verse fixes the sense of the eighth: “If we say we have no sin,” in the former, being explained by, “If we say we have not sinned,” in the latter verse, [1 John 1:10, 8] Secondly, that the point under present consideration is not whether we have or have not sinned heretofore; and neither of these verses asserts that we do sin, or commit sin now. Thirdly, that the ninth verse explains both the eighth and tenth. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;” As if he had said, “I have before affirmed, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin; but let no man say, I need it not; I have no sin to be cleansed from. If we say that we have no sin, that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and make God a liar: But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just,’ not only ‘to forgive our sins,’ but also ‘to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;’” [1 John 1:8-10] that we may ‘go and sin no more.’” [John 8:11]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE PROMISE OF SANCTIFICATION

(Ezekiel 36:25, &c.)

BY THE REV. CHARLES WESLEY.

1
There let me ever, ever dwell;
By thou my God, and I will be
Thy servant: O set to thy seal!
Give me eternal life in thee.

16
From all remaining filth within
Let me in Thee salvation have:
From actual, and from inbred sin
My ransom’d soul persist to save.

17
Wash out my old original stain:
Tell me no more It cannot be,
Demons or men! The Lamb was slain
His blood was all poured out for me!

18
Sprinkle it, Jesu, on my heart:
One drop of thy all-cleansing blood
Shall make my sinfulness depart,
And fill me with the life of God.

19
Father, supply my every need:
Sustain the life thyself hast given;
Call for the corn, the living bread,
The manna that comes down from heaven.

20
The gracious fruits of righteousness,
Thy blessings’ unexhausted store,
In me abundantly increase;
Nor let me ever hunger more.

21
Let me no more in deep complaint
“My leanness, O my leanness!” cry;
Alone consumed with pining want,
Of all my Father’s children I!

22
The painful thirst, the fond desire,
Thy joyous presence shall remove;
While my full soul doth still require
Thy whole eternity of love.

23
Holy, and true, and righteous Lord,
I wait to prove thy perfect will;
Be mindful of thy gracious word,
And stamp me with thy Spirit’s seal!

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

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

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

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

28
Now let me gain perfection’s height!
Now let me into nothing fall!
Be less than nothing in thy sight,
And feel that Christ is all in all!
4. And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit: there is a real as well as a relative change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel “the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”; producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money, together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper; in a word, changing the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. It is by this faith we are saved, justified, and sanctified; taking that word in its highest sense.

But how are we justified and sanctified by faith? This is our third head of inquiry. And this being the main point in question, and a point of no ordinary importance, it will not be improper to five it a more distinct and particular consideration.

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

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

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

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

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

5. I do allow all this, and continually maintain it as the truth of God. I allow there is a repentance consequent upon, as well as a repentance previous to, justification. It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous of good works. And there are so necessary, that if a man willingly neglect them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified; he cannot grow in grace, in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received; he cannot continue in faith, or in the favour of God. What is the inference we mist draw herefrom? Why, that both repentance, rightly understood, and the practice of all good works, --works of piety, as well as works of mercy (now properly so called, since they spring from faith), are, in some sense, necessary to sanctification.

6. I say, "repentance rightly understood": for this must not be confounded with the former repentance. The repentance consequent upon justification is widely different from that which is antecedent to it. This implies no guilt, no sense of condemnation, no consciousness of the wrath of God. It does not suppose any doubt of the favour of God, or any "fear that hath torment." It is properly a conviction, wrought by the Holy Ghost, of the sin which still remains in our heart; of the HTQPGOCYCTMQL, the carnal mind, which "does still remain" (as our Church speaks) "even in them that are regenerate"; although it does no longer reign; it has not now dominion over them. It is a conviction of our proneness to evil, of an heart bent to backsliding, of the still continuing tendency of the flesh to lust against the spirit. Sometimes, unless we continually watch and pray, it lusteth to pride, sometimes to anger, sometimes to love of the world, love of ease, love of honour, or love of pleasure more than of God. It is a conviction of the tendency of our heart to self-will, to Atheism, or idolatry; and above all, to unbelief; whereby, in a thousand ways, and under a thousand pretenses, we are ever departing, more or less, from the living God.

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

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

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

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

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

12. Hence it may likewise appear, that there is no possible danger in thus expecting full salvation.

For suppose we were mistaken, suppose no such blessing ever was or can be attained, yet we lose nothing: nay, that very expectation quickens us in using all the talents which God has given us; yea, in improving them all; so that when our Lord cometh, He will receive His own with increase.

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

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

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

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

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

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

18. "But does God work this great work in the soul gradually or instantaneously?" Perhaps it may be gradually wrought in some; I mean in this sense, --they do not advert to the particular moment wherein sin ceases to be. But it is infinitely desirable, were it the will of God, that it should be done instantaneously; that the Lord should destroy sin “by the breath of His mouth,” in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. And so He generally does; a plain fact, of which there is evidence enough to satisfy any unprejudiced person. Thou therefore look for it every moment! Look for it in the way above described; in all those good works whereunto thou art “created anew in Christ Jesus.” There in then no danger: you can be no worse, if you are no better, for that expectation. For were you to be disappointed of your hope, still you lose nothing. But you shall not be disappointed of your hope: it will come, and will not tarry. Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token you may surely know whether you seek it by faith or by works. If by works, you want something to be done first, before you are sanctified. You think, I must first be or do thus or thus. Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are; and expect it now. It is of importance to observe, that there is an inseparable connexion between these three points, --expect it by faith; expect it as you are; and expect it now! To deny one of them, is to deny them all; to allow one, is to allow them all. Do you believe we are sanctified by faith? Be true then to your principle; and look for this blessing just as you are, neither better nor worse; as a poor sinner that has still nothing to pay, nothing to plead, but “Christ died.” And if you look for it as you are, then expect it now. Stay for nothing: why should you? Christ is ready; and He is all you want. He is waiting for you: He is at the door! Let your inmost soul cry out, Come in, come in, thou heavenly Guest! Nor hence again remove; But sup with me, and let the feast Be everlasting love.

John Wesley
SERMON 44
(text from the 1872 edition)

ORIGINAL SIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I.

1. I am, First, by opening the words of the text, to show what men were before the flood. And we may fully depend on the account here given:

[...]

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. And this is certain, the Scripture gives us no reason to think any otherwise of them. On the contrary, all the above cited passages of Scripture refer to those who lived after the flood. It was above a thousand years after, that God declared by David concerning the children of men, “They are all gone out of the way, of truth and holiness; “there is none righteous, no, not one.” And to this bear all the Prophets witness, in their several generations. So Isaiah, concerning God’s peculiar people, (and certainly the Heathens were in no better condition,) “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.” The same account is given by all the Apostles, yea, by the whole tenor of the oracles of God. From all these we learn, concerning man in his natural state, unassisted by the grace of God, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is” still “evil, only evil,” and that “continually.”

2. And this account of the present state of man is confirmed by daily experience. It is true, the natural man discerns it not: And this is not to be wondered at. So long as a man born blind continues so, he is scarce sensible of his want: Much less, could we suppose a place where all were born without sight, would they be sensible of the want of it. In like manner, so long as men remain in their natural blindness of understanding, they are not sensible of their spiritual wants, and of this in particular. But as soon as God opens the eyes of their understanding, they see the state they were in before; they are then deeply convinced, that “every man living,” themselves especially, are, by nature, “altogether vanity;” that is, folly and ignorance, sin and wickedness.

3. We see, when God opens our eyes, that we were before CSGQ\K\GP\VYK\MQUOYK – without God, or, rather, Atheists, in the world. We had, by nature, no knowledge of God, no acquaintance with him. It is true, as soon as we came to the use of reason, we learned “the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, from the things that are made.” From the things that are seen we inferred the existence of an eternal, powerful Being, that is not seen. But still, although we acknowledged his being we had no acquaintance with him. As we know there is an Emperor of China, whom yet we do not know; so we knew there was a King of all the earth, yet we knew him not. Indeed we could not but by our natural understandings, than we could see him with our eyes. For “no one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal him. And no one knoweth the Son but the Father, and he to whom the Father revealeth him.”

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

5. And having no knowledge, we can have no love of God: We cannot love him we know not.

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

6. We have by nature, not only no love, but no fear of God. It is allowed, indeed, that most men have, sooner or later, a kind of senseless, irrational fear, properly called superstition; though the blundering Epicureans gave it the name of religion. Yet even this is not natural, but acquired; chiefly by conversation or from example. By nature “God is not in all our thoughts.” We leave him to manage his own affairs, to sit quietly, as we imagine, in heaven, and leave us on earth to manage ours; so that we have no more of the fear of God before our eyes, than of the love of God in our hearts.
Thus are all men "Atheists in the world." But Atheism itself does not screen us from idolatry. In his natural state, every man born into the world is a rank idolater. Perhaps, indeed, we may not be such in the vulgar sense of the word. We do not, like the idolatrous Heathens, worship molten or graven images. We do not bow down to the stock of a tree, to the work of our own hands. We do not pray to the angels or saints in heaven, any more than to the saints that are upon the earth. But what then? We have set up our idols in our hearts; and to these we bow down and worship them: We worship ourselves, when we pay that honour to ourselves which is due to God only. Therefore all pride is idolatry; it is ascribing to ourselves what is due to God alone. And although pride was not made for man, yet where is the man that is born without it? But hereby we rob god of his unalienable right, and idolatrously usurp his glory.

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

So far we bear the image of the devil, and tread in his steps. But at the next step we leave Satan behind; we run into an idolatry whereof he is not guilty: I mean love of the world; which is now as natural to every man, as to love his own will. What is more natural to us than to seek happiness in the creature, instead of the Creator? -- to seek that satisfaction in the works of his hands, which can be found in God only? What more natural than "the desire of the flesh?" that is, of the pleasure that cometh of the world? But would one imagine that these men had ever heard of Jesus Christ or his Apostles; or that they knew who it was that said, "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?" But if this is really so, if it be impossible to believe, and consequently to please God, so long as we receive or seek honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only; then in what a condition are all mankind! The Christians as well as Heathens! Since they all seek honour one of another! Since it is as natural for them so to do, themselves being the judges, as it is to see the light which strikes upon their eye, or to hear the sound which enters their ear; yea, since they account it a sign of a virtuous mind, to seek the praise of men, and of a vicious one, to be content with the honour that cometh of God only!

1. I proceed to draw a few inferences from what has been said. And, First, from hence we may learn one grand fundamental difference between Christianity, considered as a system of doctrines, and the most refined Heathenism. Many of the ancient Heathens have largely described the vices of particular men. They have spoken much against their pride, self-will, and love of the world. They knew not that all men were empty of all good, and filled with all manner of evil. They were wholly ignorant of the entire depravation of the whole human nature, of every man born into the world, in every faculty of his soul, not so much by those particular vices which reign in particular persons, as by the general flood of Atheism and idolatry, of pride, self-will, and love of the world.

This, therefore, is the first grand distinguishing point between Heathenism and Christianity. The one acknowledges that many men are infected with many vices, and even born with a proneness to them; but supposes withal, that in some the natural good much over-balances the evil. The other declares that all men are conceived in sin, and "shapen in wickedness;" -- that hence there is in every man a "carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not, cannot be, subject to" his "law;" and which so infects the whole soul, that "there dwelleth" in "him, in his flesh," in

Once in a season beasts too taste of love; Only the beast of reason is its slave, And in that folly drudges all the year. A considerable difference indeed, it must be allowed, there is between man and man, arising (beside that wrought by preventing grace) from difference of constitution and of education. But, notwithstanding this, who, that is not utterly ignorant of himself, can here cast the first stone at another? Who can abide the test of our blessed Lord's comment on the Seventh Commandment: "He that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath not regard what men think of us is the mark of a wicked and abandoned mind." So that to go calm and unmoved through honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report, is with them a sign of one that is, indeed, not fit to live: "Away with such a flow from the earth!" But who would imagine that these men had ever heard of Jesus Christ or his Apostles; or that they knew who it was that said, "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?" But if this is really so, if it be impossible to believe, and consequently to please God, so long as we receive or seek honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only; then in what a condition are all mankind! The Christians as well as Heathens! Since they all seek honour one of another! Since it is as natural for them so to do, themselves being the judges, as it is to see the light which strikes upon their eye, or to hear the sound which enters their ear; yea, since they account it a sign of a virtuous mind, to seek the praise of men, and of a vicious one, to be content with the honour that cometh of God only!

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his natural state, “no good thing;” but “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil,” only evil, and that “continually.”

2. Hence we may. Secondly, learn, that all who deny this, call it original sin, or by any other title, are put Heathens still, in the fundamental point which differences Heathenism from Christianity.

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

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

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

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

John Wesley
SERMON 46

(TEXT FROM THE 1872 EDITION)

THE WILDERNESS STATE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. With loss of faith, and love, and joy there is also joined, Fourthly, the loss of that peace which once passed all understanding. That sweet tranquillity of mind, that composure of spirit, is gone. Painful doubt returns; doubt, whether we ever did, and perhaps whether we ever shall, believe. We begin to doubt, whether we ever did find in our hearts the real testimony of the Spirit; whether we did not rather deceive our own souls, and mistake the voice of nature for the voice of God. Nay, and perhaps, whether we shall ever hear his voice, and find favour in his sight. And these doubts are again joined with servile fear, with that fear which hath torment. We fear the wrath of God, even as before we believed: We fear, lest we should be cast out of his presence; and thence sink again into that fear of death, from which we were before wholly delivered.

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

II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Another sin of omission, which frequently brings the soul of a believer into darkness, is the neglect of private prayer; the want whereof cannot be supplied by any other ordinance whatever. Nothing can be more plain, than that the life of God in the soul does not continue, much less increase, unless we use all opportunities of communing with God, and pouring out our hearts before him. If therefore we are negligent of this, if we suffer business, company, or any avocation whatever, to prevent these secret exercises of the soul, (or, which comes to the same thing, to make us hurry them over in a slight and careless manner,) that life will surely decay. And if we long or frequently intermit them, it will gradually die away.

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

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

8. But suppose we are aware of this snare of the devil, we may be attacked from another quarter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. For instance: Is it sin which occasions darkness? What sin? Is it outward sin of any kind? Does your conscience accuse you of committing any sin, whereby you grieve the Holy Spirit of God? Is it on this account that he is departed from you, and that joy and peace are departed with him? And how can you expect they should return, till you put away the accursed thing? "Let the wicked forsake his way," "cleanse your hands, ye sinners;" "put away the evil of your doings;" so shall your "light break out of obscurity:" the Lord will return and "abundantly pardon."
3. If, upon the closest search, you can find no sin of commission which causes the cloud upon your soul, inquire next, if there be not some sin of omission which separates between God and you.

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

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

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

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

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

If the guilt of any unrepented sin remain on our soul, it cannot be but you will remain in darkness,
till, having been renewed by repentance, you are again washed by faith in the “fountain opened for sin and uncleanness.”

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

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

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

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

11. A fourth text (to mention no more) which has been frequently cited in proof of the same doctrine, is 1 Peter 4:12: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.” But this is full as foreign to the point as the preceding. The text, literally rendered, runs thus: “Beloved, wonder not at the burning which is among you, which is for your trial.” Now, however, this may be accommodated to inward trials, in a secondary sense; yet, primarily, it doubtless refers to martyrdom, and the sufferings connected with it. Neither, therefore, is this text
anything at all to the purpose for which it is cited. And we may challenge all men to bring one text, either from the Old or New Testament, which is any more to the purpose than this.

12. “But is not darkness much more profitable for the soul than light? Is not the work of God in the heart most swiftly and effectually carried on during a state of inward suffering? Is not a believer more swiftly and thoroughly purified by sorrow, than by joy? -- by anguish, and pain, and distress, and spiritual martyrdoms, than by continual peace?” So the Mystics teach; so it is written in their books; but not in the oracles of God. The Scripture nowhere says, that the absence of God best perfects his work in the heart! Rather, his presence, and a clear communion with the Father and the Son: A strong consciousness of this will do more an hour, than his absence in an age. Joy in the Holy Ghost will far more effectually purify the soul than the want of that joy; and the peace of God is the best means of refining the soul from the dross of earthly affections. Away then with the idle conceit, that the kingdom of God is divided against itself; that the peace of God, and joy in the Holy Ghost, are obstructive of righteousness; and that we are saved, not by faith, but by unbelief; not by hope, but by despair!

13. So long as men dream thus, they may well walk in darkness: Nor can the effect cease, till the cause is removed. But yet we must not imagine it will immediately cease, even when the cause is no more. When either ignorance or sin has caused darkness, one or the other may be removed, and yet the light which was obstructed thereby may not immediately return. As it is the free gift of God, he may restore it, sooner or later, as it pleases him. In the case of sin, we cannot reasonably expect that it should immediately return. The sin began before the punishment, which may, therefore, justly remain after the sin is at an end. And even in the natural course of things, though a wound cannot be healed while the dart is sticking in the flesh; yet neither is it healed as soon as that is drawn out, but soreness and pain may remain long after.

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

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

John Wesley
SERMON 47

(text from the 1872 edition)

HEAVINESS THROUGH MANIFOLD TEMPTATIONS

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

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

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

I. What manner of persons those were to whom the Apostle says, “Ye are in heaviness.”

II. What kind of heaviness they were in:

III. What were the causes: and,

IV. What were the ends of it. I shall conclude with some inferences.

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

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

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

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

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

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

II.

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

2. It is probable our translators rendered it heaviness (though a less common word,) to denote two things: First, the degree, and next, the continuance, of it. It does indeed, seem that it is not a slight or inconsiderable degree of grief which is here spoken of; but such as makes a strong impression upon, and sinks deep into, the soul. Neither does this appear to be a transient sorrow, such as passes away in an hour; but rather, such as, having taken fast hold of the heart, is not presently shaken off, but continues for some time, as a settled temper, rather than a passion, -- even in them that have living faith in Christ, and the genuine love of God in their hearts.

3. Even in these, this heaviness may sometimes be so deep as to overshadow the whole soul; to give a colour, as it were, to all the affections; such as will appear in the whole behavior. It may likewise have an influence over the body; particularly in those that are either of a naturally weak constitution, or weakened by some accidental disorder, especially of the nervous kind. In many cases, we find “the corruptible body presses down the soul.” In this, the soul rather presses down the body, and weakens it more and more. Nay, I will not say that deep and lasting sorrow of heart may not sometimes weaken a strong constitution, and lay the foundation of such bodily disorders as are not easily removed: And yet, all this may consist with a measure of that faith which still worketh by love.

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

III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. One more cause of heaviness is mentioned by many of those who are termed Mystick authors.

And the notion has crept in, I know not how, even among plain people who have no acquaintance with them. I cannot better explain this, than in the words of a late writer, who relates this as her own experience: -- “I continued so happy in my Beloved, that, although I should have been forced to live a vagabond in a desert, I should have found no difficulty in it. This state had not lasted long, when, in effect, I found myself led into a desert. I found myself in a forlorn condition, altogether poor, wretched, and miserable. The proper source of this grief is, the knowledge of ourselves; by which we find that there is an extreme unlikeness between God and us. We see ourselves most opposite to him; and that our inmost soul is entirely corrupted, depraved, and full of all kind of evil and malignity, of the world and the flesh, and all sorts of abominations.” -- From hence it has been inferred, that the knowledge of ourselves, without which we should perish everlastingly, must, even after we have attained justifying faith, occasion the deepest heaviness.

9. But upon this I would observe, (1.) In the preceding paragraph, this writer says, “Hearing I had not a true faith in Christ, I offered myself up to God, and immediately felt his love.” It may be so; and yet it does not appear that this was justification. It is more probable, it was no more than what are usually termed, the “drawings of the Father.” And if so, the heaviness and darkness which followed was no other than conviction of sin; which in the nature of things, must precede that faith whereby we are justified. (2.) Suppose she was justified almost the same moment she was convinced of wanting faith, there was then no time for that gradually-increasing self-knowledge which uses to precede justification: In this case, therefore, it came after, and was probably the more severe, the less it was expected. (3.) It is allowed, there will be a far deeper, a far clearer and fuller knowledge of our inbred sin, of our total corruption by nature, after justification, than ever there was before it. But this need not occasion darkness of soul: I will not say, that it must bring us into heaviness. Were it so, the Apostle would not have used that expression, if need be for there would be an absolute, indispensable need of it, for all that would know themselves; that is, in effect, for all that would know the perfect love of God, and be thereby “made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” But this is by no means the case. On the contrary, God may increase the knowledge of ourselves to any degree, and increase in the same proportion, the knowledge of himself and the experience of his love. And in this case there would be no “desert, no misery, no forlorn condition;” but love, and peace, and joy, gradually sprouting up into everlasting life.

IV.

1. For what ends, then, (which was the Fourth thing to be considered,) does God permit heaviness to befall so many of his children? The Apostle gives us a plain and direct answer to this important question: “That the trial of their faith, which is much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”(1 Pet. 1:7.) There may be an allusion to this, in that well-known passage of the fourth chapter; (Although it primarily relates to quite another thing, as has been already observed:) “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you: But rejoice that ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may likewise rejoice with exceeding great joy.” (1 Pet. 4:12, &c.)

2. Hence we learn, that the first and great end of God’s permitting the temptations which bring heaviness on his children, is the trial of their faith, which is tried by these, even as gold by the fire.

Now we know, gold tried in the fire is purified thereby; is separated from its dross. And so is faith in the fire of temptation; the more it is tried, the more it is purified: -- yea, and not only purified, but also strengthened, confirmed, increased abundantly, by so many more proofs of the wisdom and power, the love and faithfulness, of God. This, then, -- to increase our faith, -- is one gracious end of God’s permitting those manifold temptations.

3. They serve to try, to purify, to confirm, and increase that living hope also, where unto “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath begotten us again of his abundant mercy.” Indeed our hope cannot but increase in the same proportion with our faith. On this foundation it stands: Believing in his name, living by faith in the Son of God, we hope for, we have a confident expectation of, the glory which shall be revealed; And, consequently, whatever strengthens our faith, increases our hope also. At the same time it increases our joy in the Lord, which cannot but attend an hope full of immortality. In this view the Apostle exhorts believers in the other chapter: “Rejoice that ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ.” On this very account, “happy are you; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you:” And hereby ye are enabled, even in the midst of sufferings, to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

4. They rejoice the more, because the trials which increase their faith and hope increase their love also; both their gratitude to God for all his mercies, and their good-will to all mankind. Accordingly, the more deeply sensible they are of the loving-kindness of God their Saviour, the more is their heart inflamed with love to him who “first loved us.” The clearer and stronger evidence they have of the glory that shall be revealed, the more do they love Him who hath purchased it for them, and “given them the earnest” thereof “in their hearts.” And this, the increase of their love, is another end of the temptations permitted to come upon them.

5. Yet another is, their advance in holiness: holiness of heart, and holiness of conversation; the latter naturally resulting from the former; for a good tree will bring forth good fruit. And all inward holiness is the immediate fruit of the faith that worketh by love. By this the blessed
Spirit purifies the heart from pride, self-will, passion; from love of the world, from foolish and hurtful desires, from vile and vain affections. Beside that, sanctified afflictions have, through the grace of God, an immediate and direct tendency to holiness. Through the operation of his Spirit, they humble, more and more, and abuse the soul before God. They calm and meeken our turbulent spirit, tame the fierceness of our nature, soften our obstinacy and self-will, crucify us to the world, and bring us to expect all our strength from, and to seek all our happiness in, God.

6. And all these terminate in that great end, that our faith, hope, love, and holiness “may be found,” if it doth not yet appear, “unto praise” from God himself, “and honour” from men and angels, “and glory,” assigned by the great Judge to all that have endured unto the end. And this will be assigned in that awful day to every man, “according to his works;” according to the work which God had wrought in his heart, and the outward works which he has wrought for God; and likewise according to what he had suffered; So that all these trials are unspeakable gain. So many ways do these “light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!”

7. Add to this the advantage which others may receive by seeing our behavior under affliction.

We find by experience, example frequently makes a deeper impression upon us than precept. And what examples have a stronger influence, not only on those who are partakers of like precious faith, but even on them who have not known God, than that of a soul calm and serene in the midst of storms; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; meekly accepting whatever is the will of God, however grievous it may be to nature; saying, in sickness and pain, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” -- in loss or want, “The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!”

V.

1. I am to conclude with some inferences. And, First, how wide is the difference between darkness of soul, and heaviness; which, nevertheless, are so generally confounded with each other, even by experienced Christians! Darkness, or the wilderness-state, implies a total loss of joy in the Holy Ghost; Heaviness does not; in the midst of this we may “rejoice with joy unspeakable.” They that are in darkness have lost the peace of God; They that are in heaviness have not; So far from it, that at the very time “peace,” as well as “grace,” may “be multiplied” unto them. In the former, the love of God is waxed cold, if it be not utterly extinguished; in the latter, it retains its full force, or, rather, increases daily. In these, faith itself, if not totally lost, is, however, grievously decayed: Their evidence and conviction of things not seen, particularly of the pardoning love of God, is not so clear or strong as in time past: and their trust in him is proportionably weakened: Those, though they see him not, yet have a clear, unshaken confidence in God, and an abiding evidence of that love whereby all their sins are blotted out. So that as long as we can distinguish faith from unbelief, hope from despair, peace from war, the love of God from the love of the world, we may infallibly distinguish heaviness from darkness!

2. We may learn from hence, Secondly, that there may be need of heaviness, but there can be no need of darkness. There may be need of our being in “heaviness for a season,” in order to the ends above recited; at least, in this sense, as it is a natural result of those “manifold temptations” which are needful to try and increase our faith, to confirm, and enlarge our hope, to purify our heart from all unholy tempers, and to perfect us in love. And, by consequence, they are needful in order to brighten our crown, and add to our eternal weight of glory. But we cannot say, that darkness is needful in order to any of these ends. It is no way conducive to them: The loss of faith, hope, love, is surely neither conducive to holiness, nor to the increase of that reward in heaven which will be in proportion to our holiness on earth.

3. From the Apostle’s manner of speaking we may gather. Thirdly, that even heaviness is not always needful. “Now, for a season, if need be;” So it is not needful for all persons; nor for any person at all times. God is able, he has both power and wisdom, to work, when he pleases, the same work of grace in any soul, by other means. And in some instances he does so; he causes those whom he pleaseth him to go on from strength to strength, even till they “perfect holiness in his fear, with scarce any heaviness at all;” as having an absolute power over the heart of man, and moving all the springs of it at his pleasure. But these cases are rare: God generally sees good to try “acceptable men in the furnace of affliction.” So that manifold temptations and heaviness, more or less, are usually the portion of his dearest children.

4. We ought, therefore, Lastly, to watch and pray, and use our utmost endeavours to avoid falling into darkness. But we need not be solicitous how to avoid so much as how to improve by heaviness.

Our great care should be, so to behave ourselves under it, so to wait upon the Lord therein, that it may fully answer all the design of his love, in permitting it to come upon us; that it may be a means of increasing our faith, of confirming our hope, of perfecting us in all holiness. Whenever it comes, let us have an eye to these gracious ends for which it is permitted, and use all diligence that we may not make void the counsel of God against ourselves. Let us earnestly work together with him, by the grace which he is continually giving us, in “purifying ourselves from all pollution, both of flesh and spirit,” and daily growing in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, till we are received into his everlasting kingdom!

John Wesley

SERMON 49

THE CURE OF EVIL-SPEAKING

“If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he will not hear them, tell it to the Church. But if he does not hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Matt. 18:15-17

1. “Speak evil of no man,” says the great Apostle: -- As plain a command as, “Thou shalt do no murder.” But who, even among Christians, regards this command? Yea, how few are there that so much as understand it! What is evil-speaking? It is not, as some suppose, the same with lying or slanderling. All a man says may be as true as the Bible; and yet the saying of it is evil-speaking. For evil-speaking is neither more nor less than speaking evil of an absent person; relating something evil, which was really done or said by one that is not present when it is related. Suppose, having seen a man drunk, or heard him curse or swear, I tell this when he is absent; it is evil-speaking. In our language this is also, by an extremely proper name, termed backbiting. Nor is there any material difference between this and what we usually style tale-bearing. If the tale be delivered in a soft and quiet manner (perhaps with expressions of good-will to the person, and of hope that things may not be quite so bad,) then we call it whispering. But in whatever manner it be done, the thing is the same; -- the same in substance, if not in circumstance. Still it is evil-speaking; still this command, “Speak evil of no man,” is trampled under foot; if we relate to another the fault of a third person, when he is not present to answer for himself.

2. And how extremely common is this sin, among all orders and degrees of men! How do high and low, rich and poor, wise and foolish, learned and unlearned, run into it continually! Persons who differ from each other in all things else, nevertheless agree in this. How few are there that can testify before God, “I am clear in this matter; I have always set a watch before my mouth, and kept the door of my lips!” What conversation do you hear, of any considerable length, whereof evil-speaking is not one ingredient? And that even among persons who, in the general, have the fear of God before their eyes, and do really desire to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.

3. And the very commonness of this sin makes it difficult to be avoided. As we are encompassed with it on every side, so, if we are not deeply sensible of the danger, and continually guarding against it, we are liable
to be carried away by the torrent. In this instance, almost the whole of mankind is, as it were, in a conspiracy against us. And their example steals upon us, we know not how; so that we insensibly slide into the imitation of it. Besides, it is recommended from within as well as from without. There is scarce any wrong temper in the mind of man, which may not be occasionally gratified by it, and consequently incline us to it. It gratifies our pride, to relate those faults of others whereof we think ourselves not to be guilty. Anger, resentment, and all unkind tempers, are indulged by speaking against those with whom we are displeased; and, in many cases, by reciting the sins of their neighbors, men indulge their own foolish and hurtful desires.

4. Evil-speaking is the more difficult to be avoided, because it frequently attacks us in disguise.

We speak thus out of a noble, generous (it is well if we do not say,) holy indignation, against these vile creatures! We commit sin from mere hatred of sin! We serve the devil out of pure zeal for God! It is merely in order to punish the wicked that we run into this wickedness. “So do the passions” (as one speaks) “all justify themselves,” and palm sin upon us under the veil of holiness!

5. But is there no way to avoid the snare? Unquestionably there is. Our blessed Lord has marked out a plain way for His followers, in the words above recited. None, who warily and steadily walk in this path, will ever fall into evil-speaking. This rule is either an infallible preventive, or a certain cure of it. In the preceding verses, our Lord had said, “Woe to the world, because of offences.” - unspeakable misery will arise in the world from this baleful fountain: (Offences are all things whereby anyone is turned out of, or hindered in, the ways of God): “For it must be that offenses come,” -- Such is the nature of things; such the wickedness, folly, and weakness of mankind: “But woe to that man,” -- miserable is that man, “by whom the offense cometh.” “Wherefore if thy hand, thy foot, thine eye, cause thee to offend,” -- if the most dear enjoyment, the most beloved and useful person, turn thee out of or hinder thee in the way, “pluck it out,” -- cut them off, and cast them from thee. But how can we avoid giving offense to some, and being offended at others? Especially, suppose they are quite in the wrong, and we see it with our own eyes? Our Lord here teaches us how: He lays down a sure method of avoiding offenses and evil-speaking together. “If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him of his fault, between thee and him alone: If he will hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he will not hear them, tell it to the church: But if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

I.

1. First. “If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him of his fault, between thee and him alone.” The most literal way of following this first rule, where it is practicable, is the best: Therefore, if thou seest with thine own eyes a brother, a fellow Christian, commit undeniable sin, or hearst it with thine own ears, so that it is impossible for thee to doubt the fact, then thy part is plain: Take the very first opportunity of going to him; and, if thou canst have access, “tell him of his fault between thee and him alone.” Indeed, great care is to be taken that this is done in a right spirit, and in a right manner. The success of a reproof greatly depends on the spirit wherein it is given. Be not, therefore, wanting in earnest prayer to God, that it may be given in a lowly spirit; with a deep, piercing conviction, that it is God alone who maketh thee to differ; and that if any good be done by what is now spoken, God doeth it himself. Pray that he would guard thy heart, enlighten thy mind, and direct thy tongue to such words as he may please to bless. See that thou speak in a meek as well as a lowly spirit; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” If he be “overtaken in a fault,” he can no otherwise be restored, than “in the spirit of meekness.” If he opposes the truth, yet he cannot be brought to the knowledge thereof, but by gentleness. Still speak in a spirit of tender love, “which many waters cannot quench.” If love is not conquered, it conquers all things. Who can tell the force of love?

Love can bow down the stubborn neck,

The stone to flesh convert;
Soften, and melt, and pierce and break
An adamantine heart.

Confirm, then, your love toward him, and you will thereby “heap coals of fire upon his head.”

2. But see that the manner also wherein you speak be according to the Gospel of Christ. Avoid everything in look, gesture, word, and tone of voice, that savors of pride or self-sufficiency.

Studiously avoid everything magisterial or dogmatical, everything that looks like arrogance or assuming. Beware of the most distant approach to disdain, overbearing, or contempt. With equal care avoid all appearance of anger; and though you use great plainness of speech, yet let there be no reproach, no railing accusation, no token of any warmth but that of love. Above all, let there be no shadow of hate or ill-will, no bitterness or sourness of expression; but use the air and language of sweetness, as well as gentleness, that all may appear to flow from love in the heart. And yet this sweetness need not hinder your speaking in the most serious and solemn manner; as far as may be, in the very words of the oracles of God (for there are none like them,) and as under the eye of Him who is coming to judge the quick and dead.

3. If you have not an opportunity of speaking to him in person, or cannot have access, you may do it by a messenger; by a common friend, in whose prudence, as well as uprightness, you can thoroughly confide. Such a person, speaking in your name, and in the spirit and manner above described, may answer the same end, and, in a good degree, supply your lack of service. Only beware you do not feign the want of opportunity, in order to shun the cross; neither take it for granted that you cannot have access, without ever making the trial. Whenever you can speak in your own person, it is far better. But you should rather do it by another, than not at all: This way is better than none.

4. But what, if you can neither speak yourself, nor find such a messenger as you can confide in? If this is really the case, it then only remains to write. And then may be some circumstances which make this the most advisable way of speaking. One of these circumstances is, when the person with whom we have to do is of so warm and impetuous a temper as does not easily bear reproof, especially from an equal or inferior. But it may be so introduced and softened in writing as to make it far more tolerable. Besides, many will read the very same words, which they could not bear to hear. It does not give so violent a shock to their pride, nor so sensibly touch their honor. And suppose it makes little impression at first, they will, perhaps, give it a second reading, and, upon farther consideration, lay to heart what before they disregarded. If you add your name, this is nearly the same thing as going to him, and speaking in person. And this should always be done, unless it be rendered improper by some very particular reason.

5. It should be well observed, not only that this is a step which our Lord absolutely commands us to take, but that he commands us to take this step first, before we attempt any other. No alternative is allowed, no choice of anything else: This is the way; walk thou in it. It is true, he enjoins us, if need require, to take two other steps; but they are to be taken successively after this step, and neither of them before it: Much less are we to take any other step, either before or beside this. To do anything else, or not to do this, is, therefore, equally inexusable.

6. Do not think to excuse yourself for taking an entirely different step, by saying, “Why, I did not speak to anyone, till I was so burdened that I could not refrain.” You was burdened! It was no wonder you should, unless your conscience was seared; for you was under the guilt of sin, of disobeying a plain commandment of God! You ought immediately to have gone, and told “your brother of his fault between you and him alone.” If you did not, how should you be other than burdened (unless your heart was utterly hardened,) while you was trampling the command of God under foot, and “hating your brother in your heart!” And what a way have you found to unburden yourself? God reproves you for a sin of omission, for not telling your brother of his fault; and you comfort yourself under His reproof by a sin of commission, by telling your brother’s fault to another person! Ease bought by sin is a dear purchase!
1. That we may be thoroughly instructed in this weighty affair, our Lord has given us a still farther direction: “If he will not hear them,” then, and not till then, “tell it to the church.” This is the third step. All the question is, how this word, “the church,” is here to be understood. But the very nature of the thing will determine this beyond all reasonable doubt. You cannot tell it to the national Church, the whole body of men termed “the Church of England.” Neither would it answer any Christian end if you could; this, therefore, is not the meaning of the word. Neither can you tell it to that whole body of people in England with whom you have a more immediate connection. Nor, indeed, would this answer any good end: The word, therefore, is not to be understood thus. It would not answer any valuable end to tell the faults of every particular member to the church (if you would so term it,) the congregation or society, united together in London. It remains that you tell it to the elder or elders of the church, to those who are overseers of that flock of Christ to which you both belong, who watch over yours and his soul, “as they that must give account.” And this should be done, if it conveniently can, in the presence of the person concerned, and, though plainly, yet with all the tenderness and love which the nature of the thing will admit. It properly belongs to their office, to determine concerning the behavior of those under their care, and to rebuke, according to the demerit of the offense, “with all authority.” When, therefore, you have done this, you have done all which the Word of God, or the law of love, requireth of you: You are not now partaker of his sin; but if he perish, his blood is on his own head.

2. Here, also, let it be observed, that this, and no other, is the third step which we are to take; and that we are to take it in its order after the other two; not before the second, much less the first, unless in some very particular circumstance. Indeed, in one case, the second step may coincide with this: They may be, in a manner, one and the same. The elder or elders of the church may be so connected with the offending brother, that they may set aside the necessity, and supply the place, of the one or two witnesses; so that it may suffice to tell it to them, after you have told it to your brother, “between you and him alone.”

3. When you have done this, you have delivered your own soul. “If he will not hear the church,” if he persist in his sin, “let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.” You are under no obligation to think of him any more; only when you commend him to God in prayer. You need not speak of him any more, but leave him to his own Master. Indeed, you still owe to him, as to all other heathens, earnest, tender goodwill. You owe him courtesy, and, as occasion offers, all the offices of humanity. But have no friendship, no familiarity with him; no other intercourse than with an open Heathen.

4. But if this be the rule by which Christians walk, which is the land where Christians live? A few you may possibly find scattered up and down, who make a conscience of observing it. But how very few! How thinly scattered upon the face of the earth! And where is there any body of men that universally walk thereby? Can we find them in Europe? Or, to go no farther, in Great Britain or Ireland? I fear not: I fear we may search these kingdoms throughout, and yet search in vain. Alas for the Christian world! Alas for Protestants, for Reformed Christians! O, “who will rise up with me against the wicked?” “Who will take God’s part against the evil-speakers?” Art thou the man? By the grace of God, wilt thou be one who art not carried away by the torrent? Art thou fully determined, God being thy helper, from this very hour to set a watch, a continual “watch, before thy mouth, and keep the door of thy lips?” From this hour wilt thou walk by this rule, “Speaking evil of no man?” If thou seest thy brother do evil, wilt thou “tell him of his fault between thee and him alone?” Afterwards, “take one or two witnesses;” and then

I trust in God, you will have no ease, but will be burdened so much the more, till you “go to your brother and tell him,” and no one else.

7. I know but of one exception to this rule: There may be a peculiar case, only that we are authorized to relate the evil another has done, to those whom we desire to bear a part with us in this great instance of brotherly love. But let us have a care how we relate it to any other person, till both these steps have been taken. If we neglect to take these, or if we take any others, what wonder if we are burdened still? For we are sinners against God, and against our neighbor; and how fairly soever we may color it, yet, if we have any conscience, our sin will find us out, and bring a burden upon our soul.

II.

1. But what, “if he will not hear?” If he repay evil for good? If he be enraged rather than convinced? What, if he hear to no purpose, and go on still in the evil of his way? We must expect this will frequently be the case; the mildest and tenderest reproof will have no effect; but the blessing we wished for another will return into our own bosom. And what are we to do then? Our Lord has given us a clear and full direction. Then “take with thee one or two more:” This is the second step.

Take one or two whom you know to be of a loving spirit, lovers of God and of their neighbor. See, likewise, that they be of a lowly spirit, and “clothed with humility.” Let them also be such as are meek and gentle, patient and longsuffering; not apt to “return evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.” Let them be men of understanding, such as are endued with wisdom from above; and men unbiased, free from partiality, free from prejudice of any kind. Care should likewise be taken, that both the persons and their characters be well known to him: And let those that are acceptable to him be chosen preferable to any others.

2. Love will dictate the manner wherein they should proceed, according to the nature of the case.

Nor can any one particular manner be prescribed for all cases. But perhaps, in general, one might advise, before they enter upon the thing itself, let them mildly and affectionately declare that they have no anger or prejudice toward him, and that it is merely from a principle of goodwill that they now come, or at all concern themselves with his affairs. To make this the more apparent, they might then calmly attend to your repetition of your former conversation with him, and to what he said in his own defense, before they attempted to determine anything. After this they would be better able to judge in what manner to proceed, “that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word might be established;” that whatever you have said may have its full force by the additional weight of their authority.

3. In order to this, may they not, (1.) Briefly repeat what you spoke, and what he answered? (2.) Enlarge upon, open, and confirm the reasons which you had given? (3.) Give weight to your reproof, showing how just, how kind, and how seasonable it was? And, lastly, enforce the step.

4. With regard to this, as well as the preceding rule, we may observe that our Lord gives us no choice, leaves us no alternative, but expressly commands us to do this, and nothing else in the place of it. He likewise directs us when to do this; neither sooner nor later; namely, after we have taken the first, and before we have taken the third step. It is then only that we are authorized to relate the evil another has done, to those
only “tell it to the church?” If this be the full purpose of thy heart, then
learn one lesson well, “Hear evil of no man.” If there were no hearers,
there would be no speakers, of evil. And is not (according to the vulgar
proverb) the receiver as bad as the thief? If, then, any begin to speak
evil in thy hearing, check him immediately. Refuse to hear the voice of
the charmer, charm he never so sweetly; let him use ever so soft a
manner, so mild an accent, ever so many professions of goodwill for
him whom he is stabbing in the dark, whom he smiteth under the fifth
rib! Resolutely refuse to hear, though the whisperer complain of being
“burdened till he speak.” Burdened! Thou fool! Dost thou trouv work
thy cursed secret, as a woman travaileth with child? Go, then, and be
delivered of thy burden in the way the Lord hath ordained! First, “go
and tell thy brother of his fault between thee and him alone.” next,
“take with thee one or two” common friends, and tell him in their
presence: If neither of these steps take effect, then “tell it to the church.”
But, at the peril of thy soul, tell it to no one else, either before or after,
unless in that one exempt case, when it is absolutely needful to preserve
the innocent! Why shouldst thou burden another as well as thyself, by
making him partaker of thy sin?

5. O that all you who bear the reproach of Christ, who are in derision
called Methodists, would set an example to the Christian world, so
called, at least in this one instance! Put ye away evil-speaking, talebearing, whispering: Let none of them proceed out of your mouth!
See that you “speak evil of no man;” of the absent, nothing but good. If
ye must be distinguished, whether ye will or no, let this be the
distinguishing mark of a Methodist: “He censures no man behind his
back.” By this fruit ye may know him.” What a blessed effect of this self-
denial should we quickly feel in our hearts! How would our “peace flow
as a river,” when we thus “followed peace with all men!” How would
the love of God abound in our own souls, while we thus confirmed our
love to our brethren!

And what an effect would it have on all that were united together in
the name of the Lord Jesus! How would brotherly love continually
increase, when this grand hindrance of it was removed! All the
members of Christ’s mystical body would then naturally care for each
other. “If one member suffered, all would suffer with it; if one was
honored, all would rejoice with it;” and everyone would love his
brother “with a pure heart fervently.” Nor is this all: But what an effect
might this have, even on the wild unthinking world! How soon would
they descry in us, what they could not find among all the thousands of
their brethren, and cry (as Julian the Apostate to his heathen courtiers,)
“See how these Christians love one another!” By this chiefly would
God convince the world, and prepare them also for His kingdom; as we
may easily learn from those remarkable words in our Lord’s last,
solemn prayer: “I pray for them who will believe in me, that they all
may become one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee: that the world may
believe that thou hast sent me!” (John 17:21) The Lord hasten the time!
The Lord enable us thus to love one another, not only “in word and in
tongue, but in deed and in truth,” even as Christ hath loved us.

John Wesley
SERMON 50
(text from the 1872 edition)

THE USE OF MONEY

“I say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of
unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into the

1. Our Lord, having finished the beautiful parable of the Prodigal Son,
which he had particularly addressed to those who murmured at his
receiving publicans and sinners, adds another relation of a different
kind, addressed rather to the children of God. “He said unto his
disciples,” not so much to the scribes and Pharisees to whom he had
been speaking before, — “There was a certain rich man, who had
a steward, and he was accused to him of wasting his goods. And calling
him, he said, Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou canst be no
longer steward.” (Luke 16:1, 2.) After reciting the method which the
bad steward used to provide against the day of necessity, our Saviour
adds, “His Lord commended the unjust steward” namely, in this respect,
that he used timely precaution; and subjoins this weighty reflection,
“The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the
children of light.” (Luke 16:8;) Those who seek no other portion than
this world “are wiser” (not absolutely; for they are one and all the
veriest fools, the most egregious madmen under heaven; but, “in their
generation,” in their own way; they are more consistent with
themselves; they are truer to their acknowledged principles; they more
steadily pursue their end) “than the children of light;” — than they who
see “the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Then
follow the words above recited: “And I,” — the only-begotten Son of
God, the Creator, Lord, and Possessor of heaven and earth and all that
is therein; the Judge of all, to whom ye are to “give an account of your
stewardship,” when ye “can be no longer stewards;” — “I say unto you,” —
learn in this respect, even of the unjust steward, — “make yourselves
friends,” by wise, timely precaution, “of the mammon of
unrighteousness.” “Mammon” means riches or money. It is termed “the
mammon of unrighteousness,” because of the unrighteous manner
wherein it frequently procured, and wherein even that which was
honestly procured is generally employed. “Make yourselves friends” of
this, by doing all possible good, particularly to the children of God;
“that, when ye fail,” — when ye return to dust, when ye have no more
place under the sun, — those of them who are gone before “may receive
you,” may welcome you, into the “everlasting habitations.”

2. An excellent branch of Christian wisdom is here inculcated by our Lord
on all his followers, namely, the right use of money — a subject largely
spoken of, after their manner, by men of the world; but not sufficiently
considered by those whom God hath chosen out of the world. These,
generally, do not consider, as the importance of the subject requires,
the use of this excellent talent.

Neither do they understand how to employ it to the greatest advantage;
The introduction of which into the world is one admirable instance of
the wise and gracious providence of God. It has, indeed, been the
manner of poets, orators, and philosophers, in almost all ages and
nations, to rail at this, as the grand corrupter of the world, the bane of
virtue, the pest of human society. Hence nothing so commonly heard,
as:

Nocens ferrum, ferroque nocentius aurum:
And gold, more mischievous than keenest steel.
Hence the lamentable complaint,
Effodiuntur opes, irritamenta malorum.
Wealth is dug up, incentive to all ill.
Nay, one celebrated writer gravely exhorts his countrymen, in order to
banish all vice at once, to “throw all their money into the sea:"

. . . in mare proximum [ . . .]

Summi materiem mali?
But is not all this mere empty rant? Is there any solid reason therein?
By no means. For, let the world be as corrupt as it will, is gold or silver
to blame? “The love of money,” we know, “is the root of all evil;” but
not the thing itself. The fault does not lie in the money, but in them that
use it. It may be used ill: and what may not? But it may likewise be
used well: It is full as applicable to the best, as to the worst uses. It is of
unspeakable service to all civilized nations, in all the common affairs of
life: It is a most compendious instrument of transacting all manner of
business, and (if we use it according to Christian wisdom) of doing all
manner of good. It is true, were man in a state of innocence, or were all
men “filled with the Holy Ghost;” so that, like the infant Church at
Jerusalem, “no man counted anything he had his own,” but
“distribution was made to everyone as he had need,” the use of it would be
superseded; as we cannot conceive there is anything of the kind
among the inhabitants of heaven. But, in the present state of mankind,
it is an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of
his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for
the naked: It gives to the traveller and the stranger where to lay his
head. By it we may supply the place of an husband to the widow, and of
a father to the fatherless. We maybe a defence for the oppressed, a
means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it may be as
eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of
3. It is therefore of the highest concern that all who fear God know how to employ this valuable talent; that they be instructed how it may answer these glorious ends, and in the highest degree. And, perhaps, all the instructions which are necessary for this may be reduced to three plain rules, by the exact observance whereof we may approve ourselves faithful stewards of the "mammon of unrighteousness."

I.

1. The first of these is (he that heareth, let him understand!) “Gain all you can.” Here we may speak like the children of the world: We meet them on their own ground. And it is our bounden duty to do this: We ought to gain all we can gain, without buying gold too dear, without paying more for it than it is worth. But this it is certain we ought not to do; we ought not to gain money at the expense of life, nor (which is in effect the same thing) at the expense of our health. Therefore, no gain whatsoever should induce us to enter into, or to continue in, any employ, which is of such a kind, or is attended with so hard or so long labour, as to impair our constitution. Neither should we begin or continue in any business which necessarily deprives us of proper seasons for food and sleep, in such a proportion as our nature requires. Indeed, there is a great difference here. Some employments are absolutely and totally unhealthy; as those which imply the dealing much with arsenic, or other equally hurtful minerals, or the breathing an air tainted with steams of melting lead, which must at length destroy the firmest constitution. Others may not be absolutely unhealthy, but only to persons of a weak constitution. Such are those which require many hours to be spent in writing; especially if a person write sitting, and lean upon his stomach, or remain long in an uneasy posture. But whatever it is which reason or experience shows to be destructive of health or strength, that we may not submit to; seeing "the life is more" valuable "than meat, and the body than raiment." And if we are already engaged in such an employ, we should exchange it as soon as possible for some which, if it lessen our gain, will, however not lessen our health.

2. We are, Secondly, to gain all we can without hurting our mind any more than our body. For neither may we hurt this. We must preserve, at all events, the spirit of a healthful mind. Therefore we may not engage or continue in any sinful trade, any that is contrary to the law of God, or of our country. Such are all that necessarily imply our robbing or defrauding the king of his lawful customs.

For it is at least as sinful to defraud the king of his right, as to rob our fellow subjects. And the king has full as much right, to his customs as we have to our houses and apparel. Other businesses there are, which however innocent in themselves, cannot be followed with innocence now at least, not in England; such, for instance, as will not afford a competent maintenance without cheating or lying, or conformity to some custom which not consistent with a good conscience: These, likewise, are sacredly to be avoided, whatever gain they may be admitted with provided we follow the custom of the trade; for to gain money we must not lose our souls. There are yet others which many pursue with perfect innocence, without hurting either their body or mind; And yet perhaps you cannot: Either they may entangle you in that company which would destroy your soul; and by repeated experiments it may appear that you cannot separate the one from the other; or there may be an idiosyncrasy, -- a peculiarity in your constitution of soul, (as there is in the bodily constitution of many,) by reason whereof that employment is deadly to you, which another may safely follow. So I am convinced, from many experiments, I could not study, to any degree of perfection, either mathematics, arithmetic, or algebra, without being a Deist, if not an Atheist: And yet others may study them all their lives without sustaining any inconvenience. None therefore can here determine for another; but every man must judge for himself, and abstain from whatever he in particular finds to be hurtful to his soul.

3. We are, Thirdly, to gain all we can without hurting our neighbour. But this we may not, cannot do, if we love our neighbour as ourselves. We cannot, if we love everyone as ourselves, hurt anyone in his substance. We cannot devour the increase of his lands, and perhaps the lands and houses themselves, by gaming, by overgrown bills (whether on account of physic, or law, or anything else,) or by requiring or taking such interest as even the laws of our country forbid. Hereby all pawn-broking is excluded: Seeing, whatever good we might do thereby, all unprejudiced men see with grief to be abundantly overbalanced by the evil. And if it were otherwise, yet we are not allowed to "do evil that good may come." We cannot, consistent with brotherly love, sell our goods below the market price; we cannot study to ruin our neighbour’s trade, in order to advance our own; much less can we entice away or receive any of his servants or workmen whom he has need of. None can gain by swallowing up his neighbour’s substance, without gaining the damnation of hell!

4. Neither may we gain by hurting our neighbour in his body. Therefore we may not sell anything which tends to impair health. Such is, eminently, all that liquid fire, commonly called drams or spirituous liquors. It is true, these may have a place in medicine; they may be of use in some bodily disorders; although there would rarely be occasion for them were it not for the unskillfulness of the practitioner. Therefore, such as to prepare and sell them only for this end may keep their conscience clear. But who are they? Who prepare and sell them only for this end? Do you know ten such distillers in England? Then excuse these. But all who sell them in the common way, to any that will buy, are poisoners general. They murder His Majesty’s subjects by wholesale, neither does their eye pity or spare. They drive them to hell like sheep. And what is their gain? Is it not the blood of these men? Who then would envy their large estates and sumptuous palaces? A curse is in the midst of them: The curse of God cleaves to the stones, the timber, the furniture of them. The curse of God is in their gardens, their walks, their groves; a fire that burns to the nethermost hell! Blood, blood is there: The foundation, the floor, the walls, the roof are stained with blood! And canst thou hope, O thou man of blood, though thou art “clothed in scarlet and fine linen, and farest sumptuously every day;” canst thou hope to deliver down thy fields of blood to the third generation? Not so; for there is a God in heaven: Therefore, thy name shall soon be rooted out. Like as those whom thou hast destroyed, body and soul, “thy memorial shall perish with thee!”

5. And are not they partakers of the same guilt, though in a lower degree, whether Surgeons, Apothecaries, or Physicians, who play with the lives or health of men, to enlarge their own gain? Who purposely lengthen the pain or disease which they are able to remove speedily? Who protract the cure of their patient’s body in order to plunder his substance? Can any man be clear before God who does not shorten every disorder “as much as he can,” and remove all sickness and pain “as soon as he can?” He cannot: For nothing can be more clear than that he does not “love his neighbour as himself;” than that he does not “do unto others as he would they should do unto himself.”

6. This is dear-bought gain. And so is whatever is procured by hurting our neighbour in his soul; by ministering, suppose, either directly or indirectly, to his unchastity, or intemperance, which certainly none can do, who has any fear of God, or any real desire of pleasing Him. It nearly concerns all those to consider this, who have anything to do with taverns, victualling-houses, opera-houses, play-houses, or any other places of public, fashionale diversion. If these profit the souls of men, you are clear; your employment is good, and your gain innocent; but if they are either sinful in themselves, or natural inlets to sin of various kinds, then, it is to be feared, you have a sad account to make. O beware, lest God say in that day, “These have perished in their iniquity, but their blood do I require at thy hands!”

7. These cautions and restrictions being observed, it is the bounden duty of all who are engaged in worldly business to observe that first and great rule of Christian wisdom with respect to money, “Gain all you can.” Gain all you can by honest industry. Use all possible diligence in your calling. Lose no time. If you understand yourself and your relation to God and man, you know you have none to spare. If you understand your particular calling as you ought, you will have no time that hangs upon your hands. Every business will afford some employment sufficient for every day and every hour. That wherein you are placed, if you follow it
in earnest, will leave you no leisure for silly, unprofitable diversions. You have always something better to do, something that will profit you, more or less. And "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Do it as soon as possible: No delay! No putting off from day to day, or from hour to hour! Never leave anything till to-morrow, which you can do to-day. And do it as well as possible. Do not sleep or yawn over it: Put your whole strength to the work. Spare no pains. Let nothing be done by halves, or in a slight and careless manner. Let nothing in your business be left undone if it can be done by labour or patience.

8. Gain all you can, by common sense, by using in your business all the understanding which God has given you. It is amazing to observe, how few do this; how men run on in the same dull track with their forefathers. But whatever they do who know not God, this is no rule for you. It is a shame for a Christian not to improve upon them, in whatever he takes in hand. You should be continually learning, from the experience of others, or from your own experience, reading, and reflection, to do everything you have to do better to-day than you did yesterday. And see that you practise whatever you learn, that you may make the best of all that is in your hands.

II.

1. Having gained all you can, by honest wisdom and unwearied diligence, the second rule of Christian prudence is, "Save all you can." Do not throw the precious talent into the sea: Leave that folly to heathen philosophers. Do not throw it away in idle expenses, which is just the same as throwing it into the sea. Spend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life.

2. Do not waste any part of so precious a talent merely in gratifying the desires of the flesh; in procuring the pleasures of sense of whatever kind; particularly, in enlarging the pleasure of tasting.

I do not mean, avoid gluttony and drunkenness only: An honest heathen would condemn these. But there is a regular, reputable kind of sensuality, an elegant epicurism, which does not immediately disorder the stomach, nor (sensibly, at least) impair the understanding. And yet (to mention no other effects of it now) it cannot be maintained without considerable expense. Cut off all this expense! Despise delicacy and variety, and be content with what plain nature requires.

3. Do not waste any part of so precious a talent merely in gratifying the desire of the eye by superfluous or expensive apparel, or by needless ornaments. Waste no part of it in curiously adorning your houses; in superfluous or expensive furniture; in costly pictures, painting, gilding, books; in elegant rather than useful gardens. Let your neighbours, who know nothing better, do this: "Let the dead bury their dead." But "what is that to thee?" says our Lord: "Follow thou me." Are you willing? Then you are able so to do.

4. Lay out nothing to gratify the pride of life, to gain the admiration or praise of men. This motive of expense is frequently interwoven with one or both of the former. Men are expensive in diet, or apparel, or furniture, not barely to please their appetite, or to gratify their eye, their imagination, but their vanity too. "So long as thou dost well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee." So long as thou art "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fairest sumptuously" every day," no doubt many will applaud thy elegance of taste, thy generosity and hospitality. But do not buy their applause so dear.

Rather be content with the honour that cometh from God.

5. Who would expend anything in gratifying these desires if he considered that to gratify them is to increase them? Nothing can be more certain than this; Daily experience shows, the more they are indulged, they increase the more. Whenever, therefore, you expend anything to please your taste or other senses, you pay so much for sensuality. When you lay out money to please your eye, you give so much for an increase of curiosity, -- for a stronger attachment to these pleasures which perish in the using. While you are purchasing anything which men use to applaud, you are purchasing more vanity. Had you not then enough of vanity, sensuality, curiosity before? Was there need of any addition? And would you pay for it, too? What manner of wisdom is this? Would not the literally throwing your money into the sea be a less mischievous folly?

6. And why should you throw away money upon your children, any more than upon yourself, in delicate food, in gay or costly apparel, in superfluities of any kind? Why should you purchase for them more pride or lust, more vanity, or foolish and hurtful desires? They do not want any more; they have enough already; nature has made ample provision for them: Why should you be at farther expense to increase their temptations and snares, and to pierce them through with more sorrows?

7. Do not leave it to them to throw away. If you have good reason to believe that they would waste what is now in your possession in gratifying and thereby increasing the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life at the peril of theirs and your own soul, do not set these traps in their way. Do not offer your sons or your daughters unto Belial, any more than unto Moloch. Have pity upon them, and remove out of their way what you may easily foresee would increase their sins, and consequently plunge them deeper into everlasting perdition! How amazing then is the infatuation of those parents who think they can never leave their children enough! What! Cannot you leave them enough of arrows, firebrands, and death? Not enough of foolish and hurtful desires? Not enough of pride, lust, ambition vanity? Not enough of everlasting burnings? Poor wretch! Thou fearest where no fear is. Surely both thou and they, when ye are lifting up your eyes in hell, will have enough both of the "worm that never dieth," and of "the fire that never shall be quenched!"

8. "What then would you do, if you was in my case? If you had a considerable fortune to leave?" Whether I would do it or no, I know what I ought to do: This will admit of no reasonable question.

If I had one child, elder or younger, who knew the value of money; one who I believed, would put it to the true use, I should think it my absolute, indispensable duty to leave that child the bulk of my fortune; and to the rest just so much as would enable them to live in the manner they had been accustomed to do. "But what, if all your children were equally ignorant of the true use of money?" I ought then (hard saying! Who can hear it?) to give each what would keep him above want, and to bestow all the rest in such a manner as I judged would be most for the glory of God.

III.

1. But let not any man imagine that he has done anything, barely by going thus far, by "gaining and saving all he can," if he were to stop here. All this is nothing, if a man go not forward, if he does not point all this at a farther end. Nor, indeed, can a man properly be said to save anything, if he only lays it up. You may as well bury your money into the sea, as bury it in the earth. And you may as well bury it in the earth, as in your chest, or in the Bank of England. Not to use, is effectually to throw it away. If, therefore, you would indeed "make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," add the Third rule to the two preceding. Having, First, gained all you can, and, Secondly saved all you can, Then "give all you can."

2. In order to see the ground and reason of this, consider, when the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being, and placed you in this world, he placed you here not as a proprietor, but a steward: As such he entrusted you, for a season, with goods of various kinds; but the sole property of these still rests in him, nor can be alienated from him. As you yourself are not your own, but his, such is, likewise, all that you enjoy. Such is your soul and your body, not your own, but God's. And so is your substance in particular. And he has told you, in the most clear and express terms, how you are to employ it for him, in such a manner, that it may be all an holy sacrifice, acceptable through Christ Jesus. And this light, easy service, he has promised to reward with an eternal weight of glory.

3. The directions which God has given us, touching the use of our worldly substance, may be comprised in the following particulars. If you desire to be a faithful and a wise steward, out of that portion of your Lord's
goods which he has for the present lodged in your hands, but with the right of resuming whenever it pleases him. First, provide things needful for yourself; food to eat, raiment to put on, whatever nature moderately requires for preserving the body in health and strength.

Secondly, provide these for your wife, your children, your servants, or any others who pertain to your household. If when this is done there be an overplus left, then “do good to them that are of the household of faith.” If there be an overplus still, “as you have opportunity, do good unto all men.” In so doing, you give all you can; nay, in a sound sense, all you have: For all that is laid out in this manner is really given to God. You “render unto God the things that are God’s,” not only by what you give to the poor, but also by that which you expend in providing things needful for yourself and your household.

4. If, then, a doubt should at any time arise in your mind concerning what you are going to expend, either on yourself or any part of your family, you have an easy way to remove it. Calmly and seriously inquire, “(1) In expending this, am I acting according to my character? Am I acting herein, not as a proprietor, but as a steward of my Lord’s goods? (2) Am I doing this in obedience to his Word? In what Scripture does he require me so to do? (3) Can I offer up this action, this expense, as a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ? (4.) Have I reason to believe that for this very work I shall have a reward at the resurrection of the just?” You will seldom need anything more to remove any doubt which arises on this head; but by this four-fold consideration you will receive clear light as to the way wherein you should go.

5. If any doubt still remain, you may farther examine yourself by prayer according to those heads of inquiry. Try whether you can say to the Searcher of hearts, your conscience not condemning you, “Lord, thou seest I am going to expend this sum on that food, apparel, furniture. And thou knowest, I act herein with a single eye as a steward of thy goods, expending this portion of them thus in pursuance of the design thou hadst in entrusting me with them. Thou knowest I do this in obedience to the Lord, as thou commandest, and because thou commandest it. Let this, I beseech thee, be an holy sacrifice, acceptable through Jesus Christ! And give me a witness in myself that for this labour of love I shall have a recompense when thou rewardest every man according to his works.” Now if your conscience bear you witness in the Holy Ghost that this prayer is well-pleasing to God, then have you no reason to doubt but that expense is right and good, and such as will never make you ashamed.

6. You see then what it is to “make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;” and by what means you may procure, “that when ye fail they may receive you into the everlasting habitations.” You see the nature and extent of truly Christian prudence so far as it relates to the use of that great talent, money. Gain all you can, without hurting either yourself or your neighbour; in soul or body, by applying hereto with unintermitted diligence, and with all the understanding which God has given you; save all you can, by cutting off every expense which serves only to indulge foolish desire; to gratify either the desire of flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life: waste nothing, living or dying, on sin or folly, whether for yourself or your children; and then, give all you can, or, in other words, give all you have to God. Do not stint yourself, like a Jew rather than a Christian, to this or that proportion, “Render unto God,” not a tenth, not a third, not half, but all that is God’s, be it more or less; by employing all on yourself, your household, the household of faith, and all mankind, in such a manner, that you may give a good account of your stewardship when ye can be no longer stewards; in such a manner as the oracles of God direct, both by general and particular precepts; in such a manner, that whatever ye do may be “a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour to God,” and that every act may be rewarded in that day when the Lord cometh with all his saints.

7. Brethren, can we be either wise or faithful stewards unless we thus manage our Lord’s goods? We cannot, as not only the oracles of God, but our own conscience beareth witness. Then why should we delay? Why should we confer any longer with flesh and blood, or men of the world? Our kingdom, our wisdom is not of this world: Heathen custom is nothing to us. We follow no men any farther than they are followers of Christ. Hear ye him. Yea, to-day, while it is called to-day, hear and obey his voice! At this hour, and from this hour, do his will: Fulfil his word, in this and in all things! I entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, act up to the dignity of your calling! No more sloth! Whosoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might! No more waste! Cut off every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand! No more covetousness! But ye shall know a debtor to his Creator. He is also frequently represented as a servant, which indeed is essential to him as a creature; insomuch that this appellation is given to the Son of God when, in His state of humiliation, he “took upon Him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”

But no character more exactly agrees with the present state of man, than that of a steward. Our blessed Lord frequently represents him as such; and there is a peculiar propriety in the representation.

It is only in one particular respect, namely, as he is a sinner, that he is styled a debtor; and when he is styled a servant, the appellation is general and indeterminate: But a steward is a servant of a particular kind; such a one as man is in all respects. This appellation is exactly expressive of his situation in the present world; specifying what kind of servant he is to God, and what kind of service his Divine Master expects from him.

It may be of use, then, to consider this point thoroughly, and to make our full improvement of it.

In order to this, let us, First, inquire, in what respects we are now God’s stewards. Let us, Secondly, observe, that when he requires our souls of us, we “can be no longer stewards.” It will then only remain, as we may, in the third place, observe, to “give an account of our stewardship.”

I.

1. And, first, we are to inquire, in what respects we are now God’s stewards. We are now indebted to Him for all we have; but although a debtor is obliged to return what he has received, yet until the time of payment comes, he is at liberty to use it as he pleases. It is not so with a steward; he is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his master pleases. He has no right to dispose of anything which is in his hands, but according to the will of his lord. For he is not the proprietor of any of these things, but barely entrusted with them by another; and entrusted on this express condition, -- that he shall dispose of all as his master orders. Now, this is exactly the case of every man, with relation to God. We are not at liberty to use what he has lodged in our hands as we please, but as he pleases, who alone is the possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature. We have no right to dispose of anything we have, but according to His will, seeing we are not proprietors of any of these things; they are all, as our Lord speaks, CNOQWTKC, belonging to another person; nor is anything properly our own, in the land of our pilgrimage. We shall not receive VcyKFKC, our own things, till we come to our own country. Eternal things only are our own: With all these temporal things we are barely entrusted by
another, the Disposer and Lord of all. And he entrusts us with them on this express condition, -- that we use them only as our Master’s goods, and according to the particular directions which he has given us in his Word.

2. On this condition he hath entrusted us with our souls, our bodies, our goods, and whatever other talents we have received: But in order to impress this weighty truth on our hearts, it will be needful to come to particulars.

And, first, God has entrusted us with our soul, an immortal spirit, made in the image of God; together with all the powers and faculties thereof, understanding, imagination, memory, will, and a train of affections, either included in it or closely dependent upon it, -- love and hatred, joy and sorrow, respecting present good and evil; desire and aversion, hope and fear, respecting that which is to come. All these St. Paul seems to include in two words, when he says, “The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds.” Perhaps, indeed, the latter word, PQGOCVC, might rather be rendered thoughts, provided we take that word in its most extensive sense, for every perception of the mind, whether active or passive.

3. Now, of all these, it is certain, we are only stewards. God has entrusted us with these powers and faculties, not that we may employ them according to our own will, but according to the express orders which he has given us; although it is true that, in doing His will, we most effectually secure our own happiness; seeing it is herein only that we can be happy, either in time or in eternity. Thus we are to use our understanding, our imagination, our memory, wholly to the glory of Him that gave them. Thus our will is to be wholly given up to Him, and all our affections to be regulated as he directs. We are to love and hate, to rejoice and grieve, to desire and shun, to hope and fear, according to the rule which he prescribes whose we are, and whom we are to serve in all things. Even our thoughts are not our own, in this sense; they are not at our own disposal; but for every deliberate motion of our mind we are accountable to our great Master.

4. God has, Secondly, entrusted us with our bodies (those exquisitely wrought machines, so “fearrfully and wonderfully made,”) with all the powers and members thereof. He has entrusted us with the organs of sense; of sight, hearing, and the rest: But none of these are given us as our own, to be employed according to our own will. None of these are lent us in such a sense as to leave us at liberty to use them as we please for a season. No: We have received them on these very terms, - that, as long as they abide with us, we should employ them all in that very manner, and no other, which he appoints.

5. It is on the same terms that he has imparted to us that most excellent talent of speech. “Thou hast given me a tongue,” says the ancient writer, “that I may praise Thee therewith.” For this purpose it was given to all the children of men, -- to be employed in glorifying God. Nothing, therefore, is more ungrateful or more absurd, than to think or say, “Our tongues are our own.” That cannot be, unless we have created ourselves, and so are independent on the Most High. Nay, but “it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves;” the manifest consequence is, that he is still Lord over us, in this as in all other respects. It follows, that there is not a word of our tongue for which we are not accountable to Him.

6. To Him we are equally accountable for the use of our hands and feet, and all the members of our body. These are so many talents which are committed to our trust, until the time appointed by the Father. Until then, we have the use of all these; but as stewards, not as proprietors; to the end we should “render them, not as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

7. God has entrusted us, Thirdly, with a portion of worldly goods; with food to eat, raiment to put on, and a place where to lay our head; with not only the necessaries, but the conveniences, of life.

Above all, he has committed to our charge that precious talent which contains all the rest, -- money: Indeed it is unspeakably precious, if we are wise and faithful stewards of it; if we employ every part of it for such purposes as our blessed Lord has commanded us to do.

8. God has entrusted us, Fourthly, with several talents which do not properly come under any of these heads. Such is bodily strength; such are health, a pleasing person, an agreeable address; such are learning and knowledge, in their various degrees, with all the other advantages of education.

Such is the influence which we have over others, whether by their love and esteem of us, or by power; power to do them good or hurt, to help or hinder them in the circumstances of life. Add to these, that invaluable talent of time, with which God entrusts us from moment to moment. Add, lastly, that on which all the rest depend, and without which they would all be curses, not blessings; namely, the grace of God, the power of his Holy Spirit, which alone worketh in us all that is acceptable in his sight.

II.

1. In so many respects are the children of men stewards of the Lord, the Possessor of heaven and earth: So large a portion of His goods, of various kinds, hath he committed to their charge. But it is not for ever, nor indeed for any considerable time: We have this trust reposed in us only during the short, uncertain space that we sojourn here below; only so long as we remain on earth, as this fleeting breath is in our nostrils. The hour is swiftly approaching, it is just at hand, when we “can be no longer stewards!” The moment the body “returns to the dust as it was,” and the spirit to God that gave it,” we bear that character no more; the time of our stewardship is at an end. Part of those goods wherewith we were before entrusted are now come to an end; at least, they are so with regard to us; nor are we longer entrusted with them: And that part which remains can no longer be employed or improved as it was before.

2. Part of what we were entrusted with before is at an end, at least with regard to us. What have we to do, after this life, with food, and raiment, and houses, and earthly possessions? The food of the dead is the dust of the earth; they are clothed only with worms and rottenness. They dwell in the house prepared for all flesh; their lands know them no more: All their worldly goods are delivered into other hands, and they have “no more portion under the sun.”

3. The case is the same with regard to the body. The moment the spirit returns to God, we are no longer stewards of this machine, which is then sown in corruption and dishonour. All the parts and members of which it was composed lie mouldering in the clay. The hands have no longer power to move; the feet have forgot their office; the flesh, sinews, and bones, are all hastening to be dissolved into common dust.

4. Here end also the talents of a mixed nature; our strength, our health, our beauty, our eloquence, and address, our facility of pleasing or persuading, or convincing others. Here end, likewise, all the honours we once enjoyed, all the power which was lodged in our hands, all the influence which we once had over others, either by the love or the esteem which they bore us. Our love, our hatred, our desire, is perished: None regard how we were once affected toward them. They look upon the dead as neither able to help nor hurt them; so that “a living dog is better than a dead lion.”

5. Perhaps a doubt may remain concerning some of the other talents wherewith we are now entrusted, whether they will cease to exist when the body returns to dust or only cease to be improvable. Indeed, there is no doubt but the kind of speech which we now use, by means of these bodily organs, will then be entirely at an end, when those organs are destroyed. It is certain, the tongue will no more occasion any vibrations in the air; neither will the ear convey these tremulous motions to the common sensory. Even the sonus exilis, the low, shrill voice, which the poet supposes to belong to a separate spirit, we cannot allow to have a real being; it is a mere flight of imagination.

Indeed, it cannot be questioned, but separate spirits have some way to communicate their sentiments to each other; but what inhabitant of flesh and blood can explain that way? What we term “speech,” they cannot have: So that we can no longer be stewards of this talent when we are numbered with the dead.

6. It may likewise admit of a doubt, whether our senses will exist, when
the organs of sense are destroyed. Is it not probable, that those of the lower kind will cease – the feeling, the smell, the taste – as they have a more immediate reference to the body, and are chiefly, if not wholly, intended for the preservation of it? But will not some kind of sight remain, although the eye be closed in death? And will there not be something in the soul equivalent to the present sense of hearing? Nay, is it not probable, that these will not only exist in the separate state, but exist in a far greater degree, in a more eminent manner, than now, when the soul, disentangled from its clay, is no longer “a dying spark in a cloudy place;” when it no longer “looks through the windows of the eye and ear;” but rather is all eye, all ear, all sense, in a manner we cannot yet conceive? And have we not a clear proof of the possibility of this, of seeing without the use of the eye, and hearing without the use of the ear? Yea, and earnest of it continually? For does not the soul see, in the clearest manner, when the eye is of no use; namely, in dreams? Does she not then enjoy the faculty of hearing, without any help from the ear? But however this be, certain it is, that neither will our senses, any more than our speech, be entrust us in the manner they are now, when the body lies in the silent grave.

7. How far the knowledge or learning which we have gained by education will then remain, we cannot tell. Solomon indeed says, “There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” But it is evident, these words cannot be understood in an absolute sense. For it is so far from being true that there is no knowledge after we have quitted the body, that the doubt lies on the other side, whether there be any such thing as real knowledge till then; whether it be not a plain sober truth, not a mere poetical fiction, that

All these shadows which for things we take,
Are but the empty dreams, which in death’s sleep we make;

only excepting those things which God Himself has been pleased to reveal to man. I will speak for one. After having sought for truth, with some diligence, for half a century, I am, at this day, hardly sure of anything but what I learn from the Bible. Nay, I positively affirm, I know nothing else so certainly, that I would dare to stake my salvation upon it.

So much, however, we may learn from Solomon’s words, that “there is no” such “knowledge or wisdom in the grave,” as will be of any use to an unhappy spirit; “there is no device” there, whereby he can now improve those talents with which he was once entrusted. For time is no more; the time of our trial for everlasting happiness or misery is past. Our day, the day of man, is over; the day of salvation is ended! Nothing now remains but the “day of the Lord,” ushering in wide, unchangeable eternity!

8. But still, our souls, being incorruptible and immortal, of a nature “little lower than the angels” (even if we are to understand that phrase of our original nature, which may well admit of a doubt,) when our bodies are mouldered into earth, will remain with all their faculties. Our memory, our understanding, will be so far from being destroyed, yea, or impaired, by the dissolution of the body, that, on the contrary, we have reason to believe, they will be inconceivably strengthened. Have we not the clearest reason to believe, that they will then be wholly freed from those defects which now naturally result from the union of the soul with the corruptible body? It is highly probable, that, from the time these are disunited, our memory will let nothing slip; yea, that it will faithfully exhibit everything to our view which was ever committed to it. It is true, that the invisible world is, in Scripture, termed “the land of forgetfulness;” or, as it is still more strongly expressed in the old translation, “the land where all things are forgotten.” They are forgotten, but by whom? Not by the inhabitants of that land, but by the inhabitants of the earth. It is with regard to them that the unseen world is “the land of forgetfulness.” All things therein are too frequently forgotten by these; but not by disembodied spirits. From the time they have put off the earthly tabernacle, we can hardly think they forget anything.

9. In like manner, the understanding will, doubtless, be freed from the defects that are now inseparable from it. For many ages it has been an unquestioned maxim, Humanum est errare et nescire; -- ignorance and mistake are inseparable from human nature. But the whole of this assertion is only true with regard to living men; and holds no longer than while “the corruptible body presses down the soul.” Ignorance, indeed, belongs to every finite understanding (see there is none beside God that knoweth all things;) but not mistake: When the body is laid aside, this also is laid aside, for ever.

10. What then can we say to an ingenious man, who has lately made a discovery, that disembodied spirits have not only no senses (not even sight or hearing,) but no memory or understanding; no thought or perception; not so much as a consciousness of their own existence! That they are in a dead sleep from death to the resurrection! Consangunieus lethi sopor indeed! Such a sleep we may call “a near kinsman of death,” if it be not the same thing. What can we say, but that ingenious men have strange dreams; and these they sometimes mistake for realities?

11. But to return. As the soul will retain its understanding and memory, notwithstanding the dissolution of the body, so undoubtedly the will including all the affections, will remain in its full vigour. If our love or anger, our hope or desire, perish, it is only with regard to those whom we leave behind. To them it matters not, whether they were the objects of our love or hate, of our desire or aversion. But in separate spirits themselves we have no reason to believe that any of these are extinguished. It is more probable, that they work with far greater force, than while the soul was clogged with flesh and blood.

12. But although all these, although both our knowledge and senses, our memory and understanding, together with our will, our love, hate, and all our affections, remain after the body is dropped off; yet, in this respect, they are as though they were not – we are no longer stewards of them. The things continue, but our stewardship does not: We no more act in that capacity. Even the grace which was formerly entrusted with us, in order to enable us to be faithful and wise stewards, is now no longer entrusted for that purpose. The days of our stewardship are ended.

III.

1. It now remains, that, being no longer stewards, we give an account of our stewardship.

Some have imagined, this is to be done immediately after death, as soon as we enter into the world of spirits. Nay, the Church of Rome does absolutely assert this; yea, makes it an article of faith. And thus much we may allow, the moment a soul drops the body, and stands naked before God, it cannot but know what its portion will be to all eternity. It will have full in its view, either everlasting joy, or everlasting torment; as it is no longer possible to be deceived in the judgment which we pass upon ourselves. But the Scripture gives us no reason to believe, that God will then sit in judgment upon us. There is no passage in all the oracles of God which affirms any such thing. That which has been frequently alleged for this purpose seems rather to prove the contrary; namely (Heb. 9:27,) ”It is appointed for men once to die, and after this the judgment.” For, in all reason, the word “once” is here to be applied to judgment as well as death. So that the fair inference to be drawn from this very text is, not that there are two judgments, a particular and a general; but that we are to be judged, as well as to die, once only: Not once immediately after death, and again after the general resurrection; but then only “when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him.” The imagination therefore of one judgment at death, and another at the end of the world, can have no place with those who make the written Word of God the whole and sole standard of their faith.

2. The time then when we are to give this account is, when the “great white throne comes down from heaven, and he that sitteth thereon, from whose face the heavens and the earth flee away, and there is found no place for them.” It is then “the dead, small and great, will stand before God; and the books will be opened;” -- The book of Scripture, to them who were entrusted therewith; the book of conscience to all mankind. The “book of remembrance,” likewise (to use another scriptural
expression,) which had been writing from the foundation of the world, will then be laid open to the view of all the children of men. Before all these, even the whole human race, before the devil and his angels, before an innumerable company of holy angels, and before God the Judge of all, thou wilt appear, without any shelter or covering, without any possibility of disguise, to give a particular account of the manner wherein thou hast employed all thy Lord’s goods!

3. The Judge of all will then inquire, “How didst thou employ thy soul? I entrusted thee with an immortal spirit, endowed with various powers and faculties, with understanding, imagination, memory, will, affections. I gave thee wifial full and express directions, how all these were to be employed. Didst thou employ thy understanding, as far as it was capable, according to those directions; namely, in the knowledge of thyself and me — my nature, my attributes? — in my works, whether of creation, of providence, or of grace? — in acquainting thyself with my word? — in using every means to increase thy knowledge thereof? — in meditating thereon day and night? Didst thou employ thy memory, according to my will, in treasuring up whatever knowledge thou hadst acquired, which might conducte to my glory, to thy own salvation, or the advantage of others? Didst thou store up therein, not things of no value, but whatever instruction thou hadst learned from my word; and whatever experience thou hadst gained of my wisdom, truth, power, and mercy? Was thy imagination employed, not in painting vain images, much less such as nourished ‘foolish and hurtful desires;’ but in representing to thee whatever would profit thy soul, and awaken thy pursuit of wisdom and holiness? Didst thou follow my directions with regard to thy will? Was it wholly given up to me? Was it swallowed up in mine, so as never to oppose, but always run parallel with it? Were thy affections placed and regulated in such a manner, as I appointed in my word? Didst thou give me thy heart? Didst thou not love the world, neither the things of the world? Was I the object of thy love? Was all thy desire unto me, and unto the remembrance of my name? Was I the joy of thy heart, the delight of thy soul, the chief among ten thousand? Didst thou sorrow for nothing, but what grieved my spirit? Didst thou fear and hate nothing but sin? Did the whole stream of thy affections flow back to the ocean from whence they came? Were thy thoughts employed according to my will — not in ranging to the ends of the earth, not on folly, or sin; but on ‘whatsoever things were pure, whatsoever things were holy;’ on whatsoever was conducive to my glory, and to ‘peace and good-will among men?’

4. Thy Lord will then inquire, “How didst thou employ the body wherewith I entrusted thee? I gave thee a tongue to praise me therewith: Didst thou use it to the end for which it was given? Didst thou employ it, not in evil speaking or idle speaking, not in uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; but in such as was good, as was necessary or useful either to thyself or others? Such as always tended, directly or indirectly, to ‘minister grace to the hearers?’ I gave thee, together with thy other senses, those grand avenues of knowledge, sight, and hearing: were these employed to those excellent purposes for which they were bestowed upon thee? In bringing thee in more and more instruction in all thy knowledge of things or men, was committed thee, for the promoting of virtue in the world, for the enlargement of my kingdom? Didst thou employ whatever share of power thou hadst, whatever influence over others, by the love or esteem of thee which they had conceived, for the increase of their wisdom and holiness? Didst thou employ that inestimable talent of time, with wariness and circumspection, as duly weighing the value of every moment, and knowing that all were numbered in eternity? Above all, wast thou a good steward of my grace, preventing, accompanying, and following thee? Didst thou duly observe, and carefully improve, all the influences of my Spirit — every good desire, every measure of light, all His sharp or gentle reproofs? How didst thou profit by ‘the Spirit of bondage and fear,’ which was previous to ‘the Spirit of adoption?’ And when thou wast made a partaker of this Spirit, crying in thy heart, “Abba, Father,” didst thou stand fast in the glorious liberty wherewith I made thee free? Didst thou from thenceforth present thy soul and body, all thy thoughts, thy words, and actions, in one flame of love, as a holy sacrifice, glorifying me with thy body and thy spirit? Then ‘well done, good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!’”

And what will remain, either to the faithful or unfaithful steward? Nothing but the execution of that sentence which has been passed by the righteous Judge; fixing thee in a state which admits of no change through everlasting ages! It remains only that thou be rewarded, to all eternity, according to thy works.

IV.

1. From these plain considerations we may learn, First, How important is this short, uncertain day of life! How precious, above all utterance, above all conception, is every portion of it! The least of these a serious care demands;

For though they’re little, they are golden sands!

How deeply does it concern every child of man, to let none of these run to waste; but to improve them all to the noblest purposes, as long as the breath of God is in his nostrils!

2. We learn from hence, Secondly, that there is no employment of our time, no action or conversation, that is purely indifferent. All is good or bad, because all our time, as everything we have, is not our own. All these are, as our Lord speaks, VcyCNNQVTKC, the property of another; of God our Creator. Now, these either are or are not employed according to his will. If they are so employed, all is good; if they are not, all is evil. Again: it is His will, that we should continually grow in grace, and in the living knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, every thought, word, and work, whereby this knowledge
is increased, whereby we grow in grace, is good; and every one whereby this knowledge is not increased, is truly and properly evil.

3. We learn from hence. Thirdly, that there are no works of supererogation; that we can never do more than our duty; seeing all we have is not our own, but God's; all we can do is due to Him. We have not received this or that, or many things only, but everything from Him: therefore, everything is His due. He that gives us all, must needs have a right to all; so that if we pay Him anything less than all, we cannot be faithful stewards. And considering, “every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour,” we cannot be wise stewards unless we labour to the uttermost of our power; not leaving anything undone which we possibly can do, but putting forth all our strength.

4. Brethren, “who is an understanding man and endued with knowledge among you?” Let him show the wisdom from above, by walking suitably to his character. If he so account of himself as a steward of the manifold gifts of God, let him see that all his thoughts, and words, and works, be agreeable to the post God has assigned him. It is no small thing, to lay out for God all which you have received from God. It requires all your wisdom, all your resolution, all your patience and constancy; far more than ever you had by nature, but not more than you may have by grace. For His grace is sufficient for you; and “all things,” you know, “are possible to him that believeth.” By faith, then, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ;” “put on the whole armour of God;” and you shall be enabled to glorify Him in all your words and works; yea, to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!

Edinburgh, May 14, 1768

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 near outward 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 willful, 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 medicinal 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 Ariant, 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 believe 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 revealed.

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 everything 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 deprived 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, “beheld, 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.”

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 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; neither any ocean, or bays, or rivers, but only small rivulets, or lakes, or marshes, or brooks. We are not assured that there were then no rains; for, it is highly probable that there were then no such things as clouds, or storms, or tempests, or hurricanes, but only gentle breezes, --genitabilis aura Favoni, -- fanning both man and beast, wafting the fragrant odours on their silent wings.

5. The element of air was then always serene, and always friendly to man. 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.

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 groan'd 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 earthy 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 unharmful 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 bivalve 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 wherefo 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 aetheraea 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 februm
Terris 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
class, preparatory to death.

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.

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 it might be more easy to answer her. For which reason she
forthwith asks, “Can any creature be endued with reason?” (Gen.
3:2.) “Ye shall not 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 eat of every tree of the garden;” (Gen. 3:3.)
1. Immediately pain followed sin. When he lost his innocence he lost his sin. But “the man,” as the Apostle observes, “was not deceived.” How fruits of paradise! “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou hurt or give pain had at first any place in the creation. “And thou shalt useless, yea, and hurtful productions; whereas nothing calculated to hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which inferiority of the woman to the man than that which we may conceive in “thy conception: In sorrow” or pain “thou shalt bring forth children; -- discovery? “Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that does God lead him to make that acknowledgment! “And he said, Who does God lead him to make that acknowledgment! “And he said, 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?”

III.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 unbluffed, yea, indirectly throwing the blame upon God himself, “The woman whom thou gavest to 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.2. 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 he 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.” Enoch did not die, but was translated to heaven, in a chariot 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 course of near six thousand years, to evade the execution of this component parts of the lower world. Here were earth, water, air; three of the elements, or everlasting,) the Almighty, rising in the greatness of his strength, went eye views the whole possibility of things from everlasting 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, fear, 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 suppose 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
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 or 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; all who believe in the name of the Son of God, 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 “eффective 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 afterwards knowledge. 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 scantiness 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, decrees, 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!

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 openedeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. He provideth 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.”

2. But how are these Scriptures reconcilable to the present state of things? How are they consistent with what we daily see round about us, in every part of the creation? If the Creator and Father of every living thing is
rich in mercy towards all; if he does not overlook or despise any of the works of his own hands; if he wills even the meanest of them to be happy, according to their degree; how comes it to pass, that such a complication of evils oppresses, yea, overweighs them? How is it that misery of all kinds spreads the face of the earth? This is a question which has puzzled the wisest philosophers in all ages: And it cannot be answered without having recourse to the oracles of God.

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?

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 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 beheld 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
II. 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 probably 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 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 devote whatsoever they can master: Nay, 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 it is 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 his 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 duteous 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 saeth “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
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 unseasiness: 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 recompense 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. May I be permitted to mention here a conjecture concerning the brute creation? What end does it answer to dwell upon this subject, which we so thoughtlessly subject our children 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. 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 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.
All, -- the desire of your eyes, the joy of your heart, and your portion for ever.

John Wesley
SERMON 61

 текст 1872-го издания)

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY


1. Without inquiring how far these words refer to any particular event in the Christian Church, I would at present take occasion from them to consider that important question, -- In what manner the mystery of iniquity hath wrought among us till it hath well-nigh covered the whole earth.

2. It is certain that “God made man upright;” perfectly holy and perfectly happy: But by rebelling against God, he destroyed himself, lost the favour and the image of God, and entailed sin, with its attendant, pain, on himself and all his posterity. Yet his merciful Creator did not leave him in this helpless, hopeless state: He immediately appointed his Son, his well-beloved Son, “who is the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person,” to be the Saviour of men; “the propitiation for the sins of the whole world;” the great Physician who, by his almighty Spirit, should heal the sickness of their souls, and restore them not only to the favour, but to “the image of God wherein they were created.”

3. This great mystery of godliness began to work from the very time of the original promise. 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 reinstated 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 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 “proving 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-begotten 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.” All Israel, one would think, yea, and all the earth, will soon be filled with the glory of the Lord. Nay: “The mystery of iniquity” prevailed still, well-nigh over the face of the earth. How exceeding small was the number of those whose souls were healed by the Son of God himself! “When Peter stood up in the midst of them, the number of names was about a hundred and twenty.” (Acts 1:15.) And even these were but imperfectly healed; the chief of them being a little before so weak in faith that, though they did not, like Peter, forswear their Master, yet “they all forsook him and fled.” A plain proof that the sanctifying “Spirit was not” then “given, because Jesus was not glorified.”

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 Saphira.

“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, ananomities, 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 infecting 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, 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 imperii aemula, non gradu, sed praecipiti cursu, virtutum 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 irrupt inaequalis 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? Is it 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
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, quem

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. --

Edith.]

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 nummii, 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
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;
Deteriora 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 afllatu divino fuit, -- “There never was any great man who was not divinely inspired;” yet in the very same tract he contradicts himself, and totally overthrew 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 auert;
Det vitam, det opes: aequum mi animum ipse parabo.
We ask of God, what he can give or take, --
Life, wealth; but virtuous I myself will make.

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.

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; endued 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 had 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 endowed 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 disobey 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 exceedingly 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 tempting 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 imprinting 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, manifest 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. Every thing 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 that doctrine that orthodox, right opinion, (vulgarily 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 the one as well as the other, apart from the rest, is good; but all together are very good; all conspire 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 "speak 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 subtility 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 (RQNWQMKMKNQLý 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 Ipsa 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, ignorat 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 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 necessities of life, were overwhelmed with the cares of the world; many relapsed into “the desires of other things,” which “choke[d] 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 those rare rich persons, perhaps not half the number, during three score 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 taste 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 your 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 the world, as well as against loving “the things of the world.” The world is the man 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 shelve 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 continual temptation to acquaintance and conversation with worldly men. They are likewise under 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
20. Hear ye this, all ye Preachers who have not the same life, the same
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 are so? Do you contract no intimacy with worldly men? Do not you converse with them more than duty requires? Are you in no danger of pride? Of thinking yourself better than your poor, dirty neighbours? Do you never resent, yea, and revenge an affront? Do you never render evil for evil? Do not you give way to indolence or love of ease? Do you deny yourself, and take up your cross daily? Do you constantly rise as early as you did once? Why not? Is not your soul as precious now as it was then? How often do you fast? Is not this a duty to you, as much as to a day-labourer? But if you are wanting in this, or any other respect, who will tell you of it? Who dares tell you the plain truth, but those who neither hope nor fear any thing from you? And if any venture to deal plainly with you, how hard is it for you to bear it! Are not you far less reprovable, far less advisable, than when you were poor? It is well if you can bear reproof even from me: And in a few days you will see me no more.

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, 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.
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.

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 spake 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
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 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 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 will 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; long-suffering, 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 almost said, furious? Are you fighting pro aris et foceis? "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.”

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

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 foceis? "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.”

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 takes, “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
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 CPSTYRPQPL. 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 lives 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 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.

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 JQNKITYQWPGVSL, 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, GMNQWOGFKQ, affected too much, unerring, 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 the utmost distance from stotical 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 RQMKNOQKL, RGKCTUOQK,) “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 resignations 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 unrighteousness; to fulfill that promise which he made 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 persuadebis, 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. 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 we may 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, VGNNGKQK, 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, JQNXMNGTQK. (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 his good pleasure.” Phil. 2:12-13.

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 incomprehensible 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 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: “Wherefore, 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 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) prevent 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 you ever 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, 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 dispensations 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 what is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever!”

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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! 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 treat 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 deeds!” 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
rainment.” (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 rainment
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 rainment 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 necessities and conveniences for those of our
own household:

(2.) That men in business are to lay up as much as is necessary for the
paying of the 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 plaudio
Ipse domi simul ac numnos contemptor in arca.

[The following is Francis’s translation of these lines from
Horace:
“Let them his hand.
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 crashes its
bones in pieces, or consigns it to inevitable ruin.

11. They fall, Thirdly, “into many foolish and hurtful desires;”
CPQGQWU, --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 JyGNCQPGKCyQWYdDKQW, 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) “to take the kingdom of heaven by violence.”

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, unapproveable 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 necessities 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 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 willingly 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 unaowered 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; nor, 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. Ye Methodist, 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? Is not the very reverse true? Is it not a common observation, that the richest of 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-robe. 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!

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.

14. Are not you 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-robe. 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 sink 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 hindered? 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 you to a more excellent way.” I 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 exorts 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
I. To begin at the beginning of the day. It is the manner of 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 the grace of God. He works for eternity. He labours not for the meat that perisheth, (this is the smallest part of his care,) but for that which endureth to everlasting life. And is not this “a more excellent way?”

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.

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 the grace of God. He works for eternity. He labours not for the meat that perisheth, (this is the smallest part of his care,) but for that which endureth to everlasting life. And is not this “a more excellent way?”

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 have him 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

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 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 that way, 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 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.

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.

III. 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 high road to hell. But this much I must affirm, they have chosen the better part. And will this be a small loss, -- the having so many 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 necessary for life and health. And why should not you walk in this way, speaking as the man of prayer.

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.

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,
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 such
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
excess. At least not so far as to make themselves sick with meat, or to

3. Some diversions indeed which were formerly in great request, are now
3. Some diversions indeed which were formerly in great request, are now
newspapers, and the like, to be quite innocent diversions; yet are there
newspapers, and the like, to be quite innocent diversions; yet are there

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

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 the 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 earthily 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 partsake of the nature of benevolence; 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 Delinated,” 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, when 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. We may, First, observe what is implied in having our hearts true to God.

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 testimonia, 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 hardly 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 simulco: 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 surlieness, 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.

1. 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 disposals 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 GpýMCNYK, in 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 inmost essence, of it.
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 wherein 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 love itself, “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 into eternity.

11. 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 was 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 therither 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.”

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 whereby 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 utterly 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 profieth 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

ONT REDEEMING THE TIME

“Re 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 second 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 most of the 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 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 unfits 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.

“ ‘I 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 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
1. 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 droughtiness 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 whereeto 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]

John Wesley

SERMON 94

(text from the 1872 edition)

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 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 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 may 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 implied 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 on 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.

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 indentured 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 house. Servants also, whether by the day, or for a longer space, if you cannot reclaim, either by reasoning added to your example, or by gentle or severe reproofs, though frequently repeated, you must, in anywise, dismiss from your family, though it should be ever so inconvenient.

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 who 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 sun! Is it he, 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 heart? 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 endowed 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 your 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; yes, 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 do 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 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 power of God which 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 things 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!

John Wesley.

SERMON 101

(text of the 1872 edition.)

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 sorer 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 all time. For instance: Should I ask a man why he does not obey one of the plainest commandments 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 you not 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 you not 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 commandments, 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 you not 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.” All who are thus prepared may draw near without fear, and receive the sacrament to their comfort. Now, what business can hinder you from performing this?—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 unpreapres 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 lawyer 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 aight, 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 unmeasured 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?”

[28x456]
Thy frame but dust, thy stature but a span,
A moment thy duration, foolis husband!

“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)?”

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?”

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!”

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 very every 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 shouldest be mindful; or the son of man, that thou shouldest regard him?” He is, indeed, (to use St. Augustine’s words,) aliqua portio creatura tuce, “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 thou 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 taketh 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.'"

7. 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?”

8. “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.

9. 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 palmarius 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 bear 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 distin-guished 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; inasmuch 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
1. 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.

2. 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!

3. The next sort of faith is the faith of Heathens, with which I join that of 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.

4. It cannot be doubted, but this plea will avail for millions of modern 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 fullness 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 God has declared, and profess to do 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 save 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 and not of God.” No; this does not follow. It might have been said, (and it is all the more proper,) “Hitherto you are only a servant, you devil.” No; this does not follow. It might have been said, (and it is all the more proper,) “Hitherto you are only a servant, you devil.”

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 witnesseth 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!”

John Wesley
SERMON 109

(text from the 1872 edition)

WHAT IS MAN?

“What is man?” Psalms 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 ended 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 front 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 moulder 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, frightened 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 what he had said concerning the Evangelists and the Pastors, or Bishops, no priesthood is mentioned but that of our Lord;) but I could not think that Old Testament, and the prophetic and pastoral office in the New; (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.

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, andserve 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 ended 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 herdsman: 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 literally “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 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 nakedly 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 INEFFECTIVENESS 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 in a general sense, with relation to all mankind. 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,
ninteen 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, Mongolia, 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 bulk 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, or 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. 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 we not “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
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 necessities 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 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 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 almost, but altogether. Who will meet me on this ground? Join me on this, or not at all.”

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 frightened by the silly outrages 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 be 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 press 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!"

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 union 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 under 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
whole 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
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 whatever accomplishments they have beside, of the only religion which 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.

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 distinctness 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 coveted 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 wrathes 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 wretches that cause the order in general to be contempted. 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

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 not only the qualification for heaven; but the condition the Christian is to continue in, to the day of judgment.”

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 subservient 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.

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 circumcision,” -- 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 three score years, without any material alteration. Only, about fifty years ago I had a clearer view than I now have, of the inseparable connexion of holiness to the existence of God. 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.
But I would at present carry this thought farther; I would consider it in a "Even like as a dream when one awaketh; so shalt thou make their image to vanish out of the city." 

John Wesley

MADELEY, March 26, 1790

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 thoroughly 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 to-night; 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 carcasse, 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 Moultras, 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 nation? Every thing is 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.”

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 went together, you may rejoice togeth, 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.

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!
O visit their brethren below!

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; 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!

[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,

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, principalities, 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 fillet 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 demons 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 adobe 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, 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 flesh and blood.

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.
And how much will that add to the happiness of those spirits which are men, or beasts, or inanimate creatures. How often may it please God to because we cannot see them; sometimes by preventing our being hurt by Sometimes by counteracting wicked spirits whom we cannot resist, in how many ways may they “minister to the heirs of salvation!” the Prophets;” [Rev. 22] not God, not an angel, not a human spirit. And mistaken for Christ, he told him plainly, “I am of thy fellow-servants, fell down to worship the glorious spirit which he seems to have those whom they have left behind! An indisputable proof of this we already discharged from the body, that they are permitted to minister to.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.

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 avences [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?

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.”

This we know, concerning the whole frame and arrangement of the visible world. But how exceeding little do we now concern 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.

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.

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!

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.

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.

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 glistening 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,

- Iruptit venae peorjis in aeuum
Omne nefas: fugere pudor, verunque, fidisque
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 laborèd 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, avaint! 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?”

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 entertained 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 sty’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 deal with 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 “desperately 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.”

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. 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 meanness 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 februm, &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 confusion 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, to think 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 warn not the people; then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; 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.”

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 Scriptur must be fulfilled: “Me the world hateh,” 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,
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 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 given by words, even martyrs, speak; -- a stronger testimony of her faithfulness than could be

an harlot!”

peace, the very stones would cry out, “How is the faithful city become

more acceptable person would have done this. But should all hold their

tithes, nor spare any that corrupt the Gospel. `In so doing my Maker

I should accept any man's person!' I dare not give any man flattering

who have, indeed, in many other respects, done great service to the

of such a charge against men of so established a character? Nay, and

the weight of prejudice which must necessarily follow the very mention

the very foundations of the faith we are taught thereby?

champions of our faith; who, indeed, betray that Church, and sap the

shall we say of those who are accounted the pillars of our Church, and

among us to do any great service to the cause of their master. But what

wherewith they constantly corrupt others also!

simplicity and purity wherewith it is set forth in the venerable records of

writing or preaching, declare the genuine gospel of Christ, in the

souls, and what abundance of poison! How few are there that, either in

adulterate the word of God! How little wholesome food have we for our

now preach the gospel of peace, the truth as it is in Jesus. But how few

fulfill.

stubble, but gold and precious stones, -- but that charity which never

good gift!) who, as wise master-builders, build thereon, not hay or

those comprehensive words which we are supposed to be so frequently

instanced in particular persons) agree

Necessity of Regeneration,” (which he at large proves to imply holiness

both of heart and life.) “in order to Justification.” [Titlottone'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 (GzGTYPlyFMKCQWVCK) 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.) Forbearing 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 (i) --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 summ'd 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 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 tenor of their outward behaviour, of every one of them? In a word, to watch over their minds of youth entrusted with them by their lectures? To recommend to lay this good foundation? To fix true principles of religion in the minds of youth? 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?

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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 greater 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 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, 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.”
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 that high degree to which he is presented?” (P. 114.)

12. Yet one thing more. We have all testified before God, “that all 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 long-suffering, 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-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

(P. 181.)

(P. 114.)

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II. Let us inquire what this love is, -- what is the true meaning of the word?

I. As to the First: It must be observed that the word used by St. Paul nothing.

II. The true meaning of the word love; and, poor, and though I give my body to be burned;”

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, 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 death inflicted in a manner the most terrible to nature; yet all this, if I

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, that he envieth hath not love.

It follows, “Love vaunteth not itself,” 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

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, will 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, that he envieth hath not love.

It follows, “Love vaunteth not itself,” 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 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 we can all 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 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 long-suffering? 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 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 he 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 also....

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