

# TEN SERMONS

by John Wesley

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*A collection of ten significant sermons by John Wesley including his teaching on Christian perfection, addressing misconceptions and defending the doctrine as attainable in this life.*

10 Chapters

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## 01 Awake, Thou That Sleepest

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Awake, Thou That Sleepest by John Wesley "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Ephesians 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:"

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

I.

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

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

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

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

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

justifies himself; one that labours to establish his own righteousness, as the ground of his acceptance with God.

6. This is he, who, "having a form of godliness, denies the power thereof;" yea, and probably reviles it, wheresoever it is found, as mere extravagance and delusion. Meanwhile, the wretched self-deceiver thanks God, that he is "not as other men are; adulterers, unjust, extortioners": no, he doeth no wrong to any man. He "fasts twice in a week," uses all the means of grace, is constant at church and sacrament, yea, and "gives tithes of all that he has;" does all the good that he can "touching the righteousness of the law," he is "blameless": he wants nothing of godliness, but the power; nothing of religion, but the spirit; nothing of Christianity, but the truth and 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 fitly compares him to a "painted sepulchre," which "appears beautiful without;" but, nevertheless, is "full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." The bones indeed are no longer dry; the sinews and flesh are come upon them, and the skin covers them above: but there is no breath in them, no Spirit of the living God. And, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "Ye are Christ's, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you": but, if not, God knoweth that ye abide in death, even until now.

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 sleepeth 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 the soul; and if ye have this life abiding in you, ye want no marks to evidence it to yourself, but elegchos pneumatous, that 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 it of thee, art thou ready to meet death and judgement? Canst thou stand in his sight, who is of "purer eyes than to behold iniquity"? Art thou "meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light"? Hast thou "fought a good fight, and kept the faith"? Hast thou secured the one thing needful? Hast thou recovered the image of God, even righteousness and true holiness? Hast thou put off the old man, and put on the new? Art thou clothed upon with Christ?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III.

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

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

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

4. The Spirit of Christ is that great gift of God, which at sundry times, and in diverse 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" (Ezekiel 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 (Isaiah 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, Believest thou that his arm is not shortened at all? That he is still mighty to save? That he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? That he hath now power on earth to forgive sins? "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven." God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven thee. Receive this, "not as the word of man; but as it is indeed, the word of God;" and thou art justified freely through faith. Thou shalt be sanctified also through faith which is in Jesus, and shalt set to thy seal, even thine, that "God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

6. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you, and suffer ye the word of exhortation, even from one the least esteemed in the Church. Your conscience beareth you witness in the Holy Ghost, that these things are so, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. "This is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent." This experimental knowledge, and this alone, is true Christianity. He is a Christian who hath received the Spirit of Christ. He is not a Christian who hath not received him. Neither is it possible to have received him, and not know it. "For, at that day" (when he cometh, saith our Lord), "ye shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." This is that "Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17).

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

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

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

the imposition of hands. Therefore, to deny any of these, is, in effect, to renounce the Church of England, as well as the whole Christian revelation.

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

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

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

13. And "shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Yea, we know not how soon he may say to the sword, "Sword, go through this land!" He hath given us long space to repent. He lets us alone this year also: but he warns and awakens us by thunder. His judgements are abroad in the earth; and we have all reason to expect the heaviest of all, even that he "should come unto us quickly, and remove our candlestick out of its place, except we repent and do the first works;" unless we return to the principles of the

Reformation, the truth and simplicity of the gospel. Perhaps we are now resisting the last effort of divine grace to save us. Perhaps we have well-nigh "filled up the measure of our iniquities," by rejecting the counsel of God against ourselves, and casting out his messengers.

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

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

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

## 02 Christian Perfection

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Christian Perfection by John Wesley 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.' Php 3:12.

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

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

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

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

I. 1. In the first place I shall endeavor to show in what sense Christians are not perfect. And both from experience and Scripture it appears, First, that they are not perfect in knowledge: they are not so perfect in this life as to be free from ignorance. They know, it may be, in common with other men, many things relating to the present world; and they know, with regard to the world to come, the general truths which God hath revealed. They know, likewise, (what the natural man receiveth not, for these things are spiritually discerned,) 'what manner of love' it is wherewith 'the Father' hath loved them, 'that they should be called the sons of God.' [1 John 3:1] They know the mighty working of his Spirit in their hearts; [Ephesians 3:16] and the wisdom of his providence, directing all their paths, [Proverbs 3:6] and causing all things to work together for their good. [Romans 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;' [Php 2:7] - but not any one attribute, not any one circumstance of the divine nature. [2 Peter 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 Peter 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.' [Psalms 97:2] Yea, often with regard to his dealings with themselves, doth their Lord say unto them, 'What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.' [John 13:7] And how little do they know of what is ever before them, of even the visible works of his hands! - How 'he spreadeth the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing?' [Job 26:7] how he unites all the parts of this vast machine by a secret chain which cannot be broken? So great is the ignorance, so very little the knowledge, of even the best of men!

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

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 1:2] 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; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 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,' [Matthew 5:22] or returning 'railing for railing.' [1 Peter 3:9] It is plain that all you who thus speak, if ye repent not, shall, with your infirmities, go quick into hell! But I mean hereby, not only those which are properly termed bodily infirmities, but all those inward or outward imperfections which are not of a moral nature. Such are the weakness or slowness of understanding, dulness or confusedness of apprehension, incoherency of thought, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Such (to mention no more of this kind) is the want of a ready or of a retentive memory. Such in another kind, are those which are commonly, in some measure, consequent upon these; namely, slowness of speech, impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behaviour. These are the infirmities which are found in the best of men, in a larger or smaller proportion. And from these none can hope to be perfectly freed till the spirit returns to God that gave it. [Ecclesiastes 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, [Ephesians 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, [Romans 5:1] having found redemption in the blood of Christ, [Ephesians 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 Chronicles 16:22] And for this season, it may be for weeks or months, he causeth them to 'ride on high places;' [Deuteronomy 32:13] he beareth them as on eagles' wings, [Exodus 19:4] above all the fiery darts of the wicked one. [Ephesians 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. [Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 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 Peter 3:18] and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour. [see Php 1:9]

II. 1. In what sense, then, are Christians perfect? This is what I shall endeavor, in the Second place, to show. But it should be premised, that there are several stages in Christian life, as in natural; some of the children of God being but new-born babes; others having attained to more maturity. And accordingly St. John, in his first Epistle, (1 John 2:12.) 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.' [Romans 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, [Ephesians 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.' [Ephesians 4:13]

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

3. Now the Word of God plainly declares, that even those who are justified, who are born again in the lowest sense, 'do not continue in sin;' that they cannot 'live any longer therein;' (Romans 6:1-2; ) that they are 'planted together in the likeness of the death' of Christ; (Romans 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; (Romans 6:6-7; ) that they are 'dead unto sin, and alive unto God;' (Romans 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.' (Romans 6:14; Romans 6:18)

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 Peter 4:1-2:) 'He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, - that he no longer should live to the desires of men, but to the will of God.' For this ceasing from sin, if it be interpreted in the lowest sense, as regarding only the outward behaviour, must denote the ceasing from the outward act, from any outward transgression of the law.

5 . But most express are the well-known words of St. John, in the third chapter of his First Epistle, verse 8: '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 wilfully; or he doth not commit sin habitually; or, not as other men do; or, not as he did before. But by whom is this said? By St. John? No. There is no such word in the text; nor in the whole chapter; nor in all his Epistle; nor in any part of his writings whatsoever. Why then, the best way to answer a bold assertion is simply to deny it. And if any man can prove it from the Word of God, let him bring forth his strong reasons.

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

8. Those who argue thus, seem never to have considered that declaration of our Lord: (Matthew 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.) [Matthew 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 Corinthians 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' [Galatians 3:27] are endued with no greater strength, doth greatly err, neither 'knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.' [Matthew 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.' [Proverbs 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.' [Proverbs 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 Chronicles 6:36; ) yea, 'There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not.' (Ecclesiastes 7:20.)' I answer, Without doubt, thus it was in the days of Solomon. Yea, thus it was from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Solomon, and from Solomon to Christ. There was then no man that sinned not. Even from the day that sin entered into the world, there was not a just man upon earth that did good and sinned not, until the Son of God was manifested to take away our sins. It is unquestionably true, that 'the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant.' [Galatians 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.' [Galatians 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;' [Galatians 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 Timothy 1:10.) Now, therefore, they 'are no more servants, but sons.' [see Galatians 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) 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,'

ou emellon lambanein hoi pisteuontes eis auton, 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.' [Psalms 68:18; cf. Ephesians 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 [Romans 8:37] over sin by the Holy Ghost given unto them.

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

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

14. If, therefore, you would prove that the Apostles 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 Corinthians 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.' [Galatians 2:11] Well: Suppose both Peter and Paul did then commit sin; what is it you would infer from hence? That all the other Apostles committed sin sometimes? There is no shadow of proof in this. or would you thence infer, that all the other Christians of the apostolic age committed sin? Worse and worse: This is such an inference as, one

would imagine, a man in his senses could never have thought of. or will you argue thus: 'If two of the Apostles did once commit sin, then all other Christians, in all ages, do and will commit sin as long as they live?' Alas, my brother! a child of common understanding would be ashamed of such reasoning as this. Least of all can you with any colour of argument infer, that any man must commit sin at all. No: God forbid we should thus speak! No necessity of sinning was laid upon them. The grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it is sufficient for us at this day. With the temptation which fell on them, there was a way to escape; as there is to every soul of man in every temptation. So that whosoever is tempted to any sin, need not yield; for no man is tempted above that he is able to bear. [1 Corinthians 10:13]

15. 'But St. Paul besought the Lord thrice, and yet he could not escape from his temptation.' Let us consider his own words literally translated: 'There was given to me a thorn to the flesh, an angel' (or messenger) 'of Satan, to buffet me. Touching this, I besought the Lord thrice, that it' (or he) 'might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in' these 'my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses; - for when I am weak, then am I strong.' [2 Corinthians 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 Apostles own words, 'A thorn to the flesh to smite, beat, or buffet me.' 'My strength is made perfect in weakness:' - Which same word occurs no less than four times in these two verses only. But, Fourthly, whatsoever it was, it could not be either inward or outward sin. It could no more be inward stirrings, than outward expressions, of pride, anger, or lust. This is manifest, beyond all possible exception from the words that immediately follow: 'Most gladly will I glory in' these 'my weaknesses, that the strength of Christ may rest upon me.' [2 Corinthians 12:9] What! Did he glory in pride, in anger, in lust? Was it through these weaknesses, that the strength of Christ rested upon him? He goes on: 'Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses; for when I am weak, then am I strong;' [2 Corinthians 12:10] that is, when I am weak in body, then am I strong in spirit. But will any man dare to say, 'When I am weak by pride or lust, then am I strong in spirit?' I call you all to record this day, who find the strength of Christ resting upon you, can you glory in anger, or pride, or lust? Can you take pleasure in these infirmities? Do these weaknesses make you strong? Would you not leap into hell, were it possible, to escape them? even by yourselves, then, judge, whether the Apostle could glory and take pleasure in them! Let it be, Lastly, observed, that this thorn was given to St. Paul above fourteen years before he wrote this epistle; [2 Corinthians 12:2] which itself was wrote several years before he finished his course. [see Acts 20:24; 2 Timothy 4:7] So that he had after this, a long course to run, many battles to fight, many victories to gain, and great increase to receive in all the gifts of God, and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Therefore from any spiritual weakness (if such it had been) which he at that time felt, we could by no means infer that he was never made strong; that

Paul the aged, the father in Christ, still laboured under the same weaknesses; that he was in no higher state till the day of his death. From all which it appears that this instance of St. Paul is quite foreign to the question, and does in no wise clash with the assertion of St. John, 'He that is born of God sinneth not.' [1 John 5:18]

17. 'But does not St. James directly contradict this? His words are, 'In many things we offend all, (James 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 reprov'd in the preceding chapter;) [James 2:1-26] not the Apostle himself, nor any real Christian. That in the word we (used by a figure of speech common in all other, as well as the inspired, writings) the Apostle could not possibly include himself or any other true believer, appears evidently, First, from the same word in the ninth verse: - 'Therewith,' saith he, 'bless we God and therewith curse we men. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing.' [James 3:9] True; but not out of the mouth of the Apostle, nor of anyone who is in Christ a new creature. [2 Corinthians 5:17] Secondly, from the verse immediately preceding the text, and manifestly connected with it: 'My brethren, be not many masters,' (or teachers,) 'knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.' 'For in many things we offend all.' [James 3:1] We! Who? Not the Apostles, not true believers; but they who know they should receive the greater condemnation, because of those many offences. But this could not be spoke of the Apostle himself, or of any who trod in his steps, seeing 'there is no condemnation to them who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' [Romans 8:2] Nay, Thirdly, the very verse itself proves, that 'we offend all,' cannot be spoken either of all men, or of all Christians: For in it there immediately follows the mention of a man who offends not, as the we first mentioned did; from whom, therefore, he is professedly contradistinguished, and pronounced a perfect man.

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

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

also 'to cleanse us from all unrighteousness:' [1 John 1:8-10] that we may 'go and sin no more.' [John 8:11]

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

21. This is the glorious privilege of every Christian; yea, though he be but a babe in Christ. But it is only of those who are strong in the Lord, 'and 'have overcome the wicked one,' or rather of those who 'have known him that is from the beginning,' [1 John 2:13-14] that it can be affirmed they are in such a sense perfect, as, Secondly, to be freed from evil thoughts and evil tempers. First, from evil or sinful thoughts. But here let it be observed, that thoughts concerning evil are not always evil thoughts; that a thought concerning sin, and a sinful thought, are widely different. A man, for instance, may think of a murder which another has committed; and yet this is no evil or sinful thought. So our blessed Lord himself doubtless thought of, or understood the thing spoken by the devil, when he said, 'All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.' [Matthew 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; (Matthew 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.' (Matthew 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 logimous 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 Corinthians 10:4.)

24. And as Christians indeed are freed from evil thoughts, so are they, Secondly, from evil tempers. This is evident from the above-mentioned declaration of our Lord himself: 'The disciple is not above his Master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his Master.' [Luke 6:40] He had been delivering, just before, some of the sublimest doctrines of Christianity, and some of the most grievous to flesh and blood. 'I say unto you, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you; - and unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other.' [Luke 6:29] Now these he well knew the world would not receive; and, therefore, immediately adds, 'Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?' [Luke 6:39] As if he had said, 'Do not confer with flesh and blood touching these things, - with men void of spiritual discernment, the eyes of whose understanding God hath not opened, - lest they and you perish together.' In the next verse he removes the two grand objections with which these wise fools meet us at every turn: 'These things are too grievous to be borne,' or, 'They are too high to be attained,' [Matthew 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:' [Galatians 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 Corinthians 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, [Colossians 1:27] 'purifieth himself, even as he is pure' (1 John 3:3.) He is purified from pride; for Christ was lowly of heart. [Matthew 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; John 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, syllypoumenos, 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 Ephesians 4:26] feeling a displacency at every offence against God, but only love and tender compassion to the offender.

27. Thus doth Jesus 'save his people from their sins:' [Matthew 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.) '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, (Deuteronomy 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;' [Psalms 51:10] - and most remarkably by Ezekiel, in those words: 'Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; - and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. - Ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses. - Thus saith the Lord your God, In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, - the Heathen shall know that I the Lord build the ruined places; - I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.' (Ezekiel 36:25.)

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 Corinthians 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.' [Hebrews 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;' [Php 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!' [Romans 8:21] The Promise of Sanctification (Ezekiel 36:25.) By the Rev. Charles Wesley.

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

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

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

4 Chose from the world, if now I stand Adorn'd in righteousness divine;

If, brought unto the promised land, I justly call the Saviour mine;

5 Perform the work thou hast begun, My inmost soul to thee convert:

Love me, for ever love thine own, And sprinkle with thy blood my heart.

6 Thy sanctifying Spirit pour, To quench my thirst, and wash me clean;

Now, Father, let the gracious shower Descend, and make me pure from sin.

7 Purge me from every sinful blot; My idols all be cast aside:

Cleanse me from every evil thought, From all the filth of self and pride.

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

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

O take away this heart of stone.

10 The hatred of my carnal mind Out of my flesh at once remove;

Give me a tender heart, resign'd, And pure, and fill'd with faith and love.

11 Within me thy good Spirit place, Spirit of health, and love and power;

Plant in me thy victorious grace, And sin shall never enter more.

12 Cause me to walk in Christ my Way, And I thy statutes shall fulfill; In every point thy law obey. And perfectly perform thy will.

13 Hast thou not said, who canst not lie, That I thy law shall keep and do?

Lord, I believe, though men deny;

They all are false, but thou art true.

14 O that I now, from sin released, Thy word might to the utmost prove!

Enter into the promised rest, The Canaan of thy perfect love!

15 There let me ever, ever dwell; By thou my God, and I will be Thy servant: O set to thy seal!

Give me eternal life in thee.

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

17 Wash out my old original stain:

Tell me no more It cannot be, Demons or men! The Lamb was slain His blood was all poured out  
for me!

18 Sprinkle it, Jesu, on my heart:

One drop of thy all-cleansing blood Shall make my sinfulness depart, And fill me with the life of  
God.

19 Father, supply my every need:

Sustain the life thyself hast given;

Call for the corn, the living bread, The manna that comes down from heaven.

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

21 Let me no more in deep complaint 'My leanness, O my leanness!' cry;

Alone consumed with pining want, Of all my Father's children !!

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 abhorr'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!

## 03 God's Approbation of his Works

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God's Approbation of his Works by John Wesley "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:31.

1. When God created the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, at the conclusion of each day's work it is said, "And God saw that it was good." Whatever was created was good in its kind; suited to the end for which it was designed; adapted to promote the good of the whole and the glory of the great Creator. This sentence it pleased God to pass with regard to each particular creature. But there is a remarkable variation of the expression, with regard to all the parts of the universe, taken in connection with each other, and constituting one system: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." 2. How small a part of this great work of God is man able to understand! But it is our duty to contemplate what he has wrought, and to understand as much of it as we are able. For "the merciful Lord," as the Psalmist observes, "hath so done his marvellous works" of creation, as well as of providence, "that they ought to be had in remembrance" by all that fear him; which they cannot well be, unless they are understood. Let us, then, by the assistance of that Spirit who giveth unto man understanding, endeavour to take a general survey of the works which God made in this lower world, as they were before they were disordered and depraved in consequence of the sin of man: We shall then easily see, that as every creature was good in its primeval state; so, when all were compacted in one general system, "behold, they were very good." I do not remember to have seen any attempt of this kind, unless in that truly excellent poem, (termed by Mr. Hutchinson, "That wicked farce!") Milton's "Paradise Lost."

I.

1. "In the beginning God created the matter of the heavens and the earth." (So the words, as a great man observes, may properly be translated.) He first created the four elements, out of which the whole universe was composed; earth, water, air, and fire, all mingled together in one common mass. The grossest parts of this, the earth and water, were utterly without form, till God infused a principle of motion, commanding the air to move "upon the face of the waters." In the next place, "the Lord God said, Let there be light: And there was light." Here were the four constituent parts of the universe; the true, original, simple elements. They were all essentially distinct from each other; and yet so intimately mixed together, in all compound bodies, that we cannot find any, be it ever so minute, which does not contain them all. 2. "And God saw that" every one of these "was good;" was perfect in its kind. The earth was good. The whole surface of it was beautiful in a high degree. To make it more agreeable,

He clothed The universal face with pleasant green.

He adorned it with flowers of every hue, and with shrubs and trees of every kind. And every part was fertile as well as beautiful; it was no way deformed by rough or ragged rocks; it did not shock the view with horrid precipices, huge chasms, or dreary caverns; with deep, impassable morasses,

or deserts of barren sand. But we have not any authority to say, with some learned and ingenious authors, that there were no mountains on the original earth, no unevenness on its surface. It is not easy to reconcile this hypothesis with those words of Moses: "The waters prevailed; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered.

Fifteen cubits upward" above the highest "did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered." (Genesis 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;" (Genesis 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, Revelation 21:1,) there will be "no more sea;" none covering as now the face of the earth, and rendering so large a part of it uninhabitable by man. Hence it is probable, there was no external sea in the paradisiacal earth; none, until the great deep burst the barriers which were originally appointed for it. -- Indeed there was not then that need of the ocean for navigation which there is now: For either, as the poet supposes, *Omnis tulli omnia tellus*; every country produced whatever was requisite either for the necessity or comfort of its inhabitants; or man, being then (as he will be again at the resurrection) equal to angels, was able to convey himself, at his pleasure, to any given distance; over and above that, those flaming messengers were always ready to minister to the heirs of salvation. But whether there was sea or not, there were rivers sufficient to water the earth, and make it very plenteous. These answered all the purposes of convenience and pleasure by Liquid lapse of murmuring stream; to which were added gentle, genial showers, with salutary mists and exhalations. But there were no putrid lakes, no turbid or stagnating waters; but only such as;

Bore imprest -- Fair nature's image on their placid breast.

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

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

Bid his angels turn askance This oblique globe.

There was, therefore, then no country that groaned under The rage of Arctos, and eternal frost.

There was no violent winter, or sultry summer; no extreme, either of heat or cold. No soil was burned up by the solar heat; none uninhabitable through the want of it. Thus earth, water, air, and fire, all conspired together to the welfare and pleasure of man!

7. To the same purpose served the grateful vicissitude of light and darkness, -- day and night. For as the human body, though not liable to death or pain, yet needed continual sustenance by food; so, although it was not liable to weariness, yet it needed continual reparation by sleep. By this the springs of the animal machine were wound up from time to time, and kept always fit for the pleasing labour for which man was designed by his Creator. Accordingly, "the evening and the morning were the first day," before sin or pain was in the world. The first natural day had one part dark for a season of repose; one part light for a season of labour. And even in paradise "Adam slept," (Genesis 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, (Revelation 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;" (Revelation 7:15;) that is, without any interval. As wicked spirits are tormented day and night without any intermission of their misery; so holy spirits enjoy God day and night without any intermission of their happiness.

8. On the second day God encompassed the terraqueous globe with that noble appendage, the atmosphere, consisting chiefly of air; but replete with earthly particles of various kinds, and with huge volumes of water, sometimes invisible, sometimes visible, buoyed up by that ethereal fire, a particle of which cleaves to every particle of air. By this the water was divided ed into innumerable drops, which, descending, watered the earth, and made it very plenteous, without incommoding any of its inhabitants. For there were then no impetuous currents of air; no tempestuous winds; no furious hail; no torrents of rain; no rolling thunders, or forked lightnings. One perennial spring was perpetually smiling over the whole surface of the earth. 9. On the third day God commanded all kind of vegetables to spring out of the earth; and then, to add thereto innumerable herbs, intermixed with flowers of all hues. To these were added shrubs of every kind; together with tall and stately trees, whether for shade, for timber, or for fruit, in endless variety. Some of these were adapted to particular climates, or particular exposures; while vegetables of more general use (as wheat in particular) were not confined to one country, but would flourish almost in every climate. But among all these there were no weeds, no useless plants, none that encumbered the ground;

much less were there any poisonous ones, tending to hurt any one creature; but every thing was salutary in its kind, suitable to the gracious design of its great Creator. 10. The Lord now created "the sun to rule the day, and the moon to govern the night." The sun was Of this great world both eye and soul: -- The eye, making all things visible; distributing light to every part of the system; and thereby rejoicing both earth and sky; -- and the soul; the principle of all life, whether to vegetables or animals. Some of the uses of the moon we are acquainted with; her causing the ebbing and flowing of the sea; and influencing, with a greater or smaller degree, all the fluids in the terraqueous globe. And many other uses she may have, unknown to us, but known to the wise Creator. But it is certain she had no hurtful, no unwholesome influence on any living creature. "He made the stars also;" both those that move round the sun, whether of the primary or secondary order; or those that, being at a far greater distance, appear to us as fixed in the firmament of heaven.

Whether Comets are to be numbered among the stars, and whether they were parts of the original creation, is, perhaps, not so easy to determine, at least with certainty; as we have nothing but probable conjecture, either concerning their nature or their use. We know not whether (as some ingenious men have imagined) they are ruined worlds, -- worlds that have undergone a general conflagration; or whether (as others not improbably suppose) they are immense reservoirs of fluids, appointed to revolve at certain seasons, and to supply the still decreasing moisture of the earth. But certain we are that they did not either produce or portend any evil. They did not (as many have fancied since) From their horrid hair Shake pestilence and war.

11. The Lord God afterward peopled the earth with animals of every kind. He first commanded the waters to bring forth abundantly; -- to bring forth creatures, which, as they inhabited a grosser element, so they were, in general, of a more stupid nature; endowed with fewer senses and less understanding than other animals. The bivalved shell-fish, in particular, seem to have no sense but that of feeling, unless perhaps a low measure of taste; so that they are but one degree above vegetables. And even the king of the waters, (a title which some give the whale, because of his enormous magnitude,) though he has sight added to taste and feeling, does not appear to have an understanding proportioned to his bulk. Rather, he is inferior therein not only to most birds and beasts, but to the generality of even reptiles and insects. However, none of these then attempted to devour, or in anyway hurt, one another. All were peaceful and quiet, as were the watery fields wherein they ranged at pleasure. 12. It seems the insect kinds were at least one degree above the inhabitants of the waters. Almost all these too devour one another, and every other creature which they can conquer. Indeed, such is the miserably disordered state of the world at present, that innumerable creatures can no otherwise preserve their own lives than by destroying others. But in the beginning it was not so. The paradisiacal earth afforded a sufficiency of food for all its inhabitants; so that none of them had any need or temptation to prey upon the other. The spider was then as harmless as the fly, and did not then lie in wait for blood. The weakest of them crept securely over the earth, or spread their gilded wings in the air, that wavered in the breeze, and glittered in the sun, without any to make them afraid. Meantime, the reptiles of every kind were equally harmless, and more intelligent than they; yea, one species of them "was more subtil," or knowing, "than any of the" brute creation "which God had made." 13. But, in general, the birds, created to fly in the open firmament of heaven, appear to have been of an order far superior to either insects or reptiles; although still considerably inferior to beasts; as we now restrain that word

to quadrupeds, four-footed animals, which, two hundred years ago, included every kind of living creatures. Many species of these are not only endowed with a large measure of natural understanding, but are likewise capable of much improvement by art, such as one would not readily conceive. But, among all these, there were no birds or beasts of prey; none that destroyed or molested another; but all the creatures breathed, in their several kinds, the benevolence of their great Creator. 14. Such was the state of the creation, according to the scanty ideas which we can now form concerning it, when its great Author, surveying the whole system at one view, pronounced it "very good." It was good in the highest degree whereof it was capable, and without any mixture of evil. Every part was exactly suited to the others, and conducive to the good of the whole. There was "a golden chain" (to use the expression of Plato) "let down from the throne of God;" an exactly connected series of beings, from the highest to the lowest; from dead earth, through fossils, vegetables, animals, to man, created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and enjoy his Creator to all eternity.

## II.

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

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

## 04 Imperfection of Human Knowledge

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Imperfection of Human Knowledge by John Wesley "We know in part." 1 Corinthians 13:9

1. The desire of knowledge is an universal principle in man, fixed in his inmost nature. It is not variable, but constant in every rational creature, unless while it is suspended by some stronger desire. And it is insatiable: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing;" neither the mind with any degree of knowledge which can be conveyed into it. And it is planted in every human soul for excellent purposes. It is intended to hinder our taking up our rest in anything here below; to raise our thoughts to higher and higher objects, more and more worthy our consideration, till we ascend to the Source of all knowledge and all excellence, the all-wise and all-gracious Creator.

2. But although our desire of knowledge has no bounds, yet our knowledge itself has. It is, indeed, confined within very narrow bounds; abundantly narrower than common people imagine, or men of learning are willing to acknowledge: A strong intimation, (since the Creator doeth nothing in vain,) that there will be some future state of being, wherein that now insatiable desire will be satisfied, and there will be no longer so immense a distance between the appetite and the object of it.

3. The present knowledge of man is exactly adapted to his present wants. It is sufficient to warn us of, and to preserve us from, most of the evils to which we are now exposed; and to procure us whatever is necessary for us in this our infant state of existence. We know enough of the nature and sensible qualities of the things that are round about us, so far as they are subservient to the health and strength of our bodies; we know how to procure and prepare our food; we know what raiment is fit to cover us; we know how build our houses, and to furnish them with all necessaries and conveniences; we know just as much as is conducive to our living comfortably in this world: But of innumerable things above, below, and round about us, we know little more than that they exist. And in this our deep ignorance is seen the goodness as well as the wisdom of God, in cutting short his knowledge on every side, on purpose to "hide pride from man."

4. Therefore it is, that by the very constitution of their nature, the wisest of men "know" but "in part." And how amazingly small a part do they know, either of the Creator, or of his works! This is a very needful but a very displeasing theme; for "vain man would be wise." Let us reflect upon it for awhile. And may the God of wisdom and love open our eyes to discern our own ignorance!

I.

1. To begin with the great Creator himself. How astonishingly little do we know of God! -- How small a part of his nature do we know! of his essential attributes! What conception can we form of his omnipresence? Who is able to comprehend how God is in this and every place? how he fills the immensity of space? If philosophers, by denying the existence of a vacuum, only meant that there is no place empty of God, that every point of infinite space is full of God, certainly no man could call it in question. But still, the fact being admitted what is omnipresence or ubiquity? Man is no more able to comprehend this, than to grasp the universe.

2. The omnipresence or immensity of God, Sir Isaac Newton endeavours to illustrate by a strong expression, by terming infinite space, "the Sensorium of the Deity." And the very Heathens did not scruple to say, "All things are full of God:" Just equivalent with his own declaration: -- "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." How beautifully does the Psalmist illustrate this! "Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I go into the heaven, thou art there: If I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea even there thy hand shall find me, and thy right hand shall hold me." But, in the mean time, what conception can we form, either of his eternity or immensity? Such knowledge is too wonderful for us: We cannot attain unto it.

3. A second essential attribute of God is eternity. He existed before all time. Perhaps we might more properly say, He does exist from everlasting to everlasting. But what is eternity? A celebrated author says, that the Divine eternity is *\_vitae interminabilis tota simul et perfecta possessio\_*: "The at once entire and perfect possession of never-ending life." But how much wiser are we for this definition? we know just as much of it as we did before. "The at once entire and perfect possession!" Who can conceive what this means?

4. If indeed God had stamped (as some have maintained) an idea of himself on every human soul, we must certainly have understood something of these, as well as his other attributes; for we cannot suppose he would have impressed upon us either a false or an imperfect idea of himself; but the truth is, no man ever did, or does now, find any such idea stamped upon his soul. The little which we do know of God, (expect what we receive by the inspiration of the Holy One,) we do not gather from any inward impression, but gradually acquire from without. "The invisible things of God," if they are known at all, "are known from the things that are made;" not from what God hath written in our hearts, but from what he hath written in all his works.

5. Hence then, from his works, particularly his works of creation, we are to learn the knowledge of God. But it is not easy to conceive how little we know even of these. To begin with those that are at a distance: Who knows how far the universe extends? What are the limits of it? The morning stars can tell, who sang together when the lines of it were stretched out, when God said, "This be thy circumference, O world!" But all beyond the fixed stars is utterly hid from the children of men. And what do we know of the fixed stars? Who telleth the number of them? even that small portion of them that, by their mingled light, form what we call, "the milky way?" And who knows the use of them? Are they so many suns that illuminate their respective planets? Or do they only minister to this, (as Mr. Hutchinson supposes,) and contribute, in some unknown way, to the perpetual circulation of light and spirit? Who knows what comets are? Are they planets not fully formed? or planets destroyed by a conflagration? Or are they bodies of a wholly different nature, of which we can form no idea? Who can tell what is the sun? Its use we know; but who knows of what substance it is composed? Nay, we are not yet able to determine, whether it be fluid or solid! Who knows what is the precise distance of the sun from the earth?

Many astronomers are persuaded it is a hundred millions of miles; others, that it is only eighty-six millions, though generally accounted ninety. But equally great men say, it is no more than fifty; some of them, that it is but twelve: Last comes Dr. Rogers, and demonstrates that it is just two millions nine hundred thousand miles! So little do we know even of this glorious luminary, the eye and soul of the lower world! And just as much of the planets that surround him; yea, of our own

planet, the moon. Some indeed have discovered, River and mountains on her spotty globe; yea, have marked out all her seas and continents! -- But after all, we know just nothing of the matter. We have nothing but mere uncertain conjecture concerning the nearest of all the heavenly bodies.

6. But let come to the things that are still nearer home, and inquire what knowledge we have of them. How much do we know of that wonderful body, light? How is it communicated to us? Does it flow in a continued stream from the sun? Or does the sun impel the particles next his orb, and so on and on, to the extremity of his system? Again: Does light gravitate or not? Does it attract or repel other bodies? Is it subject to the general laws which obtain in all other matter? Or is it a body *à se generis*, altogether different from all other matter? Is it the same with electric fluid, and others arrest its course? Why is the phial capable of being charged to such a point, and no farther? A thousand more questions might be asked on this head, which no man living can answer.

7. But surely we understand the air we breathe, and which encompasses us on every side. By that admirable property of elasticity, it is the general spring of nature. But is elasticity essential to air, and inseparable from it? Nay, it has lately proved, by numberless experiments, that air may be fixed, that is, divested of its elasticity, and generated or restored to it again. Therefore it is no otherwise elastic, than as it is connected with electric fire. And is not this electric or ethereal fire, the only true essential elastic in nature? Who knows by what power, dew, rain, and all other vapours rise and fall in the air? Can we account for the phenomenon of them upon the common principles? Or must we own, with a late ingenious author, that those principles are utterly insufficient; and that they cannot be rationally accounted for, but upon the principle of electricity?

8. Let us now descend to the earth which we tread upon, and which God has peculiarly given to the children of men. Do the children of men understand this? Suppose the terraqueous globe to be seven or eight thousand miles in diameter, how much of this do we know? Perhaps a mile or two of its surface: So far the art of man has penetrated. But who can inform us, what lies beneath the region of stones, metals, minerals, and other fossils? This is only a thin crust, which bears an exceeding small proportion to the whole. Who can acquaint us with the inner parts of the globe? Whereof do these consist? Is there a central fire, a grand reservoir, which not only supplies the burning mountains, but also ministers (though we know not how) to the ripening of gems and metals; yea, and perhaps to the production of vegetables, and the well-being of animals too? Or is the great deep still contained in the bowels of the earth? a central abyss of waters? Who hath seen? Who can tell? Who can give any solid satisfaction to a rational inquirer?

9. How much of the very surface of the globe is still utterly unknown to us! How very little do we know of the polar regions, either north or south, either in Europe or Asia! How little of these vast countries, the inland parts either of Africa or America! Much less do we know what is contained in the broad sea, the great abyss, which covers so large a part of the globe. Most of its chambers are inaccessible to man, so that we cannot tell how they are furnished. How little we know of those things on the dry land which fall directly under our notice!

Consider even the most simple metals or stones: How imperfectly are we acquainted with their nature and properties! Who knows what it is that distinguishes metals from all other fossils? It is answered, "Why, they are heavier." Very true; but what is the cause of their being heavier? What is the specific difference between metals and stones? or between one metal and another? between gold and silver? between tin and lead? It is all mystery to the sons of men.

10. Proceed we to the vegetable kingdom. Who can demonstrate that the sap, in any vegetable, performs a regular circulation through its vessels, or that it does not? Who can point out the specific difference between one kind of plant and another? or the peculiar, internal conformation and disposition of their component parts? Yea, what man living thoroughly understands the nature and properties of any one planet under heaven?

11. With regard to animals: Are microscopic animals, so called, real animals or no? If they are, are they not essentially different from all other animals in the universe, as not requiring any food, not generating or being generated? Are they no animals at all, but merely inanimate particles of matter, in a state of fermentation? How totally ignorant are the most sagacious of men touching the whole affair of generation! even the generation of men. In the book of the Creator, indeed, were all our members written, "which day by day were fashioned, when as yet were none of them:" But what means was the first motion communicated to the *\_punctum saliens\_*? When, and how, was the immortal spirit superadded to the senseless clay? It is mystery all: And we can only say, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

12. With regard to insects, many are the discoveries which have been lately made. But how little is all that is discovered yet, in comparison of what is undiscovered! How many millions of them, by their extreme minuteness, totally escape all our inquiries! And, indeed, the minute parts of the largest animals elude our utmost diligence. have we a more complete knowledge of fishes that we have of insects? A great part, if not the greatest part, of the inhabitants of the waters are totally concealed from us. It is probable, the species of sea-animals are full as numerous as the land-animals. But how few of them are known to us! And it is very little we know of those few. With birds we are a little better acquainted: And, indeed, it is but a little. For of very many we now hardly anything more than their outward shape. We now a few of the obvious properties of other, chiefly those that frequent our houses. But we have not a thorough, adequate knowledge even of them. How little do we now of beasts! We do not know whence the different tempers and qualities arise, not only in different species of them, but in individuals of the same species; yea, and frequently in those who spring from the same parents, the same both male and female animal. Are they mere machines? Then they are incapable either of pleasure or pain. Nay, they can have no senses; they neither see nor hear; they neither taste nor smell. Much less can they now, or remember, or move, any otherwise than they are impelled from without. But all this, as daily experiments show, is quite contrary to the matter of fact.

13. Well; but if we know nothing else, do not we now ourselves? our bodies and our souls? What is our soul? It is a spirit, we know. But what is a spirit? Here we are at a full stop. And where is the soul lodged? in the pineal gland, in the whole brain, in the heart, in the blood, in any single part of the body, or (if any one can understand those terms) "all in all, and all in every part?" How is the soul united to the body? a spirit or a clod? What is the secret, imperceptible chain that couples them together? Can the wisest of men give a satisfactory answer to any one of these plain questions? And as to our body itself, how little do we know! During a night's sleep, a healthy man perspires one part in four less when he sweats, than when he does not. Who can account for this? What is flesh? that of the muscles in particular? Are the fibres that compose it of a determinate size, so that they can be divided only so far? Or are they resolvable *\_in infinitum\_*? How does a muscle act? by being inflated, and consequently shortened? But what is it inflated with? If whit blood, how and whence comes that blood? And whither does it go, the moment the muscle is

relaxed? Are the nerves pervious or solid? How do they act? by vibration or transmission of the animal spirits? Who knows what the animal spirits are? Are they electric fire? What is sleep? Wherein does it consist? What is dreaming? How can we know dreams from waking thoughts? I doubt no man knows. O how little do we know even concerning the whole creation of God?

II.

1. But are we not better acquainted with his works of providence, than with his works of creation? It is one of the first principles of religion, that his kingdom ruleth over all: so that we may say with confidence, "O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name over all the earth!" It is a childish conceit, to suppose chance governs the world, or has any part in the government of it: No, not even in those things that, to the vulgar eye, appear to be perfectly casual. "The lot is cast to the lap; but the disposal thereof is from the Lord." Our blessed Master himself has put this matter beyond all possible doubt: "Not a sparrow," saith he, "falleth to the ground without the will of your Father which is in heaven: Yea," (to express the thing more strongly still,) "even the very hairs of you head are all numbered."

2. But although we are well apprized of this general truth, that all things are governed by the providence of God; (the very language of the heathen orator, *\_Deorum moderamine cuncta geri\_*;) yet how amazingly little do we know of the particulars contained under this general! How little do we understand of his providential dealing, either with regard to nations, or families, or individuals! There are heights and depths in all these which our understanding can in no wise fathom. We can comprehend but a small part of his ways now; the rest we shall know hereafter.

3. Even with regard to entire nations, how little do we comprehend of God's providential dealings with them! what innumerable nations in the eastern world once flourished, to the terror of all around them, and are now swept away from the face of the earth; and their memorial is perished with them! Nor has the case been otherwise in the west. In Europe also we read of many large and powerful kingdoms, of which the names only are left: The people are vanished away, and are as though they had never been. But why it has pleased the almighty Governor of the world to sweep them away with the besom of destruction we cannot tell; those who succeeded them being, many times, little better than themselves.

4. But it is not only with regard to ancient nations, that the providential dispensations of God are utterly incomprehensible to us: The same difficulties occur now. We cannot account for his present dealings with the inhabitants of the earth. We know, "the Lord is loving unto every man, and his mercy is over all his works." But we know not how to reconcile this with the present dispensations of his providence. At this day, is not almost every part of the earth full of darkness and cruel habitations? In what a condition, in particular, is the large and populous empire of Indostan! How many hundred thousands of the poor, quiet people, have been destroyed, and their carcasses left as the dung of the earth! in what a condition (though they have no English ruffians there) are the numberless islands in the Pacific Ocean! How little is their state above that of wolves and bears! And who careth either for their souls or their bodies? But does not the Father of men care for them? O mystery of providence!

5. And who cares for thousands, myriads, if not millions, of the wretched Africans? Are not whole droves of these poor sheep (human, if not rational beings!) continually driven to market, and sold,

like cattle, into the vilest bondage, without any hope of deliverance but by death? Who cares for those outcasts or men, the well-known Hottentots? It is true, a late writer has taken much pains to represent them as a respectable people: But from what motive it is not easy to say; since he himself allows (a specimen of their elegance of manners) that the raw guts of sheep and other cattle are not only some of their choicest food, but also the ornaments of their arms and legs; and (a specimen of their religion) that the son is not counted a man, till he has beat his mother almost to death; and when his father grows old, he fastens him to a little hut, and leaves him there to starve! O Father of mercies! are these the works of thy own hands, the purchase of thy Son's blood?

6. How little better is either the civil or religious state of the poor American Indians! that is, the miserable remains of them: For in some provinces not one of them is left to breathe. In Hispaniola, when the Christians came thither first, there were three millions of inhabitants. Scarce twelve thousand of them now survive. And in what condition are these, or the other Indians who are still scattered up and down in the vast continent of South or North America? Religion they have none; no public worship of any kind! God is not in all their thoughts. And most of them have no civil government at all; no laws; no magistrates; but every man does what is right in his own eyes. Therefore they are decreasing daily; and, very probably, in a century or two there will not be one of them left.

7. However, the inhabitants of Europe are not in so deplorable a condition. They are in a state of civilization; they have useful laws, and are governed by magistrates; they have religion; they are Christians. I am afraid, whether they are called Christians or not, many of them have not much religion. What say you to thousands of Laplanders, or Finlanders, or Samoiedes, and Greenlanders? indeed, of all who live in high northern latitudes? Are they as civilized as sheep or oxen? To compare them with horses, or any of our domestic animals, would be doing them too much honour. Add to these, myriads of human savages that are freezing among the snow of Siberia, and as many, if not more, who are wandering up and down in the deserts of Tartary. Add thousands upon thousands of Poles and Muscovites; and of Christians, so called, from Turkey in Europe. And did "God so love" these, "that he gave his Son, his only begotten Son, to the end they might not perish, but have everlasting life?" Then why are they thus? O wonder above all wonders!

8. Is there not something equally mysterious in the divine dispensation with regard to Christianity itself? Who can explain why Christianity is not spread as far as sin? Why is not the medicine sent to every place where the disease is found? But alas! It is not: "The sound of it is" not now "gone forth into all lands." The poison is diffused over the whole globe; the antidote is not known in a sixth part of it. Nay, and how is it that the wisdom and goodness of God suffer the antidote itself to be so grievously adulterated, not only in Roman Catholic countries, but almost in every part of the Christian world? So adulterated by mixing it frequently with useless, frequently with poisonous ingredients, that it retains none, or at least a very small part of its original virtue.

Yea, it is so thoroughly adulterated by many of those very persons whom he has sent to administer it that it adds tenfold malignity to the disease which it was designed to cure! In consequence of this there is little more mercy or truth to be found among Christians than among pagans. Nay, it has been affirmed and I am afraid truly, that many called Christians are far worse than the heathens that surround them: more profligate, more abandoned to all manner of

wickedness, neither fearing God, nor regarding man! O who can comprehend this! Doth not he who is higher than the highest regard it?

9. Equally incomprehensible to us are many of the divine dispensations with regard to particular families. We cannot at all comprehend why he raises some to wealth, honour, and power and why in the meantime he depresses others with poverty and various afflictions. Some wonderfully prosper in all they take in hand, and the world pours in upon them; while others with all their labour and toil can scarce procure daily bread. And perhaps prosperity and applause continue with the former to their death; while the latter drink the cup of adversity to their life's end -- although no reason appears to us either for the prosperity of the one or the adversity of the other.

10. As little can we account for the divine dispensations with regard to individuals. We know not why the lot of this man is cast in Europe, the lot of that man in the wilds of America; why one is born of rich or noble, the other of poor parents; why the father and mother of one are strong and healthy, those of another weak and diseased; in consequence of which he drags a miserable being all the days of his life, exposed to want, and pain, and a thousand temptations from which he finds no way to escape.

How many are from their very infancy hedged in with such relations that they seem to have no chance (as some speak), no possibility of being useful to themselves or others? Why are they, antecedent to their own choice, entangled in such connections? Why are hurtful people so cast in their way that they know not how to escape them? And why are useful persons hid out of their sight, or snatched away from them at their utmost need? O God, how unsearchable are thy judgments or counsels! Too deep to be fathomed by our reason: and thy ways of executing those counsels not to be traced by our wisdom!

III.

1. Are we able to search out his works of grace any more than his works of providence? ~Nothing is more sure than that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Why is it then that so vast a majority of mankind are, so far as we can judge, cut off from all means, all possibility of holiness, even from their mother's womb? For instance: what possibility is there that a Hottentot, a New-Zealander, or an inhabitant of Nova-Zembla, if he lives and dies there, should ever know what holiness means? Or consequently ever attain it? Yea, but one may say: "He sinned before he was born, in a pre-existent state. Therefore he was placed here in so unfavourable a situation. And it is mere mercy that he should have a second trial." I answer: supposing such a pre-existent state, this which you call a second trial is really no trial at all. As soon as he is born into the world he is absolutely in the power of his savage parents and relations, who from the first dawn of reason train him up in the same ignorance, atheism, and barbarity with themselves. He has no chance, so to speak; he has no possibility of any better education. What trial has he then? From the time he comes into the world till he goes out of it again he seems to be under a dire necessity of living in all ungodliness and unrighteousness. But how is this? How can this be the case with so many millions of the souls that God has made? Art thou not the God "of all the ends of the earth, and of them that remain in the broad sea?"

2. I desire it may be observed that if this be improved into an objection against revelation it is an objection that lies full as much against natural as revealed religion. If it were conclusive it would

not drive us into Deism, but into flat Atheism. It would conclude not only against the Christian revelation but against the being of a God. And yet I see not how we can avoid the force of it but by resolving all into the unsearchable wisdom of God, together with a deep conviction of our ignorance and inability to fathom his counsels.

3. Even among us who are favoured far above these, -- to whom are entrusted the oracles of God, whose word is a lantern to our feet, and a light in all our paths, -- there are still many circumstances in his dispensations which are above our comprehension. We know not why he suffered us so long to go on in our own ways before we were convinced of sin. Or why he made use of this or the other instrument, and in this or the other manner. And a thousand circumstances attended the process of our conviction which we do not comprehend. We know not why he suffered us to stay so long before he revealed his Son in our hearts; or why this change from darkness to light was accompanied with such and such particular circumstances.

4. It is doubtless the peculiar prerogative of God to reserve the "times and seasons in his own power." And we cannot give any reason, why, of two persons equally athirst for salvation one is presently taken into the favour of God, and the other left to mourn for months or years. One, as soon as he calls upon God, is answered, and filled with peace and joy in believing; another seeks after him, and, it seems, with the same degree of sincerity and earnestness, and yet cannot find him, or any consciousness of his favour, for weeks, or months, or years. We know well this cannot possibly be owing to any absolute decree, consigning, one before he was born to everlasting glory, and the other to everlasting fire; but we do not know what is the reason for it: It is enough that God knoweth.

5. There is, likewise, great variety in the manner and time of God's bestowing his sanctifying grace, whereby he enables his children to give him their whole heart, which we can in no wise account for. We know not why he bestows this on some even before they ask for it; (some unquestionable instances of which we have seen;) on some after they have sought it but a few days; and yet permits other believers to wait for it perhaps twenty, thirty, or forty years; nay, and others, till a few hours, or even minutes, before their spirits return to him. For the various circumstances also which attend the fulfilling of that great promise, "I will circumcise thy heart, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul," God undoubtedly has reasons; but those reasons are generally hid from the children of men. Once more: some of those who are enabled to love God with all their heart and with all their soul, retain the same blessing, without any interruption, till they are carried to Abraham's bosom; others do not retain it, although they are not conscious of having grieved the Holy Spirit of God. This also we do not understand: We do not herein "know the mind of the Spirit."

IV. Several valuable lessons we may learn from a deep consciousness of this our own ignorance. First, we may learn hence a lesson of humility; not "to think of ourselves," particularly with regard to our understanding, "more highly than we ought to think;" but "to think soberly;" being thoroughly convinced that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think one good thought; that we should be liable to stumble at every step, to err every moment of our lives, were it not that we have "an anointing from the Holy One," which abideth "with us;" were it not that He who knoweth what is in man helpeth our infirmities; that "there is a spirit in man which giveth wisdom," and the inspiration of the Holy One which "giveth understanding." From hence we may learn, Secondly, a lesson of

faith, of confidence in God. A full conviction of our own ignorance may teach us a full trust in his wisdom. It may teach us (what is not always so easy as one would conceive it to be) to trust the invisible God farther than we can see him! It may assist us in learning that difficult lesson, to "cast down" our own "imagination" (or reasonings rather, as the word properly signifies), to "cast down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." There are at present two grand obstructions to our forming a right judgment of the dealings of God with respect to men. The one is, there are innumerable facts relating to every man which we do not and cannot know. They are, at present, hid from us, and covered from our search by impenetrable darkness. The other is, we cannot see the thoughts of men, even when we know their actions. Still we know not their intentions; and without this we can but ill judge of their outward actions. Conscious of this, "judge nothing before the time" concerning his providential dispensations; till he shall bring to light "the hidden things of darkness," and manifest "the thoughts and intent of the heart." From a consciousness of our ignorance we may learn, Thirdly, a lesson of resignation. We may be instructed to say at all times and in all instances, "Father, not as I will; but as thou wilt." This was the last lesson which our blessed Lord (as man) learnt while he was upon earth. He could go no higher than, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt," till he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. Let us also herein be made conformable to his death, that we may know the full "power of his resurrection!" [Preached at Bristol, March 5, 1784]

## 05 The First Fruits of the Spirit

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### The First Fruits of the Spirit by John Wesley

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:1

1. By "them which are in Christ Jesus," St. Paul evidently means, those who truly believe in him; those who, "being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." They who thus believe do no longer "walk after the flesh," no longer follow the motions of corrupt nature, but "after the Spirit"; both their thoughts, words, and works are under the direction of the blessed Spirit of God.

2. "There is therefore now no condemnation to" these. There is no condemnation to them from God; for he hath justified them "freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus." He hath forgiven all their iniquities, and blotted out all their sins. And there is no condemnation to them from within; for they "have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that they might know the things which are freely given to them of God" (1 Corinthians 2:12); which Spirit "beareth witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God." And to this is added the testimony of their conscience, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world" (2 Corinthians 1:12).

3. But because this scripture has been so frequently misunderstood, and that in so dangerous a manner; because such multitudes of "unlearned and unstable men" (hoi amatheis kai astEriktoi, men untaught of God, and consequently unestablished in the truth which is after godliness) have wrested it to their own destruction; I propose to show, as clearly as I can:

I. First, who those are "which are in Christ Jesus," and "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit:"

II. Secondly, how "there is no condemnation to" these.

III. I shall conclude with some practical inferences.

I.

1. First, I am to show, who those are that "are in Christ Jesus." And are they not those who believe in his name? those who are "found in him, not having their own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith?" these, "who have redemption through his blood," are properly said to be in him; for they dwell in Christ, and Christ in them. They are joined unto the Lord in one Spirit. They are ingrafted into him as branches into the vine. They are united, as members to their head, in a manner which words cannot express, nor could it before enter into their hearts to conceive.

2. Now "whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not"; "walketh not after the flesh." The flesh, in the usual language of St. Paul, signifies corrupt nature. In this sense he uses the word, writing to the Galatians, "The works of the flesh are manifest" (Galatians 5:19); and a little before, "Walk in the

Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust" (or desire) "of the flesh" (v. 16). To prove which, namely, that those who "walk by the Spirit," do not "fulfil the lusts of the flesh," he immediately adds, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusteth against the flesh (for these are contrary to each other); that ye may not do the things which ye would." So the words are literally translated; hina mE ha an theIete, tauta poiEte, not, "So that ye cannot do the things that ye would"; as if the flesh overcame the Spirit: a translation which hath not only nothing to do with the original text of the Apostle, but likewise makes his whole argument nothing worth; yea, asserts just the reverse of what he is proving.

3. They who are of Christ, who abide in him, "have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." They abstain from all those works of the flesh; from "adultery and fornication"; from "uncleanness and lasciviousness"; from "idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance "; from "emulations, wrath, strife, sedition, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings"; from every design, and word, and work, to which the corruption of nature leads.

Although they feel the root of bitterness in themselves, yet are they endued with power from on high to trample it continually under foot, so that it cannot "spring up to trouble them"; insomuch that every fresh assault which they undergo, only gives them fresh occasion of praise, of crying out, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord."

4. They now "walk after the Spirit," both in their hearts and lives. They are taught of him to love God and their neighbour, with a love which is as "a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." And by him they are led into every holy desire, into every divine and heavenly temper, till every thought which arises in their heart is holiness unto the Lord.

5. They who "walk after the Spirit," are also led by him into all holiness of conversation. Their "speech is always in grace, seasoned with salt"; with the love and fear of God. "No corrupt communication comes out of their mouth; but only that which is good," that which is "to the use of edifying," which is "meet to minister grace to the hearers." And herein likewise do they exercise themselves day and night, to do only the things which please God; in all their outward behaviour to follow him "who left us an example that we might tread in his steps"; in all their intercourse with their neighbour, to walk in justice, mercy, and truth; and "whatsoever they do," in every circumstances of life, to "do all to the glory of God."

6. These are they who indeed "walk after the Spirit." Being filled with faith and with the holy Ghost, they possess in their hearts, and show forth in their lives, in the whole course of their words and actions, the genuine fruits of the Spirit of God, namely, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance," and whatsoever else is lovely or praiseworthy. "They adorn in all things the gospel of God our Saviour"; and give full proof to all mankind, that they are indeed actuated by the same Spirit "which raised up Jesus from the dead."

II.

1. I proposed to show, in the second place, how "there is no condemnation to them which are" thus "in Christ Jesus," and thus "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

And, first, to believers in Christ, walking thus, "there is no condemnation" on account of their past sins. God condemneth them not for any of these; they are as though they had never been; they

are cast "as a stone into the depth of the sea," and he remembereth them no more. God, having "set forth his Son to be a propitiation "for them, "through faith in his blood," hath declared unto them "His righteousness for the remission of the sins that are past." He layeth therefore none of these to their charge; their memorial is perished with them.

2. And there is no condemnation in their own breast; no sense of guilt, or dread of the wrath of God. They "have the witness in themselves:" they are conscious of their interest in the blood of sprinkling. "They have not received again the spirit of bondage unto fear," unto doubt and racking uncertainty; but they "have received the Spirit of adoption," crying in their heart, "Abba, Father." Thus, being "justified by faith," they have the peace of God ruling in their hearts; flowing from a continual sense of his pardoning mercy, and "the answer of a good conscience toward God."

3. If it be said, "But sometimes a believer in Christ may lose his sight of the mercy of God; sometimes such darkness may fall upon him that he no longer sees him that is invisible, no longer feels that witness in himself of his part in the atoning blood; and then he is inwardly condemned, he hath again "the sentence of death in himself": I answer, supposing it so to be, supposing him not to see the mercy of God, then he is not a believer: For faith implies light, the light of God shining upon the soul. So far, therefore, as any one loses this light, he, for the time, loses his faith. And, no doubt, a true believer in Christ may lose the light of faith; and so far as this is lost, he may, for a time, fall again into condemnation. But this is not the case of them who now "are in Christ Jesus," who now believe in his name. For so long as they believe, and walk after the Spirit, neither God condemns them, nor their own heart.

4. They are not condemned, secondly, for any present sins, for now transgressing the commandments of God. For they do not transgress them: they do not "walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This is the continual proof of their "love of God, that they keep his commandments"; even as St. John bears witness. "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:" he cannot, so long as that seed of God, that loving, holy faith remaineth in him. So long as "he keepeth himself" herein, "that wicked one toucheth him not." Now it is evident, he is not condemned for the sins which he doth not commit at all. They, therefore, who are thus "led by the Spirit, are not under the law" (Galatians 5:18): not under the curse or condemnation of it; for it condemns none but those who break it. Thus, that law of God, "Thou shalt not steal," condemns none but those who do steal. Thus, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy," condemns those only who do not keep it holy. But against the fruits of the Spirit "there is no law" (5:23); as the Apostle more largely declares in those memorable words of his former Epistle to Timothy: "We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this," (if, while he uses the law of God, in order either to convince or direct, he know and remember this), *hoti dikaiO nomos ou keitai*, (not, "that the law is not made for a righteous man," but) "that the law does not lie against a righteous man:" it has no force against him, no power to condemn him; "but against the lawless and disobedient, against the ungodly and sinners, against the unholy and profane; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God." (1 Timothy 1:8-9; 1 Timothy 1:11).

5. They are not condemned, thirdly, for inward sin, even though it does now remain. That the corruption of nature does still remain, even in those who are the children of God by faith; that they have in them the seeds of pride and vanity, of anger, lust, and evil desire, yea, sin of every kind; is

too plain to be denied, being matter of daily experience. And on this account it is, that St. Paul, speaking to those whom he had just before witnessed to be "in Christ Jesus," (1 Corinthians 1:2; 1 Corinthians 1:9), to have been "called of God into the fellowship "(or participation) "of his Son Jesus Christ "; yet declares, "Brethren, I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1): "babes in Christ"; so we see they were "in Christ"; they were believers in a low degree. And yet how much of sin remained in them! Of that "carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God!"

6. And yet, for all this, they are not condemned. Although they feel the flesh, the evil nature, in them; although they are more sensible, day by day, that their "heart is deceitful and desperately wicked"; yet, so long as they do not yield thereto; so long as they give no place to the devil; so long as they maintain a continual war with all sin, with pride, anger, desire, so that the flesh hath not dominion over them, but they still "walk after the Spirit"; "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." God is well pleased with their sincere, though imperfect. obedience; and they "have confidence toward God," knowing they are his, "by the Spirit which he hath given" them. (1 John 3:24).

7. Nay, fourthly, although they are continually convinced of sin cleaving to all they do; although they are conscious of not fulfilling the perfect law, either in their thoughts, or words, or works; although they know they do not love the Lord their God with all their heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; although they feel more or less of pride, or self-will, stealing in, and mixing with their best duties; although even in their more immediate intercourse with God, when they assemble themselves with the great congregation, and when they pour out their souls in secret to him who seeth all the thoughts and intents of the heart, they are continually ashamed of their wandering thoughts, or of the deadness and dulness of their affections; yet there is no condemnation to them still, either from God or from their own heart. The consideration of these manifold defects only gives them a deeper sense, that they have always need of that blood of sprinkling which speaks for them in the ears of God, and that Advocate with the Father "who ever liveth to make intercession for them." So far are these from driving them away from him in whom they have believed, that they rather drive them the closer to him whom they feel the want of every moment. And, at the same time, the deeper sense they have of this want, the more earnest desire do they feel, and the more diligent they are, as they "have received the Lord Jesus, so to walk in him."

8. They are not condemned, fifthly, for sins of infirmity, as they are usually called. Perhaps it were advisable rather to call them infirmities: that we may not seem to give any countenance to sin, or to extenuate it in any degree, by thus coupling it with infirmity. But (if we must retain so ambiguous and dangerous an expression), by sins of infirmity I would mean, such involuntary failings as the saying a thing we believe true, though, in fact, it prove to be false; or, the hurting our neighbour without knowing or designing it, perhaps when we designed to do him good.

Though these are deviations from the holy, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, yet they are not properly sins, nor do they bring any guilt on the conscience of "them which are in Christ Jesus." They separate not between God and them, neither intercept the light of his countenance; as being no ways inconsistent with their general character of "walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

9. Lastly. "There is no condemnation "to them for anything whatever which it is not in their power to help; whether it be of an inward or outward nature, and whether it be doing something or leaving something undone. For instance, the Lord's Supper is to be administered; but you do not partake thereof. Why do you not? You are confined by sickness; therefore, you cannot help omitting it; and for the same reason you are not condemned. There is no guilt, because there is no choice. As there "is a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not."

10. A believer, indeed, may sometimes be grieved: because he cannot do what his soul longs for. He may cry out, when he is detained from worshipping God in the great congregation, "Like as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: When shall I come to appear in the presence of God?" He may earnestly desire (only still saying in his heart, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt") to "go again with the multitude, and bring them forth into the house of God." But still, if he cannot go, he feels no condemnation, no guilt, no sense of God's displeasure; but can cheerfully yield up those desires with, "O my soul, put thy trust in God! For I will yet give him thanks, who is the help of my countenance and my God."

11. It is more difficult to determine concerning those which are usually styled sins of surprise: as when one who commonly in patience possesses his soul, on a sudden and violent temptation, speaks or acts in a manner not consistent with the royal law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Perhaps it is not easy to fix a general rule concerning transgressions of this nature.

We cannot say, either that men are, or that they are not, condemned for sins of surprise in general: but it seems, whenever a believer is by surprise overtaken in a fault, there is more or less condemnation, as there is more or less concurrence of his will. In proportion as a sinful desire, or word, or action is more or less voluntary, so we may conceive God is more or less displeased, and there is more or less guilt upon the soul.

12. But if so, then there may be some sins of surprise which bring much guilt and condemnation. For, in some instances, our being surprised is owing to some wilful and culpable neglect; or, to a sleepiness of soul which might have been prevented, or shaken off before the temptation came. A man may be previously warned either of God or man, that trials and dangers are at hand; and yet may say in his heart, "A little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to rest."

Now, if such an one afterwards fall, though unawares, into the snare which he might have avoided, --that he fell unawares, is no excuse; he might have foreseen and have shunned the danger. The falling, even by surprise, in such an instance as this, is, in effect, a wilful sin; and, as such, must expose the sinner to condemnation, both from God and his own conscience.

13. On the other hand, there may be sudden assaults, either from the world, or the god of this world, and frequently from our own evil hearts, which we did not, and hardly could, foresee. And by these even a believer, while weak in faith, may possibly be borne down, suppose into a degree of anger, or thinking evil of another, with scarce any concurrence of his will. Now in such a case, the jealous God would undoubtedly show him that he had done foolishly.

He would be convinced of having swerved from the perfect law, from the mind which was in Christ, and consequently, grieved with a godly sorrow, and lovingly ashamed before God. Yet need he not

come into condemnation. God layeth not folly to his charge, but hath compassion upon him, "even as a father pitieth his own children." And his heart condemneth him not: in the midst of that sorrow and shame he can still say, "I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

III.

1. It remains only to draw some practical inferences from the preceding considerations. And, first, if there be "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," on account of their past sin; then why art thou fearful, O thou of little faith? Though thy sins were once more in number than the sand, what is that to thee, now thou art in Christ Jesus? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth?" All the sins thou hast committed from thy youth up, until the hour when thou wast "accepted in the Beloved," are driven away as chaff, are gone, are lost, swallowed up, remembered no more. Thou art now "born of the Spirit:" wilt thou be troubled or afraid of what is done before thou wert born? Away with thy fears! Thou art not called to fear, but to the "spirit of love and of a sound mind." Know thy calling! Rejoice in God thy Saviour, and give thanks to God thy Father through him!

2. Wilt thou say, "But I have again committed sin, since I had redemption through his blood? And therefore it is, that "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It is meet thou shouldst abhor thyself; and it is God who hath wrought thee to this self-same thing. But, dost thou now believe? Hath he again enabled thee to say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth"; "and the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God?" Then that faith again cancels all that is past, and there is no condemnation to thee. At whatsoever time thou truly believest in the name of the Son of God, all thy sins, antecedent to that hour, vanish away as the morning dew. Now then, "stand thou fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made thee free." He hath once more made thee free from the power of sin, as well as from the guilt and punishment of it. O "be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage!" --neither the vile, devilish bondage of sin, of evil desires, evil tempers, or words, or works, the most grievous yoke on this side hell; nor the bondage of slavish, tormenting fear, of guilt and self-condemnation.

3. But secondly, do all they which abide "in Christ Jesus, walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit?" Then we cannot but infer, that whosoever now committeth sin, hath no part or lot in this matter. He is even now condemned by his own heart. But, "if our heart condemn us," if our own conscience beareth witness that we are guilty, undoubtedly God doth; for "He is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things"; so that we cannot deceive him, if we can ourselves. And think not to say, "I was justified once; my sins were once forgiven me:" I know not that; neither will I dispute whether they were or no.

Perhaps, at this distance of time, it is next to impossible to know, with any tolerable degree of certainty, whether that was a true, genuine work of God, or whether thou didst only deceive thy own soul. But this I know, with the utmost degree of certainty, "he that committeth sin is of the devil." Therefore, thou art of thy father the devil. It cannot be denied: for the works of thy father thou doest. O flatter not thyself with vain hopes! Say not to thy soul, "Peace peace!" For there is no peace.

Cry aloud! Cry unto God out of the deep; if haply he may hear thy voice. Come unto him as at first, as wretched and poor, as sinful, miserable, blind and naked! And beware thou suffer thy soul to take no rest, till his pardoning love be again revealed; till he "heal thy backslidings," and fill thee again with the "faith that worketh by love."

4. Thirdly. Is there no condemnation to them which "walk after the Spirit," by reason of inward sin still remaining, so long as they do not give way thereto; nor by reason of sin cleaving to all they do? Then fret not thyself because of ungodliness, though it still remain in thy heart. Repine not, because thou still comest short of the glorious image of God; nor yet because pride, self-will, or unbelief, cleave to all thy words and works. And be not afraid to know all this evil of thy heart, to know thyself as also thou art known. Yea, desire of God, that thou mayest not think of thyself more highly than thou oughtest to think. Let thy continual prayer be, Show me, as my soul can bear, The depth of inbred sin;

All the unbelief declare, The pride that lurks within. But when he heareth thy prayer, and unveils thy heart; when he shows thee throughly what spirit thou art of; then beware that thy faith fail thee not, that thou suffer not thy shield to be torn from thee. Be abased. Be humbled in the dust. See thyself nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. But still, "Let not thy heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Still hold fast, "I, even I, have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "And as the heavens are higher than the earth, so is his love higher than even my sins." Therefore, God is merciful to thee a sinner! Such a sinner as thou art! God is love; and Christ hath died!

Therefore, the Father himself loveth thee! Thou art his child! Therefore he will withhold from thee no manner of thing that is good. Is it good, that the whole body of sin, which is now crucified in thee, should be destroyed? It shall be done! Thou shalt be "cleansed from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit." Is it good, that nothing should remain in thy heart but the pure love of God alone? Be of good cheer!

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength." "Faithful is he that hath promised, who also will do it." It is thy part, patiently to continue in the work of faith, and in the labour of love; and in cheerful peace, in humble confidence, with calm and resigned and yet earnest expectation, to wait till the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this.

5. Fourthly. If they that "are in Christ," and "walk after the Spirit," are not condemned for sins of infirmity: as neither for involuntary failings, nor for anything whatever which they are not able to help; then beware, O thou that hast faith in his blood, that Satan herein gain no advantage over thee. Thou art still foolish and weak, blind and ignorant; more weak than any words can express; more foolish than it call yet enter into thy heart to conceive; knowing nothing yet as thou oughtest to know.

Yet let not all thy weakness and folly, or any fruit thereof, which thou art not yet able to avoid, shake thy faith, thy filial trust in God, or disturb thy peace or joy in the Lord. The rule which some give, as to wilful sins, and which, in that case, may perhaps be dangerous, is undoubtedly wise and safe if it be applied only to the case of weakness and infirmities. Art thou fallen, O man of God? yet, do not lie there, fretting thyself and bemoaning thy weakness; but meekly say, "Lord, I shall fall every moment, unless thou uphold me with thy hand." And then arise! Leap and walk! Go on thy way! "Run with patience the race that is set before Thee."

6. Lastly. Since a believer need not come into condemnation, even though he be surprised into what his soul abhors; (suppose his being surprised is not owing to any carelessness or wilful neglect of his own); if thou who believest art thus overtaken in a fault, then grieve unto the Lord; it shall be a precious balm.

Pour out thy heart before him, and show him of thy trouble, and pray with all thy might to him who is "touched with the feeling of thy infirmities," that he would establish, and strengthen and settle thy soul, and suffer thee to fall no more. But still he condemneth thee not. Wherefore shouldest thou fear? Thou hast no need of any "fear that hath torment." Thou shalt love him that loveth thee, and it sufficeth: more love will bring more strength. And, as soon as thou lovest him with all thy heart, thou shalt be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.

"Wait in peace for that hour, when the God of peace shall sanctify thee wholly, so that thy whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

## 06 The Marks Of The New Birth

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The Marks Of The New Birth by John Wesley "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." John 3:8

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

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

I.

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

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

3. For all this is no more than a dead faith. The true, living, Christian faith, which whosoever hath, is born of God, is not only an assent, an act of the understanding; but a disposition, which God hath wrought in his heart; "a sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God." This implies, that a man first renounce himself; that, in order to be "found in Christ," to be accepted through him, he totally

rejects all "confidence in the flesh;" that, "having nothing to pay," having no trust in his own works or righteousness of any kind, he comes to God as a lost, miserable, self-destroyed, self-condemned, undone, helpless sinner; as one whose mouth is utterly stopped, and who is altogether "guilty before God." Such a sense of sin, (commonly called despair, by those who speak evil of the things they know not,) together with a full conviction, such as no words can express, that of Christ only cometh our salvation, and an earnest desire of that salvation, must precede a living faith, a trust in Him, who "for us paid our ransom by his death, and fulfilled the law of his life." This faith then, whereby we are born of God, is "not only a belief of all the articles of our faith, but also a true confidence of the mercy of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

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

5. The same invaluable privilege of the sons of God is as strongly asserted by St. John; particularly with regard to the former branch of it, namely, power over outward sin. After he had been crying out, as one astonished at the depth of the riches of the goodness of God, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God! Beloved, now are we the sons of God: And it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is;" (1 John 3:1, etc.) 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 methodeia planEs, artful method of deceiving, the precious promise is utterly lost; by this kybeia anthrOpOn, tricking and shuffling of men, the word of God is made of none effect. O beware, thou that thus takest from the words of this book, that, taking away the whole meaning and spirit from them, leavest only what may indeed be termed a dead letter, lest God take away thy part out of the book of life!

6. Suffer we the Apostle to interpret his own words, by the whole tenor of his discourse. In the fifth verse of this chapter, he had said, "Ye know that he," Christ, "was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." What is the inference he draws from this? "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not. Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." (1 John 3:6.) To his

enforcement of this important doctrine, he premises an highly necessary caution: "Little children, let no man deceive you;" (1 John 3:7;) for many will endeavor so to do; to persuade you that you may be unrighteous, that you may commit sin, and yet be children of God! "He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning." Then follows, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: And he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this," adds the Apostle, "the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." By this plain mark (the committing or not committing sin) are they distinguished from each other. To the same effect are those words in his fifth chapter, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." (1 John 3:18.)

7. Another fruit of this living faith is peace. For, "being justified by faith," having all our sins blotted out, "we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 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.) *elpida zOsan*, 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;" (Romans 8:16-17;) "if so be that we suffer with him," if we deny ourselves, if we take up our cross daily, if we cheerfully endure persecution or reproach for his sake, "that we may also be glorified together." And in whom doth the Spirit of God bear this witness? In all who are the children of God. By this very argument does the Apostle prove, in the preceding verses, that they are so: "As many," saith he, "as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!" It follows, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (8:14-16.)

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

5. And thus is the Scripture fulfilled, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." For it is easy to believe, that though sorrow may precede this witness of God's Spirit with our spirit; (indeed must, in some degree, while we groan under fear, and a sense of the wrath of God abiding on us;) yet, as soon as any man feeleth it in himself, his "sorrow is turned into joy." Whatsoever his pain may have been before; yet, as soon as that "hour is come, he remembereth the anguish no more, for joy" that he is born of God. It may be, many of you have now sorrow, because you are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel;" because you are conscious to yourselves that you have not this Spirit; that you are "without hope and without God in the world." But when the Comforter is come, "then your heart shall rejoice;" yea, "your joy shall be full," and "that joy no man taketh from you." (John 16:22.) "We joy in God," will ye say, "through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement;" "by whom we have access into this grace," this state of grace, of favour, or reconciliation with God, "wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 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, etc.) Unspeakable indeed! It is not for the tongue of man to describe this joy in the Holy Ghost. It is "the hidden manna, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it." But this we know, it not only remains, but overflows, in the depth of affliction. "Are the consolations of God small" with his children, when all earthly comforts fail? Not so. But when sufferings most abound, the consolations of his Spirit do much more abound; insomuch that the sons of God "laugh at destruction when it cometh;" at want, pain, hell, and the grave; as knowing Him who "hath the keys of death and hell," and will shortly "cast them into the bottomless pit;" as hearing even now the great voice out of heaven, saying, "Behold, the

tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Revelation 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." (Romans 5:5.) "Because they are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son in their hearts, crying, Abba, Father!" (Galatians 4:6.) By this Spirit, continually looking up to God as their reconciled and loving Father, they cry to him for their daily bread, for all things needful, whether for their souls or bodies. They continually pour out their hearts before him, knowing "they have the petitions which they ask of him." (1 John 5:15.) Their delight is in him. He is the joy of their heart; their "shield," and their "exceeding great reward." The desire of their soul is toward him; it is their "meat and drink to do his will;" and they are "satisfied as with marrow and fatness, while their mouth praiseth him with joyful lips." (Psalms 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 of Solomon 2:16.) "Thou art fairer than the children of men; full of grace are thy lips, because God hath anointed thee for ever!" (Psalms 45:2.)

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

4. But some may possibly ask, "Does not the Apostle say, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments?'" (1 John 5:3.) Yea, and this is the love of our neighbour also, in the same sense as it is the love of God. But what would you infer from hence? that the keeping the outward commandments is all that is implied in loving God with all your heart, with all your mind, and soul, and strength, and in loving your neighbour as yourself? that the love of God is not an affection of the soul, but merely an outward service? and that the love of our neighbour is not a disposition of heart, but barely a course of outward works? To mention so wild an interpretation of the Apostle's words, is sufficiently to confute it. The plain indisputable meaning of that text is, this is the sign or

proof of the love of God, of our keeping the first and great commandment, to keep the rest of his commandments. For true love, if it be once shed abroad in our heart, will constrain us so to do; since, whosoever loves God with all his heart, cannot but serve him with all his strength.

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

#### IV.

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

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

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

generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

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

5. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye" also "must be born again." "Except ye" also "be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God." Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye were born again in baptism. Who denies that ye were then made children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven? But, notwithstanding this, ye are now children of the devil. Therefore ye must be born again. And let not Satan put it into your heart to cavil at a word, when the thing is clear. Ye have heard what are the marks of the children of God: All ye who have them not on your souls, baptized or unbaptized, must needs receive them, or without doubt ye will perish everlastingly. And if ye have been baptized, your only hope is this, that those who were made the children of God by baptism, but are now the children of the devil, may yet again receive "power to become the sons of God;" that they may receive again what they have lost, even the "Spirit of adoption, crying in their hearts, Abba, Father!"

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

## 07 The New Creation

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The New Creation by John Wesley Behold, I make all things new. Revelation 21:5.

1. What a strange scene is here opened to our view! How remote from all our natural apprehensions! Not a glimpse of what is here revealed was ever seen in the heathen world. Not only the modern, barbarous, uncivilized Heathens have not the least conception of it; but it was equally unknown to the refined, polished Heathens of ancient Greece and Rome. And it is almost as little thought of or understood by the generality of Christians: I mean, not barely those that are nominally such, that have the form of godliness without the power; but even those that in a measure fear God, and study to work righteousness.

2. It must be allowed that after all the researches we can make, still our knowledge of the great truth which is delivered to us in these words is exceedingly short and imperfect. As this is a point of mere revelation, beyond the reach of all our natural faculties, we cannot penetrate far into it, nor form any adequate conception of it. But it may be an encouragement to those who have in any degree tasted of the powers of the world to come to go as far as we can go, interpreting Scripture by Scripture, according to the analogy of faith.

3. The Apostle, caught up in the visions of God, tells us in the first verse of the chapter, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth;" and adds, (Revelation 21:5,) "He that sat upon the throne said," (I believe the only words which he is said to utter throughout the whole book,) "Behold, I make all things new."

4. Very many commentators entertain a strange opinion that this relates only to the present state of things, and gravely tell us that the words are to be referred to the flourishing state of the Church, which commenced after the heathen persecutions. Nay, some of them have discovered that all which the Apostle speaks concerning the "new heaven and the new earth" was fulfilled when Constantine the Great poured in riches and honours upon the Christians. What a miserable way is this of making void the whole counsel of God, with regard to all that grand chain of events, in reference to his Church, yea, and to all mankind, from the time that John was in Patmos unto the end of the world! Nay, the line of this prophecy reaches farther still: It does not end with the present world, but shows us the things that will come to pass when this world is no more. For,

5. Thus saith the Creator and Governor of the universe: "Behold, I make all things new;" all which are included in that expression of the Apostle, "A new heaven and a new earth." A new heaven: the original word in Genesis (Genesis 1:1-31) is in the plural number. And indeed this is the constant language of Scripture, not heaven, but heavens. Accordingly, the ancient Jewish writers are accustomed to reckon three heavens; in conformity to which, the Apostle Paul speaks of his being "caught up into the third heaven." It is this, the third heaven, which is usually supposed to be the more immediate residence of God; so far as any residence can be ascribed to his omnipresent Spirit, who pervades and fills the whole universe. It is here (if we speak after the manner of men) that the Lord sitteth upon his throne, surrounded by angels and archangels, and by all his flaming

ministers.

6. We cannot think that this heaven will undergo any change, any more than its Great Inhabitant. Surely this palace of the Most High was the same from eternity, and will be, world without end. Only the inferior heavens are liable to change; the highest of which we usually call the starry heaven. This, St. Peter informs us, "is reserved unto fire, against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." In that day, "being on fire," it shall, first, shrivel as a parchment scroll;" then it shall "be dissolved, and shall pass away with a great noise;" lastly, it shall "flee from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and there shall be found no place for it."

7. At the same time "the stars shall fall from heaven;" the secret chain being broken which had retained them in their several orbits from the foundation of the world. In the meanwhile the lower or sublunary heaven, with the elements (or principles that compose it,) "shall melt with fervent heat;" while "the earth with the works that are therein, shall be burned up." This is the introduction to a far nobler state of things, such as it has not yet entered into the heart of men to conceive, the universal restoration, which is to succeed the universal destruction. For "we look," says the Apostle, "for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter 3:7, )

8. One considerable difference there will undoubtedly be in the starry heaven, when it is created anew: There will be no blazing stars, no comets there. Whether those horrid, eccentric orbs are half-formed planets, in a chaotic state (I speak on the supposition of a plurality of worlds;) or such as have undergone their general conflagration, they will certainly have no place in the new heaven, where all will be exact order and harmony. There may be many other differences between the heaven that now is and that which will be after the renovation: But they are above our apprehension: We must leave eternity to explain them.

9. We may more easily conceive the changes which will be wrought in the lower heaven, in the region of the air. It will be no more torn by hurricanes, or agitated by furious storms, or destructive tempests. Pernicious or terrifying meteors will have no more place therein. We shall have no more occasion to say, There like a trumpet, loud and strong, Thy thunder shakes our coast;

While the red lightnings wave along, The banners of thy host!

No: All will be then light, fair, serene; a lively picture of the eternal day.

10. All the elements (taking that word in the common sense, for the principles of which all natural beings are compounded) will be new indeed; entirely changed as to their qualities, although not as to their nature. Fire is at present the general destroyer of all things under the sun; dissolving all things that come within the sphere of its action, and reducing them to their primitive atoms. But no sooner will it have performed its last great office of destroying the heavens and the earth; (whether you mean thereby one system only, or the whole fabric of the universe; the difference between one and millions of worlds being nothing before the great Creator;) when, I say, it has done this, the destructions wrought by fire will come to a perpetual end. It will destroy no more: it will consume no more: it will forget its power to burn, which it possesses only during the present state of things, and be as harmless in the new heavens and earth as it is now in the bodies of men and other animals, and the substance of trees and flowers; in all which (as late experiments show) large quantities of ethereal fire are lodged; if it be not rather an essential component part of every material being under the sun. But it will probably retain its vivifying power, though divested of its

power to destroy.

11. It has been already observed that the calm, placid air will be no more disturbed by storms and tempests. There will be no more meteors, with their horrid glare, affrighting the poor children of men. May we not add, (though at first it may sound like a paradox,) that there will be no more rain? It is observable that there was none in Paradise; a circumstance which Moses particularly mentions: (Genesis 2:5-6:) "The Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth. But there went up a mist from the earth," which then covered up the abyss of waters, "and watered the whole face of the ground," with moisture sufficient for all the purposes of vegetation. We have all reason to believe that the case will be the same when paradise is restored. Consequently there will be no more clouds or fogs; but one bright, refulgent day. Much less will there be any poisonous damps, or pestilential blasts. There will be no Sirocco in Italy; no parching or suffocating winds in Arabia; no keen north-east winds in our own country, Shattering the graceful locks of yon fair trees; but only pleasing, healthful breezes, Fanning the earth with odoriferous wings.

12. But what change will the element of water undergo when all things are made new! It will be, in every part of the world, clear and limpid; pure from all unpleasing or unhealthful mixtures; rising here and there in crystal fountains, to refresh and adorn the earth "with liquid lapse of murmuring stream." For, undoubtedly, as there were in Paradise, there will be various rivers gently gliding along, for the use and pleasure of both man and beast. But the inspired writer has expressly declared, "there will be no more sea." (Revelation 21:1.) We have every reason to believe, that at the beginning of the world, when God said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear," (Genesis 1:9,) the dry land spread over the face of the water, and covered it on every side. And so it seems to have done, till, in order to the general deluge which God had determined to bring upon the earth at once, "the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep broken up." But the sea will then retire within its primitive bounds, and appear on the surface of the earth no more. For either, indeed, will there be any more need of the sea. For either as the ancient Poet supposes, *Omnis feret omnia tellus*,\_ every part of the earth will naturally produce whatever its inhabitants want, or all mankind will procure what the whole earth affords by a much easier and readier conveyance. For all the inhabitants of the earth, our Lord informs us, will then be *isaggeloi*, equal to angels; on a level with them in swiftness, as well as strength; so that they can quick as thought, transport themselves, or whatever they want, from one side of the globe to the other.

13. But it seems, a greater change will be wrought in the earth, than even in the air and water. Not that I can believe that wonderful discovery of Jacob Behmen, which many so eagerly contend for; that the earth itself with all its furniture and inhabitants, will then be transparent as glass. There does not seem to be the least foundation for this, either in Scripture or reason. Surely not in Scripture: I know not one text in the Old or New Testament which affirms any such thing. Certainly it cannot be inferred from that text in the Revelation: (Revelation 4:6:), "And before the throne there was a sea of glass, like unto crystal." And yet, if I mistake not, this is the chief, if not the only Scripture which has been urged in favour of this opinion! Neither can I conceive that it has any foundation in reason. It has indeed been warmly alleged, that all things would be far more beautiful if they were quite transparent. But I cannot apprehend this: Yea, I apprehend quite the contrary. Suppose every part of a human body were made transparent as crystal, would it appear more beautiful than it does now? Nay, rather it would shock us above measure. The surface of the body,

and in particular "the human face divine," is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful objects that can be found under heaven; but could you look through the rosy cheek, the smooth, fair forehead, or the rising bosom, and distinctly see all that lies within, you would turn away from it with loathing and horror!

14. Let us next take a view of those changes which we may reasonably suppose will then take place in the earth. It will no more be bound up with intense cold, nor parched up with extreme heat; but will have such a temperature as will be most conducive to its fruitfulness. If, in order to punish its inhabitants, God did of old Bid his angels turn askance This oblique lobe, thereby occasioning violent cold on one part, and violent heat on the other; he will, undoubtedly, then order them to restore it to its original position: So that there will be a final end, on the one hand, of the burning heat which makes some parts of it scarce habitable; and, on the other of The rage of Arctos and eternal frost.

15. And it will then contain no jarring or destructive principles within its own bosom. It will no more have any of those violent convulsions in its own bowels. It will no more be shaken or torn asunder by the impetuous force of earthquakes; and will, therefore need neither Vesuvius nor Etna, nor any burning mountains to prevent them. There will be no more horrid rocks or frightful precipices; no wild deserts, or barren sands; no impassable morasses, or unfruitful bogs, to swallow up the unwary traveller. There will, doubtless, be inequalities on the surface of the earth, which are not blemishes, but beauties. For though I will not affirm, that Earth hath this variety from heaven, Of pleasure situate in hill and dale; yet I cannot think gently-rising hills will be any defect, but an ornament, of the new-made earth. And doubtless we shall then likewise have occasion to say, Lo, there his wondrous skill arrays The fields in cheerful green! A thousand herbs his hand displays, A thousand flower between!

16. And what will the general produce of the earth be? Not thorns, briars, or thistles; not any useless or fetid weed; not any poisonous, hurtful, or unpleasant plant; but every one that can be conducive, in anywise, either to our use or pleasure. How far beyond all that the most lively imagination is now able to conceive! We shall no more regret the loss of the terrestrial Paradise, or sigh at that well-devised description of our great Poet:

Then shall this mount Of Paradise, by might of waves, be moved  
Out of his place, push'd by the horned flood,  
With all its verdure spoil'd and trees adrift,  
Down the great river to the opening gulf,  
And there take root, an island salt and bare!  
For all the earth shall then be a more beautiful  
Paradise than Adam ever saw.

17. Such will be the state of the new earth with regard to the meaner, the inanimate, parts of it. But great as this change will be, it is little, it is nothing, in comparison of that which will then take place throughout all animated nature. In the living part of the creation were seen the most deplorable effects of Adam's apostasy. The whole animated creation, whatever has life, from leviathan to the smallest mite, was thereby made subject to such vanity, as the inanimate creatures could not be. They were subject to that fell monster, DEATH, the conqueror of all that breathe. They were made subject to its fore-runner, pain, in its ten thousand forms; although "God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the death of any living."

How many millions of creatures in the sea, in the air, and on every part of the earth, can now no otherwise preserve their own lives, than by taking away the lives of others; by tearing in pieces and devouring their poor, innocent, unresisting fellow-creatures! Miserable lot of such innumerable multitudes, who, insignificant as they seem, are the offspring of one common Father; the creatures of the same God of love! It is probable not only two-thirds of the animal creation, but ninety-nine parts of a hundred, are under a necessity of destroying others in order to preserve their own life! But it shall not always be so. He that sitteth upon the throne will soon change the face of all things, and give a demonstrative proof to all his creatures that "his mercy is over all his works." The horrid state of things which at present obtains, will soon be at an end. On the new earth, no creature will kill, or hurt, or give pain to any other. The scorpion will have no poisonous sting; the adder, no venomous teeth. The lion will have no claws to tear the lamb; no teeth to grind his flesh and bones. Nay, no creature, no beast, bird, or fish, will have any inclination to hurt any other; for cruelty will be far away, and savageness and fierceness be forgotten. So that violence shall be heard no more, neither wasting or destruction seen on the face of the earth. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb," (the words may be literally as well as figuratively understood,) "and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: They shall not hurt or destroy," from the rising up of the sun, to the going down of the same.

18. But the most glorious of all will be the change which then will take place on the poor, sinful, miserable children of men. These had fallen in many respects, as from a greater height, so into a lower depth, than any other part of the creation. But they shall "hear a 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 their God." (Revelation 21:3-4.) Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise. In how beautiful a manner is this described by the Apostle: "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 done away!" As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for, or parting with, friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And, to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!

## 08 What Is Man?

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What is Man? by John Wesley

"When I consider thy heaven, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man?" Psalms 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?"

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

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

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

2. But what are all the inhabitants of Great Britain, compared to all the inhabitants of the earth? These have frequently been supposed to amount to about four hundred millions. But will this computation be allowed to be just, by those who maintain China alone to contain fifty-eight millions? If it be true, that this one empire contains little less than sixty millions, we may easily suppose that the inhabitants of the whole terraqueous globe amount to four thousand millions of

inhabitants, rather than four hundred. And what is any single individual, in comparison of this number?

3. But what is the magnitude of the earth itself, compared to that of the solar system? Including, beside that vast body, the sun, so immensely larger than the earth, the whole train of primary and secondary planets; several of which (I mean, of the secondary planets, suppose that satellites or moons of Jupiter and Saturn) are abundantly larger than the whole earth?

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Indeed, what proportion can there possibly be between any finite and infinite duration? What proportion is there between a thousand or ten thousand years, or ten thousand time ten thousand

ages, and eternity? I know not that the inexpressible disproportion between any conceivable part of time and eternity can be illustrated in a more striking manner than it is in the well-known passage of St. Cyprian: "Suppose there was a ball of sand as large as the globe of earth, and suppose one grain of this were to be annihilated in a thousand years; yet that whole space of time wherein this ball would be annihilating, at the rate of one grain in a thousand years, would bear less, yea, unspeakably, infinitely less, proportion to eternity, than a single grain of sand would bear to that whole mass." What, then, are the seventy years of human life, in comparison of eternity? In what terms can the proportion between these be expressed? It is nothing, yea, infinitely less than nothing!

4. If, then, we add to the littleness of man the inexpressible shortness of his duration, it is any wonder that a man of reflection should sometimes feel a kind of fear, lest the great, eternal, infinite Governor of the universe should disregard so diminutive a creature as man? a creature so every way inconsiderable, when compared either with immensity or eternity? Did not both these reflections glance through, if not dwell upon, the mind of the royal Psalmist? Thus, in contemplation of the former, he breaks out into the strong words of the text: "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou has 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 creatury'u tucy'u*, "some portion of thy creation;" but *quantula portio*, "how amazingly small a portion!" How utterly beneath thy notice! It seems to be in contemplation of the latter, that he cries out in the hundred and forty-fourth Psalm, "Lord, what is man, that thou hast such respect unto him; or the son of man, that though shouldest so regard him?" "Man is like a thing of naught." Why? "His time passeth away like a shadow." In this, although in a very few places,) the new translation of the Psalms that bound up in our Bibles is perhaps more proper than the old, that which we have in the Common Prayer Book.

It runs thus: "Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him; or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?" According to the former translation, David seems to be amazed that the eternal God, considering the littleness of man, should have so much respect unto him, and should so much regard him: But in the latter, he seems to wonder, seeing the life of man "passeth away like a shadow," that God should take any knowledge of him at all, or make any account of him.

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 palmarium of the learned infidels, I answer, Do you expect to find any proportion between finite and infinite? Suppose God had created a thousand more worlds than there are grains of sand in the universe; what proportion would all these together 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!

## 09 When You Fast

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When You Fast by John Wesley

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18

Satan has attempted, from the beginning of the world, to separate what God has joined together; to separate inward from outward religion; to set one of these at odds with the other. And he was very successful among those who were "unaware of his schemes."

Many, in every age, "are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge." They have held strictly to the "righteousness of the law," that is, the performance of outward duties, but in the mean time completely disregarding inward righteousness, which is "the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." And many others have run into the opposite extreme, disregarding all outward duties, perhaps even "speaking evil of the law, and judging the law," so far as it directs any action on their part.

It is by this very scheme of Satan, that faith and works have been so often set at odds with each other. And many who had a real zeal for God have, for a time, fallen into the snare at either extreme. Some have magnified faith to the utter exclusion of good works, not only stating that good works are not the cause of our justification, (for we know that man is justified freely by the redemption which is in Jesus,) but even stating that good works are not even the necessary fruit of it, yes, stating that good works have no place in the religion of Jesus Christ. Others, eager to avoid this dangerous mistake, have run just as far in the opposite direction; and either maintained that good works were the cause, at least the previous condition, of justification, or spoken of them as if they were everything, the whole religion of Jesus Christ. In the same way the ends and the means of Christianity been set at odds with each other. Some well-meaning persons have seemed to equate Christianity with the saying of prayers, in receiving the Lord's supper, in listening to sermons, and in reading books on holiness; neglecting, at the same time, the end purpose of all these things, which is the love of God and their neighbor. And this very thing has confirmed others in the neglect, if not the contempt, of the very ordinances of God, -- thereby wretchedly abusing and undermining and overthrowing the very end they were designed to establish. But of all the means of grace there is scarcely any concerning which men have run into greater extremes, than that of which our Lord speaks in our text this morning, I mean religious fasting. Some have exalted this type of fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it; as if were retaliating by undervaluing it as much as the others had overvalued it! There have been those who have spoken of fasting, as if it were everything in religion; if not the end itself, yet on the opposite extreme has been others who treated the subject of fasting as if it were nothing, as if it were a fruitless labor, which had no relationship at all to Christianity. No doubt the truth lies

somewhere in-between. It is not everything, nor yet is it nothing. It is not the end, but it is a precious means to the end; a means which God himself has ordained, and in which therefore, when it is properly used, God will surely give us his blessing. In order to set this in the clearest light, I shall endeavor to show, I. First, what is the nature of fasting, and what are the different types and degrees.

II. Secondly, what are the reasons, purposes, and objectives of fasting.

III. Thirdly, how we can answer the most likely objections against fasting.

IV. Fourthly, how we are to fast.

I. First, what is the nature of fasting, and what are the different types and degrees? As to the nature of it, all the inspired writers, both in the Old Testament and the New, take the word to fast in its simple sense, meaning, "not to eat, to abstain from food." This is so clear, that it would be a waste of time to quote the words of David, Nehemiah, Isaiah, and the Prophets, or of our Lord and his Apostles; all agreeing in this, that to fast, is, not to eat for a prescribed time. In the Old Testament, we find that other conditions were usually tied to the fasting, which had no real necessary connection with it. Such as the neglect of their clothing; the absence of those ornaments which they were accustomed to wear; the outward expressions of mourning; the strewing of ashes on their head; or wearing sackcloth next their skin. But we find little mention made in the New Testament of any of these additional conditions. Nor does it appear, that any importance was given them by the Early Christians; however some Christians might voluntarily use them, as outward signs of inward humiliation. The Apostles, or their fellow Christians did not beat or tear their own flesh: Such actions as these were typical for the priests or worshippers of Baal. The gods of the Heathens were nothing but devils; and surely it was acceptable to their devil-god, when his priests (1 Kings 18:28) "shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed." But it cannot be pleasing to Jesus, nor be appropriate for His followers, for Jesus "did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." As to the degrees or types of fasting, we have instances of some who have fasted for a long period of days. Such as, Moses, Elijah, and our blessed Lord, being endowed with supernatural strength for that purpose, are recorded to have fasted, without interruption, "forty days and forty nights." But the time of fasting, more frequently mentioned in Scripture, is one day, from morning till evening. And this was the fast commonly observed among the ancient Christians. But in addition to these, they also had their half-fasts on the fourth and sixth days of the week, (Wednesday and Friday,) throughout the year; on which they ate no food till three in the afternoon, the time when they returned from the public service.

Nearly related to this, is what some Churches mean by the term abstinence; which may be used when we cannot completely fast, because of sickness or weakness of the body. This is the eating just a little; abstaining in part; taking a smaller quantity of food than usual. I do not remember any scriptural instance of this. But neither can I condemn it; for the Scripture does not. It may have its use, and receive a blessing from God. The lowest kind of fasting, if it can be called by that name, is the abstaining from pleasant food. Of this, we have several instances in Scripture, besides that of Daniel and his friends, who because of a special consideration, namely, that they might "not defile themselves with the royal food and wine (a daily provision which the King had appointed for them), asked the chief official for permission not to defile themselves in this way, saying, "Give us

nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. (Daniel 1:8ff) Perhaps from a mistaken imitation of this event we have the very ancient custom of abstaining from meat and wine during such times that were set apart for fasting and abstinence. It may also have come into practice simply from a supposition that vegetables and water were the better diet, and a belief that it was proper to use what was least pleasing to the flesh at those times of solemn approach to God. In the Jewish religion there were some stated fasts. Such was the fast of the seventh month, appointed by God himself to be observed by all Israel under the severest penalty. "The LORD said to Moses, 'The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God. Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people'" [Leviticus 23:26-29]. In later years, several other stated fasts were added to these. So mention is made, by the Prophet Zechariah, of the fasts not only "of the seventh, but also of the fourth, of the fifth, and of the tenth month." (Zechariah 8:19) In the ancient Christian Church, there were likewise stated fasts: both annual and weekly. Of the former sort was that before Easter; observed by some for 48 hours; by others, for an entire week; by many, for two weeks; taking no food till the evening of each day: Of the latter, those of the fourth and sixth days of the week, observed at least in every place where any Christians lived. And in our church today, in the 18th century, we have added many more days of fasting. But besides those which were fixed, in every God-fearing nation there have always been occasional fasts, appointed from time to time, as the particular circumstances and occasions of each required. So when "the Moabites and Ammonites came to make war on Jehoshaphat, he resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah" [2 Chronicles 20:1; 2 Chronicles 20:3]" And likewise we read in Jeremiah's day, "In the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah," when they were afraid of the King of Babylon, "a time of fasting before the LORD was proclaimed for all the people in Jerusalem and those who had come from the towns of Judah" [Jeremiah 36:9].

And, in like manner, certain persons, who are careful of their ways, and desire to walk humbly and closely with God, will find frequent occasion for private seasons of humbling their souls, in secret, before their Father in heaven. And it is to this kind of fasting that the directions given here in our text do chiefly and primarily refer.

II. In the second place let us look at the reasons, purposes, and objectives of fasting:

1. First, men and women who are experiencing deep emotions of mind, who are affected with any intense passion, such as sorrow or fear, are often swallowed up with them, and even forget to eat their food. At such times they have little regard for food, not even what is necessary to sustain life, much less for any delicacy or variety; being taken up with quite different thoughts. Thus when Saul said, "I am in great distress; for the Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me;" it is recorded, "His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and night" [1 Samuel 28:15; 1 Samuel 28:20]. In the same way, those who were in the ship with the Apostle Paul, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, finally gave up all hope of being saved.

Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. 'For the last fourteen days,' he said, 'you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food - you haven't eaten anything.'" [Acts 27:20; Acts 27:33] And likewise, David, and all the men that were with him, when they heard that the people

had fled from the battle, and that many of the people were fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son were dead also, "They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel" [2 Samuel 1:12]. So we can see, that many times they whose minds are deeply engaged in thought because of a crisis or burden are intolerant of any interruption, and even dislike the food their bodies need, because it would divert their thoughts from what they desire to give their whole attention to. Even Saul, when, on the occasion mentioned before, had "fallen full length on the ground . . . His strength was gone," yet he said, "I will not eat." Until "his men joined the woman in urging him."

2. Here, then, is one "natural" reason for fasting. A person experiences deep affliction because they are overwhelmed with sorrow for sin, and a strong apprehension of the wrath of God. This person, would, without any instruction, without knowing or considering whether it was a command of God or not, would "forget to eat his food," and abstain not only from delicacies but even from required food-like the Apostle Paul, who, after being confronted with Jesus on the Damascus Road, was blind "For three days . . . and did not eat or drink anything" [Acts 9:9].

Yes, when the storms of life come; when a horrible dread is experienced, one who has been living without God in the world, his soul would "detest all kinds of food;" it would be displeasing and annoying to him; he would be impatient with anything that would interrupt his ceaseless cry, "Lord, save me or I wish perish!" How strongly this was expressed in a recent sermon, preached at our church, on the subject of fasting! Listen, "When unsaved men and women feel in themselves the heavy burden of sin, and see that it only brings damnation, and see with the eye of their mind, the horrors of hell, they tremble, they shake, and are inwardly touched with sorrowfulness of heart, and cannot help but accuse themselves, and express their grief to Almighty God, and call to him for mercy. After this their mind is so overwhelmed with sorrow and distress, partly with an earnest desire to be delivered from this danger of hell and damnation, that all desire for food and drink is laid aside, and they lack any desire for worldly things and pleasures. The only thing they desire to do is to weep, to grieve, to mourn, both with words and actions of their body to reveal that they are tired of life."

3. Another reason for fasting is this: Many of those who now fear God are deeply aware how often they have sinned against him, by the abuse of food.

They know how much they have sinned by excess of food and drink; how long they have transgressed the holy law of God, with regard to a lack of self-control; how they have indulged their sensual appetites, perhaps even to the point of impairing their bodily health-certainly to the point where they even hurt their soul. For they continually fed and increased that foolishness, that flippant attitude of mind, that lightheartedness, that inattention to things of the deepest concern, that giddiness and carelessness of spirit, which was nothing other than drunkenness of the soul, which confused all their noblest faculties, and was expressed by the excess of wine or strong drink. Therefore, to remove the effect, they remove the cause. They keep at a distance from all excess. They abstain, as far as is possible, from what had almost plunged them in everlasting judgment. They often completely refrain; always being careful to be careful and temperate in all things.

Likewise, they well remember how their lack of restraint in eating not only increased carelessness and flippancy of spirit, but also foolish and unholy desires, yes, unclean and wicked feelings. And

this experience is very real. Even a discreet, regular gratification of the body is continually gratifying the soul, and sinking it into a level of the animals that perish. It cannot be expressed what an effect variety and delicacy of food have on the mind as well as the body; making it ripe for every pleasure of the senses, as soon as opportunity will provide. Therefore, because of this, every wise man and woman must control their soul, and keep them in check; they will wean it more and more from all those indulgences of the inferior appetites, which naturally tend to chain it down to earth, and to pollute as well as debase it. Here is another continual reason for fasting; to remove the food of lust and sensuality, and to remove the incentives of foolish and hurtful desires, of evil and worthless feelings.

4. Perhaps we should not completely omit another reason for fasting, which some people have insisted on; namely, the punishing of themselves for having abused the good gifts of God.

They do this by sometimes completely refraining from these gifts of God; thus exercising a kind of holy revenge on themselves, for their past folly and ingratitude, in turning the things which should have been for their health into an occasion of sin. They believe David felt this, when he said, "I wept and chastened," or punished, "my soul with fasting;" and the Apostle Paul, when he mentions "what revenge" godly sorrow caused in the Corinthians.

5. A fifth and the most important reason for fasting is, that it is a help to prayer; especially when we set apart larger portions of time for private prayer. Sometimes God is often pleased to lift up the souls of his servants above all the things of earth, and to lift them up, as it were, into the third heavens. And fasting is chiefly an aid to prayer, so much so, that it has frequently been found a means, in the hand of God, of confirming and increasing, not one virtue, but also seriousness of spirit, sincerity, sensitivity and tenderness of conscience, deadness to the world, and consequently a love of God, and of every holy and heavenly feeling. Not that there is any natural or necessary connection between fasting, and the blessings of God. But he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; he will convey whatever seems good to him by whatever means he is pleased to use. And he has, in all ages, appointed fasting to be a means of averting his wrath, and obtaining whatever blessings we, from time to time, are in need of.

Just how powerful a means this is to avert the wrath of God, we may learn from the remarkable instance of Ahab. "There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself"-wholly given himself up, like a slave bought with money-"to do evil." Yet when he "he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted, and went around meekly. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah, saying, "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day."

It was for this end, to avert the wrath of God, that Daniel sought God "in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." This appears from the whole tenor of his prayer, particularly from the solemn conclusion of it: "O Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill-hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake." (Daniel 9:3; Daniel 9:16ff)

6. But it is not only from the people of God that we learn, when his anger is moved, to seek him by fasting and prayer; but even from the heathens. When Jonah had declared, "Forty more days and

Nineveh will be destroyed, the people of Nineveh declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.'" (Not that the beast had sinned, or could repent; but that, by their example, man might be admonished, considering that, for his sin, the anger of God was hanging over all creatures) "Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" And their labor was not in vain. The fierce anger of God was turned away from them. "When God saw what they did (the fruits of that repentance and faith which he had brought about in them by his Prophet) and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened" [Jonah 3:4-10].

7. Fasting is a means not only of turning away the wrath of God, but also of obtaining whatever blessings we are in need of.

We read in the Bible, that when the other tribes of Israel were in battle against the Benjamites and 18,000 Israelites were killed that, "Then the Israelites, all the people, went up to Bethel, and there they sat weeping before the LORD. They fasted that day until evening;" and then they asked the Lord, "'Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother, or not?' The LORD responded, 'Go, for tomorrow I will give them into your hands'" [Judges 20:26-28]. In the same way, Samuel gathered all Israel together, when they were in bondage to the Philistines, and "On that day they fasted" before the Lord: And when "the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle, the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites" [1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Samuel 7:10]. Likewise, Ezra tells us, that, "There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children," [Ezra 8:21]. In the same way, Nehemiah says, "I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. And said, 'Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.' And God granted him mercy in the sight of the king. (Nehemiah 1:4-11) In like manner, the apostles always joined fasting with prayer when they desired the blessing of God on any important undertaking. Thus we read, (Acts 13:1-52) "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, surely for direction in this undertaking, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had," a second time "fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." [Acts 13:1-3] In the same way also, Paul and Barnabas, as we read in the following chapter, "appointed elders in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" [Acts 14:23].

Finally, one more example, we see that blessings are to be obtained by the use of fasting, which are not otherwise attainable, our Lord expressly declares in his answer to his disciples, who had asked Him, "Why couldn't we drive the demon out? Jesus replied, Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind [of demon] does not go out except by prayer and fasting" [Matthew 17:19-20]-In other words, prayer and fasting are the appointed means by which the very demons are subject to you.

Fasting has been the appointed means: For it was not by intelligence or reason, that the people of God have been, in all ages, directed to use fasting as a means to these ends; but they have been, from time to time, taught it by God himself, by clear and open revelations of his will. A good example is found in the Book of Joel, where God says to His people, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning . . . Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly . . . Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. The LORD will reply to them: "I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations." (Joel 2:12ff) Nor are they only earthly blessings which God tells his people to expect in the use of fasting with prayer and repentance. For, at the same time that he promised those who would seek him with fasting, and weeping, and mourning, that "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten - the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm - my great army that I sent among you;" he adds, "You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God.-Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God." And then immediately follows the great gospel promise: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" [Joel 2:25-29].

Now whatever reasons there were to motivate those of ages past, in the zealous and constant accomplishment of this duty, they are of equal force still to stimulate us. But above all these, we have a special reason for fasting often; namely, the command of Him by whose name we are called. Surely, Jesus does not, in His Sermon on the Mount, expressly command either fasting, the giving of money to the poor, or prayer; but his directions to be used when we fast, when we give to the poor, and when we pray, are of the same force. For by telling us how to fast, how to give, and how to pray, is an unquestionable command to do those very things. Consequently, the saying, "Give to the poor, pray, and fast" in such a manner, is a clear command to perform all those duties; as well as to perform them in that manner which will not lose its reward. And an another additional motive and encouragement for the performance of this duty; is the promise which our Lord has graciously attached to the proper discharge of fasting, prayer, and the giving to the poor: "Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Now we have seen the clear reasons and the purpose in fasting, however, there are some who consider themselves wiser than their Lord and have raised a number of objections against fasting.

III. Thirdly, how we can answer the most common objections against fasting:

1. The most plausible of these objections has been that "A Christian should fast from sin, and not from food: This is what God requires at his hands." So he does; but he requires the other also. Therefore one should fast from sin, but also from food when God requires or calls for it. Now look at their argument in its full dimensions; and you will easily judge of the strength of it:

If a Christian ought to abstain from sin, then he ought not to abstain from food: But a Christian ought to abstain from sin.

Therefore he ought not to abstain from food.

It is completely true that a Christian must try to abstain from sin; but how does it follow from that, that he ought not to abstain from food? Yes, let him do both the one and the other. Let him, by the grace of God, always abstain from sin; and let him often abstain from food, for such reasons and ends as experience and Scripture plainly show.

2. Secondly, it has been objected, "But is it not better to abstain from pride and vanity, from foolish and hurtful desires, from crabbiness, and anger, and discontent, than from food?"

Without question, it is. But here again we must remind you of our Lord's words: "You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." And, indeed, the latter is just as important as the former; it is a means to that great end. We abstain from food with this view, that, by the grace of God conveyed into our souls through this outward means of fasting, in conjunction with all the other channels of his grace which he has appointed, we may be enabled to abstain from every passion and attitude which is not pleasing in his sight. We refrain from the one, that, being enabled with power from on high, we may be able to refrain from the other. So that your argument proves just the contrary to what you designed. It proves that we ought to fast. For if we ought to abstain from evil attitudes and desires, then we ought thus to abstain from food; since these little instances of self-denial are the ways God has chose, wherein to bestow that power to overcome sin.

3. A third objection: "But we do not find it to be true:" "We have often fasted; but what did it benefit us? We were not a bit better; we found no blessing as a result.

No, we have found it a hindrance rather than an help. Instead of preventing anger, for instance, or fretfulness, it has been a means of increasing them to such a degree, that we could neither bear others nor ourselves." This may very possibly be the case. It is possible either to fast or pray in such a manner as to make you much worse than before; more unhappy, and more unholy. Yet the fault does not lie in the means itself, but in the manner of using it. Still use it, but use it in a different manner. Do what God commands as he commands it; and then, doubtless, his promise will not fail: His blessings will no longer be withheld; but, when you fast in secret, "Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

4. The fourth objection is: "But isn't it mere superstition, to imagine that God regards such little things as fasting?"

If you say it is, you condemn all the generations of God's children. Will you say, all of them were weak, superstitious men? Can you be so bold as to call as weak and superstitious men such as Moses and Joshua, Samuel and David, Jehosaphat, Ezra, Nehemiah, and all the prophets? Yes, even the greatest of all-the Son of God himself? It is certain, both our Master, and all His servants just mentioned, did believe that fasting was not a little thing, and that He who is higher than the highest does honor it. Likewise, along the same lines, it is clear, that all of Christ's Apostles, after they were "filled with the Holy Spirit, and with wisdom" when they had the "anointing of the Holy One, teaching them all things," and commended themselves as the ministers of God . . . in fastings," as well as "with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left." After "the bridegroom was taken from them; then they did fast." Nor would they attempt anything where the glory of God was concerned, such as the sending out workers into the harvest fields, without solemn fasting as well as prayer.

5. The fifth objection is stated, "But if fasting is indeed of so great importance, and attended with such a blessing, then isn't it best to fast all the time?" The argument is, that we should not fast now and then, but to keep up a continual fast. To abstain from food, as much as our bodily strength will bear." Let no one be discouraged from doing this. By all means eat as little as you desire and only plain food, exercise as much self-denial as you desire, and as much as your bodily strength will bear. And this may promote, by the blessing of God, several of the great ends mentioned above. It may be a considerable help, not only to holiness and purity, but also to heavenly-mindedness; to the weaning of your hearts from things below, and setting them on things above. Now listen carefully, this is not fasting, scriptural fasting; it is never termed as such in all the Bible-it is quite another thing. By all means practice it; but not in order to set aside a command of God, and as an instituted means of averting his judgments, and obtaining the blessings of his children. So you may continually use as much abstinence as you please; which, is nothing other than Christian temperance; but this must never interfere with your observing solemn times of fasting and prayer. For instance: Your habitual abstinence or restraint must not prevent your fasting in secret, if you were suddenly overwhelmed with huge sorrow and remorse, and with horrible fear and dismay. Such a situation of mind would almost constrain you to fast; you would loathe your daily food; you would scarcely tolerate even to take in such foods that would be needful for the body, till God "lifted you up out of the horrible pit, and set your feet on a rock." The same would be the case if you were in agony of heart, vehemently wrestling with God for his blessing. You would need no one to instruct you not to eat bread till you had obtained the request of your lips.

Again, had you been at Nineveh when it was proclaimed throughout the city, "Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. Let everyone call urgently on God;"-would your continual fast have been any reason for not taking part in that general humiliation? Doubtless it would not. You would have been as much concerned as any other not to take any food on that day.

Lastly. Had you been with the brethren in Antioch, at the time when they fasted and prayed, before the sending out Barnabas and Saul, can you possibly imagine that your own personal abstinence would have been a sufficient reason for not joining in this special time of fasting and prayer? Without doubt, if you had not joined them, you would soon have been cut off from the Christian community. You would have deservedly been cast out from among them, as bringing confusion into the Church of God.

IV. In the last place, how we are to fast, so that it may be acceptable to the Lord?

1. First, let it be done to the Lord, with our eye firmly fixed on Him.

Let our intention be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father in heaven; to express our sorrow and shame for our many transgressions of his holy law; to wait for an increase of purifying grace, focusing our attention on things above; to add seriousness and earnestness to our prayers; to avert the wrath of God, and to obtain all the great and precious promises which he has made to us in Jesus Christ.

Let us beware of mocking God, of turning our fast, as well as our prayers, into an abomination to the Lord, by the mixture of any worldly view, particularly by seeking the praise of men. Our blessed Lord specifically warns against this in the words of the text. "When you fast, do not look somber as

the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting." In addition, they also covered themselves with dust and ashes to be sure everyone knew they were fasting, which was their chief purpose. "I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full"-the admiration and praise of men. "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face:" Do as you are accustomed to do at other times; "so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting;" - do not let this be any part of your intention; for it doesn't matter whether others know it or not-it doesn't make you any better or worse. The only one that matters is "your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

2. Secondly, if we do desire this reward, let us beware of thinking we will merit anything from God by our fasting.

We cannot be warned too often of trying to "establish our own righteousness;" trying to procure salvation or any other need by our works and not by grace, for this is so deeply rooted in all of our hearts. Fasting is a way which God has ordained for us to receive his unmerited mercy; God is not obligated to give us anything, but he has promised to freely give us his blessing.

Now we are not to imagine, that the performance of any mere outward act of fasting will receive any blessing from God. God says, "Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes?" Are these outward acts, however strictly performed, all that is meant by a man "humbling himself?" - "Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?" No, surely not, for if it nothing but a mere external act, then it is nothing but wasted effort. Such a performance may possibly humble the body; but as to the soul, it profits nothing.

Now we must remember that in our fastings, that the body may sometimes be denied too much, so to become unfit for what God has called us to do. We must diligently guard against this; for we ought to preserve our health, as a gift of God. Therefore care is to be taken, whenever we fast, to proportion the fast to our strength. For we may not offer God murder for sacrifice, or destroy our bodies to help our souls. But at these solemn times of our lives, we may, even when our bodies are weak and need nourishment, avoid that other extreme, for which God condemns those of the past who complained to God for not accepting their fasts. "'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'" To which God replied, "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please." If we cannot completely abstain from food, we may, at least, abstain from our most favorite foods; and then we will not seek his face in vain.

3. Thirdly, let us be careful to humble our souls as well as our bodies.

Let every time of either public or private fasting, be a time of exercising all those holy attitudes which are implied in a broken and contrite heart. Let it be a time of devout mourning, of godly sorrow for sin; such a sorrow as that of the Corinthians, concerning which the Apostle said, "I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow," which is a precious gift of his Spirit, lifting the soul to God from whom it flows, "brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret." Yes, and let our godly sorrow work in us the same inward and outward repentance; the same complete change of heart, renewed after the image of

God, in righteousness and true holiness; and the same change of life, until we are holy as He is holy, in all of our conversations.

Let it work in us the same sincerity that is found in him, without spot and blameless; the same integrity, evidenced in our lives rather than just in our words, by our abstaining from all appearance of evil; the same indignation, fervent hatred of every sin; the same fear of our own deceitful hearts; the same desire to be in all things conformed to the holy and acceptable will of God; the same zeal for whatever may be a means of his glory, and of our growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the same revenge against Satan and all his works, against all filthiness both of flesh and Spirit. (2 Corinthians 7:9ff)

4. Fourthly, let us always join fervent prayer with fasting, pouring out our souls before God, confessing our sins, humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, laying open before him all our needs, all our guiltiness and helplessness. This is a time for expanding our prayers, both in behalf of ourselves and of others. Let us now grieve over the sins of our people; and cry aloud for the Church, that the Lord may build her up, and cause his face to shine on her. Thus, we may observe, the men of God, in ancient times always joined prayer and fasting together; likewise the Apostles, in all the instances cited above; and even our Lord fasted and prayed.

5. Lastly, one other thing needs to be mentioned with regard to fasting: in order for our fasting to be acceptable to the Lord, we need to add prayers and gifts to the poor; works of mercy, within our power, both to the bodies and souls of men, for: "With such sacrifices God is pleased."

We see this clearly illustrated when the angel declares to Cornelius, who was fasting and praying in his house, the angel said, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God" [Acts 10:4ff]. And God himself clearly and specifically declares: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke. Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail" [Isaiah 58:6-11]. Amen.

## 10 Who Will You Deny, Yourself or the Lord?

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Who Will You Deny, Yourself or the Lord? by John Wesley

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." Luke 9:23

Denying ourselves and taking up our cross isn't a little side issue - it is absolutely necessary to becoming or continuing to be a disciple of Jesus. If we don't practice self-denial, we aren't His disciples. It's useless to try to follow the One who was crucified without taking up our own cross daily. Unless we deny ourselves, it will be impossible not to deny the Lord. But so many who have written about self-denial (some of them large volumes) don't seem to have an understanding of the subject. Either they couldn't explain it to others, or they didn't know how far to take it, or they didn't sense the absolute necessity of it. Others speak of it in such a dark, mystical way, that the average man can't understand what it's supposed to mean.

Still others speak very clearly on the necessity of self-denial, but they never get down to any specifics about what to do. And if some of them do get specific, they only talk about those things that hardly affect anyone, since they almost never occur in common life. They speak of things like enduring imprisonment or tortures, giving up houses or lands, husbands or wives, children, or even life itself. But most of us aren't likely to be called to endure things like these for the Gospel, unless God permits times of public persecution to return. An Uphill Climb

What does it mean for a man to "deny himself, and take up his cross daily"? This is something which is so, so important to understand, because many powerful enemies oppose this Christian doctrine stronger than they oppose any other aspect of our spiritual lives. All of our natural feelings rise up against any kind of self-denial, and we immediately look for reasons to excuse ourselves from it. Those who love the world hate the very sound of it. And the great enemy of our souls, knowing full-well its importance, tries to roll every stone against it. But this isn't all. Even people who have pretty much shaken off the yoke of the devil, and who've sensed the work of God in their hearts, don't seem to know much about this central doctrine of Christianity. Some are as deeply and totally ignorant about it as if there wasn't one word about it in the Bible. But self-denial is something that their Master insists on.

Others are even further off, having accepted a strong prejudice against it. They've gotten this idea from shallow "Christians" who like the easy things of life, and who don't want anything of godliness except the power.

It's not enough for a minister of the Gospel to not oppose the doctrine of self-denial. If he wants to be pure from the blood of all men, he must speak of it often, showing the necessity of it in the clearest and strongest way. Can you see how you're in constant danger of being fooled, cheated, or ridiculed out of this important command of Jesus, either by false teachers or false believers? In the meantime, a good understanding of what self-denial really means is badly needed. And once you know what it means, you need to learn to practice it as a way of life.

All of the things that hold us back from being right with God or growing in the Lord can be boiled down to this: either we won't deny ourselves or we won't take up our cross. Let deep prayer go before, accompany, and follow what you are now about to read, that it may be written in your heart by the finger of God, never to be erased.

I'll try to show, First, what it means for a man to deny himself and take up his cross; and, Secondly, show that if anyone isn't fully Christ's disciple, it's always because he won't obey this command of Jesus.

## I. Self-Denial

What is self-denial? How do we deny ourselves? Why do we have to? Self-denial is simply denying or refusing to follow our own will, from a conviction that the will of God is the only right way. The first reason that God should be totally in charge of our lives, instead of us, is because He made us. "It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves." (Psalms 100:3) It's only a natural result of the relationship between man and his Creator. If God's way is the right way in everything, big and small, it follows that we shouldn't go our own way in anything. Self-denial holds true for the angels of God in heaven as well as with man, innocent and holy, as he came out of the hands of his Creator. The second reason that God should be totally in charge of our lives is because of the condition that all men are in since the fall. Our own will leans toward indulging our natural desires. But it's God's plan and desire that we resist and overcome that temptation, not at some times or in some things only, but in all times and in all things.

Let me illustrate this. The will of God is like a road leading straight to God. The will of man, which once ran parallel with it, is now another road, which runs in the opposite way. It leads away from God. If we walk on one, we have to leave the other. We can't walk on both at the same time. It's impossible for a man to follow his own will and follow the will of God. You have to choose one or the other, either denying God's will to follow your own, or denying yourself to follow the will of God.

Without a doubt, it's more pleasing, for a while, to follow our own will and desires. But by following our desires in anything, we strengthen the rebellion of our heart. So, by eating the food we enjoy, we often increase a bodily disease. It satisfies our taste, but it makes us sicker; it brings pleasure, but it also brings death. On the whole, then, to deny ourselves, is to give up our own will, no matter how much we may want our own way, whenever it doesn't fall in line with the will of God. It's to deny ourselves any pleasure which doesn't come from, or lead to, God.

**Taking Up Your Cross** In our daily lives what does it mean to take up your cross? We need to find out, because everyone that wants to follow Christ must not only deny himself, but take up his cross as well. Taking up our cross means doing anything that goes against what we would choose to do. So taking up our cross is a little harder than denying ourselves. It rises a little higher, and is more difficult to flesh and blood. Even though it may sometimes be hard to give up our own pleasure, it's easier to do that than to take up hardship and endure pain.

Now, in running "the race that is set before us" according to the will of God, many times there's a cross lying in the way. That cross is something which will not only bring no pleasure, but something that is a burden or a pain. Picking up our cross is not just denying ourselves something that is pleasurable, it is allowing something that is unpleasurable to enter into our lives. What do we do when we are faced with this? The choice is plain: either we take up our cross, or we turn

aside from the way of God. In order to bring our lives back in line with what the Lord originally intended us to be, it's often necessary to pluck out, so to speak, an eye, or to cut off a right hand. We're so attached to some habits of sin that we can never be separated from them without intense pain. The Lord then purifies the soul like a refiner's fire, to burn up all the impurity. It's painful all right, and it must be, because the soul cannot pass through the fire without pain. The Good Doctor

If God puts us through any kind of pain, it's only in order to heal us. Jesus is our Great Physician and He cuts away what is infected or rotting, in order to preserve the healthy part. And if we would freely choose the loss of a limb, instead of letting our whole body perish, how much more should we choose, figuratively, to cut off a right hand, rather than to have our whole soul cast into hell! When our Lord said to the rich young man, "go and sell all that you possess, and give it to the poor" (knowing this was the only way to heal his greed), the very thought of it gave that young man so much pain that "he went away grieved." (Mark 10:21-22) He chose to part with his hope of heaven, rather than part with his possessions on earth. This was a pain he would not agree to endure. A cross he would not take up. And in one way or another every follower of Christ will surely have to take up his cross daily.

Taking up our cross doesn't mean literally tearing our own flesh, wearing uncomfortable clothes, purposely exposing ourselves to extreme heat or cold, or anything else that would hurt our bodily health. It means embracing the will of God, even though it may be totally different from what we want. It means choosing the good, though it may be bitter medicine. It means freely accepting hardships, trials, and temporary pain of whatever kind, as we walk on the path of eternal life.

## II. Self-Indulgence

Secondly I want to show that it's always because of lack of self-denial, or taking up his cross, that someone doesn't completely follow Christ and is not fully His disciple. Let me show you what I mean with a few examples:

### Five Kinds Of People

1.) The first kind of man hears the word which is able to save his soul. He likes what he hears, acknowledges the truth, and his heart is touched, yet he remains dead in sin, senseless and unawakened. Why is this? Because he won't part with the sin he loves, though he now knows it is utterly hated by the Lord. He came to hear, full of lust and unholy desire, and he leaves the same way because he will not deny himself these things. This man doesn't wake up, even though the trumpet is blown.

2.) The second kind of person begins to wake up, and his eyes even open a little. He's convicted by the Spirit of God and receives the truth. But soon the conviction wears off and his eyes are closed again. Why does he again sink into the sleep of death? Because he continues to yield to the sin he loves. He drinks again of the pleasing poison. Although he begins to wake up, he has no deep conviction. Therefore it's impossible that any lasting work can be done in his life because he will not deny himself.

3.) The third type of man has really woken up. The things God has shown him don't fade away. The impressions are deep and lasting. And yet, he never feels at peace with God, although he really desires it. Now, why is this? It's because he doesn't bring forth fruit in keeping with his

repentance. He doesn't "cease to do evil" and "learn to do good" according to the grace he has received.

These people don't completely let go of their sinful habits, or they continue to avoid doing the good they know they should do, because it's something they don't want to do. That is, they never come to a point of saving faith, because they won't deny themselves, or take up their cross.

4.) The fourth person is someone who has tasted the heavenly gift and the powers of the age to come. The peace which passes all understanding ruled his heart and mind; and the love of God was poured out in his heart by the Holy Spirit - yet now he is weak. He again loves the things of the world and desires them more than the things that are not seen. The eye of his understanding is closed again, so that he can't see Him who is unseen. His love has grown cold, and the peace of God no longer rules in his heart. And no wonder, for he has again given a place to the devil, and grieved the Holy Spirit of God. He has turned again to some pleasing sin, if not in some outward act, yet in his heart. He has given a place to pride, or anger, or lust, to self-will, or stubbornness.

Maybe he didn't stir up the gift of God which was in him - he gave way to spiritual laziness and wouldn't be bothered with the pains to "pray at all times...on the alert with all perseverance." (Ephesians 6:18). That is, he made shipwreck of his faith, for lack of self-denial and taking up his cross daily.

5.) The fifth kind of man hasn't made a total ship-wreck of his faith. He still has a measure of the Spirit of adoption, which continues to witness with his spirit that he is a child of God. However, he's not "going on to perfection." He isn't, as he once was, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, as the deer pants after the water brook. Instead he's tired and worn out in his mind, wavering between life and death. And why is he this way? Because he has forgotten the Word of God. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected." (James 2:21-22) That is, he isn't diligent in working the works of God. He doesn't continue in prayer, either personal or group prayer, in communicating with Jesus, meditating on the Word of God, fasting, and in staying in fellowship. And why doesn't he continue in prayer? Because in times of dryness it's a pain and bother to him. Or he isn't zealous in helping others. He doesn't fervently serve the Lord by doing good to men, in every way he can, to their souls as well as their bodies. He doesn't continue to yield to God at all opportunities, because he'd rather go to sleep, or it's just too cold outside, or dark, or rainy. Why can't he feed the hungry or clothe the naked? Because he might have to do it at the expense of his own clothes, or use cheaper and less pleasing food. Besides, visiting the sick or those in prison is surrounded with all kinds of uncomfortable circumstances. And so are most works of spiritual mercy, like correction, for example.

He won't help his brother by correcting him because shame, sometimes fear, comes between. He may have to expose himself to ridicule or worse inconveniences. When he considers these and other things, he leaves out one or more, if not all, works of mercy and love. Therefore, his faith is not being perfected, and he can't mature in his faith, because he won't deny himself, and take up his cross daily. Tired of carrying his cross, he stops diligently pressing on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

We can see that it's always because a man will not deny himself or take up his cross that he doesn't completely follow his Lord. It's for this reason that he's not fully a disciple of Christ. This is the real reason why so many people who were once burning and shining lights have now lost both their light and heat. They didn't value self-denial according to its high importance, or take any pains in practicing it.

Lastly, see that you apply this, every one of you, to your own soul. Meditate on it when you're in secret. Consider it in your heart! Take care not only to understand it thoroughly, but to remember it to your life's end! Cry to the Strong for strength, that as soon as you understand, you will practice it! Don't put it off, but practice it on every one of the thousand occasions which occur in all circumstances of life! Practice it daily, without intermission, from the hour you first set your hand to the plow, and enduring to the end, until your spirit returns to God!

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