

Man in His Original and in His Lapsed State.

by Edward Payson

The sermon explores the concept of man's original state of uprightness and his subsequent fall into sin, highlighting the consequences of rebellion against God.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Ecclesiastes 7:29, John 3:3, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, Ephesians 4:22, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Original Sin", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

Edward Payson preaches on Ecclesiastes 7:29, highlighting the contrast between God making man upright and man seeking out sinful inventions. He delves into the original state of man as perfectly conforming to the divine law in understanding, memory, conscience, heart, will, and imagination. Payson emphasizes the depravity of man's faculties due to sin, leading to a separation from God and the need for a great moral change akin to a new creation or new birth for true religion. He challenges professing Christians to assess their spiritual state and progress in their Christian journey.

Transcript

"Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions"

Ecclesiastes 7:29

need not inform those of you who are acquainted with the contents of scripture, that in this book Solomon has recorded the result of numerous trials and experiments which he had made in searching after happiness and inquiring after truth. His success in these pursuits does not appear to have been very flattering. After making a fair trial, whether any or all worldly objects could afford happiness, he found nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit. Nor could he boast of much greater success in his inquiries after truth; I said I will be wise, but it was far from me.

I applied my heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness. But, here again, he found himself entangled and perplexed by innumerable questions which he could not answer, and difficulties which he could not solve; so that at last he was obliged to sit down content with the discovery of one truth; a truth however of great importance; a truth indeed, which if rightly understood, will go far to elucidate most of the religious questions by which men are perplexed, and respecting which they are divided in opinion; Lo, this only have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

This passage, which contains the result of the wise man's inquiries, and the sum of his discoveries, includes two propositions, I. God made man upright. II. Men have sought out many inventions. To illustrate and establish these two propositions is my present design. I. God made man upright. This assertion evidently refers to the nature of man as he was originally created. In other words, it refers to our first parents, the progenitors of mankind; for we are informed in the account given us of the creation, that God created man in his own image, after his own likeness; and that, after the work of creation was finished, God saw that all was very good.

Man then, at his creation, was not only good, but very good, perfectly good. he was, as one observes, a miniature picture of his Maker; for he was made in the image, and after the likeness of the holy God. These passages evidently teach the same truth which is contained in our text, that mankind, or human nature was originally made upright. Let us consider more particularly the import of this term. The words, upright and righteous, literally signify agreeable, or conformable to rule.

Our text then teaches us that man was made in a state of perfect conformity to some rule. If it is asked what rule? I answer, the law of God, for this is the only perfect, immutable and eternal rule to which God requires his creatures to be conformed, and in conformity to which, rectitude or uprightness consists. I say that this is a perfect, eternal and immutable rule; for we are assured that the law of God is perfect; that it is holy, just and good; and that though heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from it, till all be fulfilled.

Man then was created in a state of perfect conformity to the law of God. If it be asked in what this state of conformity consists, or what it implies; I answer, it implies the possession of an understanding perfectly acquainted with the law; of a memory which perfectly retains all its precepts; of a conscience which always faithfully applies it; of a heart which perfectly loves it; and a will perfectly obedient and submissive to its authority; and of an imagination which presents to the mind no images, but such as ought to be entertained.

If either of these be wanting, man cannot be perfectly upright, or, in other words, perfectly conformed to the divine law. This assertion it will be necessary to illustrate and prove more particularly. 1. A state of perfect conformity to the divine law implies the possession of an understanding perfectly acquainted with that law. This, I conceive, is too evident to be denied; since no being can act in conformity to a law, or regulate his conduct by a law, with which he is not acquainted.

Man then, at his creation, was endued with such an understanding. In the language of Scripture, the divine law was put in his mind. He was not like St. Paul, alive without the law, but alive with the law. He was perfectly acquainted both with the letter and the spirit of it; and saw with the greatest clearness its nature, spirituality, strictness, and extent; so that the path of duty lay, in all cases, as plainly before the eye of his mind, as the path from this house to our habitations ever lay before our bodily eyes.

In a word, he so perfectly understood what was required of him, and had such a perfect knowledge of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong, that it was impossible for him, while he remained in his original state, ever to transgress ignorantly, or by mistake. Agreeably, we find knowledge expressly mentioned by the inspired writers as one thing in which the image of God, that image in which man was created, consists. 2. In the next place, a state of perfect uprightness, or conformity to the divine law, implies a memory which faithfully retains all its precepts.

The necessity of such a memory is obvious. We cannot regulate our conduct by a law not remembered, any more than by a law which does not exist. Just so far as any of its precepts are forgotten, they must cease to affect us. Memory is the storehouse of the mind, in which all its treasures are laid up; and when any thing fades out of the memory, it no longer exists in the mind. Man then, was originally created with a memory, which faithfully retained every jot and tittle of the divine law, as wax retains the impression of a seal; so that every precept was ready at hand to direct his conduct, on all occasions, and in all circumstances.

Of course, while he remained as God created him, it was impossible that he should ever transgress the law through forgetfulness. 3. In the third place, a state of perfect conformity to the divine law implies a conscience which always faithfully applies it. As we have of late repeatedly reminded you, the office of conscience is to apply to our conduct the rule which is given it; and to pass sentence upon us according to that rule. The rule given to man at his creation, was the divine law, and as he perfectly understood and remembered this law, his conscience was ever guided by an infallible rule; and this rule it was always ready to apply.

Memory gave her the words, in which the rule was expressed; and understanding gave the exact meaning of those words, so that she could never pronounce an erroneous sentence, never lead man to think, as St. Paul afterwards did before his conversion, that he was verily doing God service when in reality he was violating his commands. Nor did conscience ever slumber or lose any portion of her quick sensibility to right and wrong, but was ever awake, susceptible, and active; so that man always found her saying, as a voice within him, This is the way, walk thou in it.

And as man, while he retained his original character, always perfectly complied with her admonitions, conscience, of course, always approved his conduct. Their constant language was, Well done, good and faithful servant; and as her voice was the voice of God, so her approving sentence was sanctioned by the power of God, and spoke peace to the soul with all his authority and energy. Man, therefore, then possessed in a perfect degree peace of conscience. He had, in the fullest sense of the words, a conscience void of offence; a conscience which was never offended, and which did not offend. 4.

In the fourth place, a state of perfect conformity to the divine law implies a heart which perfectly loves that law. This is even more necessary than any thing which has yet been mentioned. Indeed, it is absolutely indispensable: for though the understanding were perfectly acquainted with the law; though the memory perfectly retained, and conscience ever faithfully applied it; yet if the heart did not love its precepts, and love to obey them, they would not be obeyed; for the heart, or in other words, the affections and inclinations, is the ruling faculty of the soul, and will sooner or later subdue and lead captive all the other faculties.

Besides, as the law is fulfilled by love, as it principally requires love, it is evident that where there is no love, there can be no real obedience to any of its requirements. Man then, was created with a heart, which perfectly loved the divine law, and which was perfectly inclined to obey. His inclinations perfectly coincided with his duty. He not only walked in the path of duty, but loved to walk in it, and proposed it to others. That he was so, is farther evident from the fact, that he was created in the image of God, for God is love, holy love; and therefore an essential part of his image, in which man was created, must consist in love.

God also loves his own law; for it is a transcript of his mind, an expression of his will; and, of course, since man was made in the likeness of God, he must have loved his law. In a word, the divine law was written in

his heart by the finger of God, as it afterwards was upon the tables of stone; so that, while man retained the character which God gave him, he could never transgress the law by choice or design. 5. In the fifth place, a state of perfect conformity to the law of God implies a will perfectly obedient and submissive to that law; or, in other words, to the divine government and authority.

This, I conceive, is too evident to require proof; for a rebellious, stubborn will, is utterly incompatible with conformity to the law of God. A perfectly obedient and submissive will, then, man originally possessed. His will was swallowed up in the will of God, following just as the shadow follows the body. This resulted as a necessary consequence from the holy love to God's law which reigned in his heart; for the will is the servant of the heart, and follows where the heart leads.

The understanding, which is the eye of the mind, discovers objects with the consequences of pursuing or avoiding them; the heart chooses or refuses those objects; and then the will resolves either to pursue or avoid them, according to the inclination of the heart. So long then, as man's understanding was perfectly clear, and his heart perfectly right, his will could not but be perfectly obedient and submissive to the law of God. 6. There still remains one faculty possessed by man, which it is necessary to consider, viz., that which is usually called the imagination.

Whether this faculty is possessed by spirits in a disembodied state, may be doubted. It seems probable that it belongs exclusively neither to the soul nor to the body, but that it results from the union of both. It is that faculty by which the images or ideas of absent sensible objects are presented to the mind. I say the images of sensible objects; for intellectual objects, such as truth, for instance, are perceived by the understanding; and I say of absent sensible objects, for when such objects are present with us, they are perceived by our senses.

Now it may be made to appear evident, that such a faculty was necessary for man in his present situation. He is an inhabitant of one world, destined after a short residence here, to be removed to another. Now the world, to which he must remove, differs so widely from this, that in consequence of the imperfection of language many of its objects cannot be described or presented to our minds, except by the assistance of figures and comparisons drawn from the sensible objects around us.

It was therefore necessary that we should be endued with a faculty of perceiving these figures and comparisons, and of forming by their assistance some images or conceptions of heavenly and eternal objects. It was doubtless for this reason that God gave us the faculty which we call imagination; and when man left the forming hand of his Maker, this faculty, like the others which we have mentioned, was entirely free from moral imperfection. Instead of filling the mind, as it now does, with vain thoughts, waking dreams, and worthless or sinful fancies, it presented nothing but holy images of spiritual and heavenly objects.

In every object which met man's senses, his pure imagination enabled him to discover some striking illustration of important truths, some analogical resemblance to those things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, which God has prepared for them that love him. A striking instance of the manner, in which a holy imagination operates, we have in the life of our Savior. To him the whole world was a Bible, and every object a text, from which he drew the most convincing arguments, the most instructive lessons, the most striking illustration of divine truth.

Such was the imagination of man, and such its employment, while he retained his original character. Thus have I separately considered the several faculties of the human soul, and attempted to show that they

were all made at first upright, or in a state of perfect conformity to the divine law. And a little reflection will convince us that, if either of these faculties had been imperfect, man could not have been made upright, or created in the image and after the likeness of God.

If he had not clearly understood the law, or had not perfectly remembered it, or faithfully applied it, or cordially loved it, or willingly obeyed it, or if his imagination had presented vain, impure, or sinful images to the mind; in either of these cases, he would have been imperfect, or not upright, and God would have been chargeable with the imperfection; nor could it have been said with truth, that all his works were very good. It may perhaps be expected that I should now proceed to say something of the human body, with its appetites and propensities; but this is needless.

The body is only the habitation of the soul, and its members only the instruments by which the soul acts on surrounding sensible objects. In itself, without the soul, it is nothing but a little mass of organized dust, incapable of doing either good or evil. It is the soul, the inhabitant within, which gives a character to its motions; and if the soul be perfectly holy, its habitation must be perfectly pure. It may, however, be proper to remark, that the appetites of the body were originally, not as they now are, disorderly, craving, and excessive in their desires, but were perfectly under the guidance and control of the mind and desired nothing more than the divine law allowed, and the welfare of man required.

Such then was man at his creation, sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body, perfect in that image of God which consists in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, But, II. Though God made man thus upright, they have sought out many inventions. The disjunctive particle, with which the latter clause of our text is introduced, intimates that the royal preacher here means sinful inventions, or inventions contrary to that uprightness, that state of conformity to the divine law, in which man was created.

That this must have been his meaning is farther evident from many other inspired passages in which this truth is taught. Thus we are told, that men have all gone astray, like sheep, and turned every one to his own way; that when the Lord looked down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand or seek after him, he saw that they had all gone out of the way, that they had together become filthy, so that there was none righteous or upright, none that did good, no not one.

These expressions teach us, not only that man is now out of the way of righteousness, but that he was originally in it; for otherwise it could not with propriety be said that he had turned or gone out of it. Similar therefore must be the meaning of the wise man, when he says, men have sought out many inventions. That is, first, they have sought out or invented many new ways in which to walk, forsaking the good old way in which God originally placed them. Of this you may be convinced by looking a moment at the present and past situation of mankind, and considering the almost innumerable foolish, sinful ways in which men seek for happiness, and the various forms of false religion which have prevailed, and which still prevail in the world.

While the way of truth and uprightness is always one and the same, the new and false ways which men have invented are numerous and continually changing. In the next place, men have forsaken the one living and true God, in whom they live, and move, and are, and sought out or invented innumerable false gods and created idols, to which they give that homage and attention which are due to him alone. To use his own language, they have forsaken him, the Fountain of living waters, and hewn out for themselves broken cisterns which can hold no water.

When they knew God, says the apostle, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened; so that they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Of similar conduct we, my friends, are in reality guilty; for, though we do not bow down to false gods of wood and stone, we have all set up idols in our hearts; we all love and serve the creature, more than the Creator; we all take pride in some of those things, the glory of which God has resolved to stain; and are all more or less fascinated and bewitched by the innumerable inventions of luxury and art which men have sought out, and which the world places before us to draw off our hearts from God.

In the third place, men have ceased to be conformed to the divine law, and have sought out many other rules, rules more agreeable to their present sinful inclinations, by which to regulate and try their conduct. How numerous and how various are these rules, no one who is acquainted with mankind need be informed. Some adopt for this purpose the laws of their country; others the opinion of some human teacher; while a third and more numerous class govern themselves by the maxims which pass currently in the society of which they happen to be members.

Thus in various ways men measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, and therefore are not wise; for while they follow these rules of human invention, they have lost all that uprightness, that conformity to the divine law, which has been described. For instance, their understandings are so blinded by sinful prejudices and inclinations, that they have lost the knowledge of the divine law. They are all, like St. Paul before his conversion, alive without the law; nor can they be made by mere human teaching to know any thing of its nature, spirituality and extent.

Agreeably, we are told that their understandings are darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their hearts. And as men do not now understand, so neither do they remember the law of God. They retain indeed with care, many things which they ought to forget; but are prone to forget what they ought to remember. How many are there among us, who have heard the word of God inculcated from their childhood, who pass whole days without recollecting one of its precepts, or even without reflecting that God has given them a law for the regulation of their conduct.

Hence men are represented as not liking to retain God in their knowledge and as saying to the Almighty, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. Hence too the wicked are described as those who forget God; and hence Paul exhorts the Hebrews to give the more earnest heed to the truths they had heard, lest at any time they should let them slip,--an exhortation which plainly intimates that we are exceedingly prone to suffer the truth to slip out of our minds.

That we are so, and that our memories are exceedingly depraved, every one must be convinced, who will reflect how much more easily he retains an idle tale or slanderous report than the truth of God's word; and how much sooner he forgets the mercies he has received from God, than the injuries which he receives from men. The conscience also shares in these malignant effects of sin. No longer does she faithfully apply the law of God to our conduct, or pronounce sentence according to its rules.

Indeed, it is impossible that she should; for if men neither understand the nature, nor remember the precepts of the divine law, how is it possible that conscience should apply it to our conduct. It is a rule of which she now knows nothing. She judges according to the rule which is put into her hands, and we have already observed that men invent or seek out false rules for her use. Besides, in consequence of sin, she

has lost much of her sensibility, and is prone to slumberer, so that nothing disturbs her but crimes of the first magnitude, and nothing can awaken her but the Spirit of God.

Hence St. Paul, speaking of unbelievers, says, even their mind and conscience is defiled ; and of others he says, that their consciences are seared as with an hot iron. Nor has the heart of man escaped the contagion of sin. Indeed, this is the first part affected by it; for while man's heart loves the law, he will always understand, remember, and apply it. It is only because men have ceased to love God's law that they now misunderstand and forget it. It is the sinfulness of the heart alone, which darkens the understanding, renders the memory treacherous, and the conscience insensible and unfaithful.

A sinful heart cannot endure an understanding which perceives, a memory which retains, and a conscience which applies the law of God; for these faculties would then be at constant war with the heart, opposing and condemning all her sinful inclinations. A sinful heart loves darkness for the same reason with the midnight thief. Agreeably, our Savior informs us that every one that doeth evil hateth the light neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. This then is the reason why men do not like to retain God in their knowledge.

Set the heart right, let it be again reconciled to God and to his law, and all the other facilities will be rectified at once. But alas, the heart will not be set right; for it has become deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. In this depravity of man's heart, the will also shares of course. It has become rebellious, like an iron sinew; for the carnal mind is enmity against God, and not subject to his law. Hence the language of the unsubdued will is, I will not have God to reign over me: not his will, but mine be done.

Would time permit, I might proceed to show how the imagination is depraved by the loss of its original conformity to the divine law; how, instead of raising the mind from earth to heaven, it drags down the mind from heaven to earth; fills it with vain thoughts, foolish fancies, and impure sinful images, and debases and degrades every thing great and good by its mean groveling conceptions of them. I might also show how the infection of sin has spread from the soul to the body, inflaming its appetites, and often reducing men by their instrumentality almost to a level with the brutes, and sometimes below them.

But on this part of my subject time forbids me to enlarge. I must, however, briefly notice, Lastly, among the inventions of sinful man the innumerable excuses, pleas, and apologies, which he has sought out to justify his conduct, and to make himself appear unfortunate, rather than criminal. These excuses are far too numerous to particularize; and in nothing have mankind displayed more ingenuity than in forming them; for though they have lost the knowledge to do good, they are wise to do evil, and to justify it when done.

All these excuses, however different, agree in this: they attempt to transfer the guilt of sin from man to God. Indeed it is evident that the guilt cannot be removed from man without casting it upon God; for if man be not guilty, certainly guilty, God, if I way venture to utter it, -- is so. But our subject overthrows all these excuses at once; for if God made man upright he cannot be justly blamed for the sins of men; and if men have sought out many wicked and foolish inventions, they alone ought to bear the blame of them and suffer their consequences.

Thus, my friends, have we taken a brief view of what man was, and of what he is; of what he was as God made him, and of what he is since he has, if I may so express it, unmade or destroyed himself. And now who can forbear to weep over such a scene as this; over a world thus dreadfully marred, over a race of immortal beings once bearing the image and likeness of God, perfectly conformed in every faculty to his holy law, and in all respects but little lower than the angels; but now debased, ruined, and enslaved by sin,

the image of God lost, his law effaced from their minds, and themselves dead in trespasses and sins, transformed into children of wrath, and heirs of endless perdition.

O, how has the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! Well might such a spectacle make heaven weep, could tears be shed in heaven. And if it has not done this it has done more. It has brought down God's eternal Son from heaven to earth on an errand of mercy, to seek and to save a race thus ruined and lost. This fact alone, if rightly considered, taken in connection with the manner in which this salvation was effected, will give us more just and enlarged conceptions of the greatness of man's ruin than any thing which can be said of it beside.

It will show us that the work of saving was incomparably greater and more difficult than that of creating the world. When the world was created, its Maker did not leave his celestial abode. A word, an act of his will, was sufficient. But when the world was to be saved, its Maker was constrained to descend from heaven, the Creator to take the form of a creature, and a whole life of toil and suffering closed by a most painful and ignominious death, was necessary to effect the work.

From the greatness of the work of salvation, then, infer the greatness of man's ruin. Judge that if one, if such an one, died for men, then men were indeed dead. 2. From this subject we may learn the nature and necessity of that moral change which the Scriptures call a new birth, a new creation, and a resurrection from the dead. In other words, we may learn the nature and necessity of true religion. The word religion literally signifies to circle or bind again what had been broken or separated.

We have seen how the bands which bound men to God were sundered by the sin of the former. True religion consists in a reunion of these bands, in bringing man back into the state in which he was originally created, and from which he has fallen. Now in order to this, is not a great moral change necessary, if our text be true? If man was originally upright, or perfectly conformed to the divine law, must he not become again upright, before he can be restored to the favor of God?

And if all his powers and faculties are depraved by sin, as above described, must not this change be so great, as to be justly styled a new creation, or a new birth? Must not the man be, as it were, made or created anew that he must be so, the Scriptures most clearly assert: If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Ye are created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds; and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge, or made anew, after the image of God.

Add to these and many other passages, our Savior's declaration, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, --and you must, I think, be convinced that a great moral change is absolutely necessary; that there can be no true religion, no bringing a man into his former state, no reconciling him to God without it. You will, at least, see that the Bible is a complete whole; that it contains a connected and consistent scheme of divine truth. 3. From this subject, my professing friends, you may learn whether you are what you profess to be; and if so, how far you have advanced in your Christian course.

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