

*FINDING GOD,
FINDING ME:
Re-Discovering the Beauty
of Scripture*

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John Wesley Sermons are taken from:

Wesley, John, and Kenneth J. Collins. *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013.

I dedicate this book to all those seeking to find the meaning to their life by searching the Christian Scriptures faithfully.

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THE WHOLE STORY

Every generation has a story, event, something that brings them together. You may remember some of them just from the last twentieth century:

World War 1

World War 2

Pearl Harbor

MLK

JFK

Space shuttle challenger

Michael Jackson

OJ Simpson

Berlin Wall

And sooooo many more.

These events all bring us closer together because they bring us a shared experience. These events bind us together because we love to tell the stories. We love to remember. We love to feel connected with something larger than us.

I tell you all this because we are all shaped by, whether we know it or not, we keep going back to these stories to help us remember a connection. Our lives have been shaped by these events. They have transformed how we view the world.

What is it that has shaped you the most? What has helped you see the world as you do? Do you notice how you act around others largely depends on what your eyes and mind consume throughout the day?

For the last 15 to 20 years, I have been seeking to be shaped by one source. This is a source that many will complain about, altogether reject, or find fault with solely based upon the actions of others. This book is called the Bible.

This is a book to help us navigate through the big themes found in the scriptures (the Bible) so we can see how the storyline fits together and how the Bible also reveals our storyline within the story of God himself.

There are demons, massive disasters, wars, sex, kings and queens, traveling around the known world. The Bible is full of adventures and stories that do not even compare to the rated-R movies we may watch today. But how can we make sense of this book, this library of books and letters?

I hope to help you journey through this so you can see the truth that is still speaking today.

Each chapter will focus on a particular theme in more detail, but for now, let's do a grand, over-arching narrative to gain the Bible's meta-narrative (big storyline).

Word of God? God-breathed?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV) says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV) says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Some more intelligent people can explain these verses in greater detail than I will attempt to do here, but I will do my best to explain as I have understood them.

Our biggest challenge will be to keep the whole, over-arching narrative of scripture in our minds. It is too easy to cherry-pick the verses or stories we like. You know, the ones that make us feel good when we are about to try or accomplish something.

With that thought, I invite you to read through 2 Timothy 3 and Hebrews 4. What are they talking about?

Paul, the author of 2 Timothy, reminds Timothy to stick with what he learned as a child. The instruction that shaped him will continue to guide and shape him as he continues his path of ministering to the people. Paul is speaking truth to Timothy that the life (breath, spirit, Greek word *pneuma*) used to inspire the scriptures we have today is the same life (breath, spirit) that will still speak to him today.

In Hebrews, the author pleads with the readers/hearers to keep listening for the voice of God. The people should be open to keeping their ears and minds focused on the voice of God speaking. Hardened hearts and willfully going against the voice of God keep their lives full of anxiety. The voice of God will lead them to rest (see Matthew 11).

If people ever want to know what God is asking of them, they should stick close to the truth of scripture. This will help to cut out anything that draws the people away from God. The Spirit that speaks in scripture will guide, convict, and reveal the true motives of the actions.

Word of God

There is a big deal that the Bible is the Word of God. What's interesting is the Bible never says that about itself. Over 40 authors wrote the Bible on three continents over 1,500 years. The Bible demonstrates the relationship between God and humanity and humanity and God as well as humanity with humanity.

Now, there is one the Bible makes clear is the Word of God. John 1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

So, who is the Word of God? Jesus the Christ. The Lord and Savior of the world. The King of kings. "Wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, Prince of Peace," Emmanuel (God-in-flesh).

When we read the biblical narrative through the lens of Jesus Christ, we can see God's intent from the beginning. We learn who God is. We rejoice that God became one of us to redeem and work in and through us for the glory of his kingdom to be on earth as it is in heaven.

Knowing who God is helps us understand ourselves because we were made in the "image of God" (Genesis 1:27). Knowing Jesus reveals the Father's heart for the world. Knowing the Holy Spirit reveals who guides us in this life.

Understanding the Bible: Six Themes

So, what do we do with all of this? How does this help me understand the Bible? It is a hard book. There are names I cannot pronounce, wars and genocide I don't know what to do with.

This is where we begin. What is the Bible attempting to speak and teach to us?

Creation.

Fall.

Israel.

Jesus.

Church.

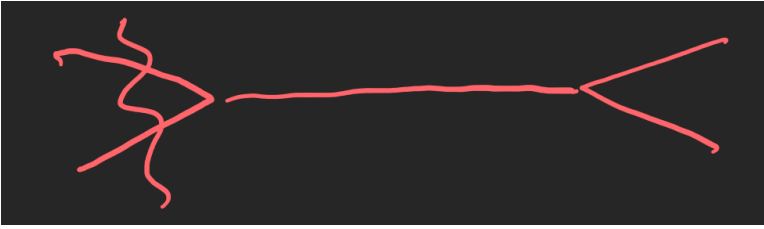
New Creation.

These are the six themes throughout scripture. These will be the guides for each of the following six chapters. These are what we will view to learn more about ourselves.

Again, I did not develop these themes or the following picture, but knowing what we're discussing has dramatically enhanced my understanding of scripture.

Explaining the Bible in Five Minutes

Take out a sheet of paper and draw the following picture:



This is the picture we will be working with. Does this help you understand the Bible yet? LOL. I'm just kidding. Let's explain this.

I first encountered this diagram in my Old Testament Introduction class at Asbury Theological Seminary, taught by Dr. Brian Russell. Since then, I have used this illustration to speak about the Bible.

Notice the picture goes in an interesting way. The left angle represents the Bible's opening with the "universe" in mind. Then, the straight line is representative of a "particular" people group God is working in and through. Finally, the right angle opens back up to represent the "universal" scope of the final culmination of history.

Universal. Particular. Universal.

These are important to know so you can see who the author is speaking to.

Left angle. Universal.

Creation. Fall.

God created the heavens and the earth. We find this truth in Genesis 1 and 2. Everything is perfect. Adam and Eve are the humans (image-bearers) of God here on earth to be creative and steward and shape the earth with God.

But then, something happens. We do not get far into the story to see evil make an entrance and everything taking a downward cycle. The squiggly line represents this. We have come to know this as the Fall.

The chief person God uses in this part of the story is Noah. From Genesis 3 (the trip) through Genesis 11, we see how far humanity “falls” from being the perfection of God’s image here on earth. All of this happened worldwide, so this is still part of the universal scope the Bible opens with.

Straight Line. Particular.

Israel.

Now, we get to the straight line. Right where the intersection of the line and the left angle meet, write the name Abraham. He is the beginning of God working through a specific people group to be the kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19).

Starting here, we get the big names of Moses and David, who will be the people of Israel identify with for the rest of what we call the Old Testament.

Throughout the first five books, what we call the Torah (Law), we see how God makes covenants (binding promises) with his people. These covenants all demonstrate where the people are in their relationship with God at that particular moment.

Now, if you can take the time to study and learn the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), you will better understand how God called the people of Israel to live. The next books dealing with history (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah) all reveal how the people attempted to and failed to live up to the covenants God had made.

Now we get to the prophets (those books after Psalms). The prophets are not always easy to read. We need to understand what they are talking about. But the prophet’s job was to point the people back to the covenant, the Law, and God’s original intent. The prophets call the people to live according to the Torah’s words.

Some other books not mentioned—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes—speak about wisdom, poetry, finding ways to express our heart to God, and remembering all God has done. These books are important because we can see the deepest cries of humanity and how everything only has meaning when God is involved and recognized.

Okay.

In the intersection of the straight line and the right angle, write the name Jesus. This is where everything changes once again. Read about Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John).

Jesus moves the storyline back to a universal scope because Gentiles (non-Jewish) can now be part of God's covenant. Jesus begins to form his disciples into the Church, which shows how we should live in this world. With Jesus at the center and core of our lives, we learn to live in a covenant community (Acts, Romans, etc.) We learn how our witness matters for expanding the kingdom of heaven.

The Church will be the leader in the final theme of New Creation. This is where God reshapes and transforms humanity and all creation into the New Jerusalem, the New Creation, Heaven on Earth.

This is the big storyline of scripture. Now, look at what this teaches about humanity.

You were born (creation).

You realized you were not perfect (fall).

You tried to follow rules to be better (Israel).

You realize you need a savior because you can't do this alone (Jesus).

You learn to live in community and live in mission (Church).

You now have hope for the future (New Creation).

I hope this brief explanation helps you understand what the Bible teaches. Now, we will dive deeper into each theme and see what we can learn about God, ourselves, and how we should live.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I would invite and encourage you to have your Bible, a journal, and a pen/pencil along the way to take notes, insights, and write any prayer requests that come up as well as prayers.

Each chapter will have a suggested location to read the particular scripture as well as the corresponding chapter. We may hear and see the scriptures differently if we are out in the world reading and learning in the midst of different scenery. At the beginning of each chapter, there is a brief meditation to help the reader with the mindset for the particular theme. Each chapter/theme concludes with a series of sermons from John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. I encourage you to take the time to read these sermons to help you understand the topics more fully.

Finally, I encourage you to have a group of people (three to five) so you can talk through this material and answer the questions. You will learn through the scriptures, prayer times, and chapters, and you will also have the chance to learn from each other. We always learn more comprehensively when we are in community.

Please know I am praying for you as you take this journey. I pray your faith is enhanced and this resource helps you better understand the biblical narrative, who God is, who you are, and your purpose. I pray this is a launching pad for you to dive deeper into the Word that has given life to millions over the millennia and will speak truth and life to you today.

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CREATION

THE BEAUTY OF IT ALL

Mountains. Flowing streams of water. Rock formations. Sitting high in a tree, looking over the horizon. This is something beautiful to me. Sitting “on top of the world,” looking out and seeing the wonder that the finger of God has designed within the landscape. All of our survival, enjoyment, and stewardship.

My wife, Amanda, loves the beach. The sand between her toes. The rushing of the waves coming in and out from the ocean. The cool breeze in the evening. The beauty of the diversity of fish. The feeling of the water. It’s like a tangible, visible reminder of the power and movement of the Holy Spirit.

Every one of us has a place outdoors we call “home.” We all seek to find a special feeling to find ourselves. Where is this place for you? How often do you get there? Is it a priority to get to this place in creation?

A little over ten years ago, I began to travel with some close friends to the mountains in Colorado. This has become a Sabbath Retreat for me annually, a place of Shalom. I could go there more often, but the time I spend there makes it much more special. For one week a year, I get just to be. I don’t have an agenda. I don’t have to worry about any deadlines. I get to be present and enjoy the time, intentionally seek the face of God, and renew my spirit.

I remember the first two years I went. We went to look for elk and moose. The majesty of these animals is incredible. Hearing the elk’s bugle and watching the moose’s movement is fascinating. One time, I was with my friends Rusty and Mark. We went into town and parked the suburban downtown. We almost got out of the vehicle when we witnessed people backing out of the way. Some are getting in their cars. Some just getting inside. When we looked, we saw a mamma moose (mooset?) Walking the streets and sidewalks with her young. We were so excited and entrenched in the moment.

This is the kind of thing that creates memories. There is something mystical and magical about being outside in God's creation. We have a moment to feel small, insignificant, yet fearfully and wonderfully made. We can be in awe of the world, sit in a place of wonder and enjoyment for what has been made, and praise God.

I hope you remember some of the memories you have had in nature flood your heart and mind as you begin this first chapter on CREATION. Take some time right now to pray a simple prayer to get ready for this chapter:

Lord God, open my eyes, mind, and heart to the beauty around me. Help me experience your glory and majesty. Use this time to keep my focus on you and how wonderful you have made me. Amen.

CREATION

Welcome to this different kind of Bible Study. One of the challenges we have to face is not to be complacent with reading scripture. Therefore, our challenge will be to read and discuss scripture in different places in our community. I hope and pray that we find ways to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit and a more profound way to read scripture than before.

The plan is to walk through six major themes in scripture to give us a broad overview and allow us to see ourselves within the story of redemption and salvation the Biblical narrative tells. The six major themes—Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, and New Creation—all point to God’s work in the world and reveals to us who we are as humans, God’s creations in the world.

LOCATION: City Park

Today, we begin at the beginning (well...” In the beginning...””) with Genesis 1 and 2. We are looking at the CREATION narratives to discuss and experience our original design God planned when we were created.

Here’s the deal: when speaking with non-believers, we often begin with the fall. What we do is start with everything wrong with us. We are now challenged to begin with a new starting point. The reason? The story and truth of the original creation are directly parallel with the New Creation at the end of time. When we begin with the fact that God created and what God says about the creation, we get a glimpse at what God thinks about and is working towards for the new. This helps people better understand who they were, who they are, and who God transforms them into.

Let’s get started.

First of all, look around. Look at the trees. The grass. Any birds? What animals (if any)? What are some things you notice around you? Where’s your mind drifting? Your heart?

(Take some time to observe the surroundings and write down what you observe.)

With this mindset, let's open your Bible and read Genesis 1 & 2.

Questions:

1. What are some things that stand out?
2. What questions do you have about this passage?
3. What do you learn about God?
4. Is there anything you learned about yourself or the original intent/design of humanity?

ORIGINAL DESIGN

These are stories we have heard and have told for many years. We often make them into Children Ministry only with cute little pictures of Adam and Eve, fig leaves, apples, rainbows in paradise, etc. I'm sure you can think about lessons you have had on the creation narratives.

Some things to note:

- There are two creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2, each with a different order.
- Genesis 1 tells of the general creation of everything, and Genesis 2 shows the special relationship humanity has with God and what God desires from his creations.

Look at what God created, and pay attention to the order in which everything was made.

SIDE NOTE: One of the things we need to know before we move on is the time period. The Hebrew word “יָוֶמֶת” (yom), in reality” means period of time. This could be a literal 24 hours. It could also be a span of time, such a millennia. The point of this is that God created, not how long it took.

God is creating something new on days 1, 2, and 3. God is creating day and night, waters and sky, land and vegetation. Then, God fills the space on days 4, 5, and 6. God is a God who prepares and places everything in its proper environment to help it thrive.

What does this say about you and me? God created the space for us to live in a relationship with creation and in relationship with him. It's not haphazard nor spontaneous. This is something that took great care and great thought.

One of the significant differences between Genesis 1 and 2 is in Genesis 2, the human (Hebrew word “adam” אָדָם) was created first, and the animals were created so the human was not alone. Finally, the woman (not named until Genesis 3) was formed from man to show the intimate connection between male and female.

ANCIENT PEOPLES

Because we have read these passages several times, we take for granted that God created everything. But, this was a revolutionary concept for ancient peoples.

Every culture throughout history has found a way to explain the world's creation. Some stories involve a war in the cosmos (the heavens) between the gods, and the drops of blood became humans. Many stories throughout the world try to tell of the world's and humanity's origins. (Ex. Babylonian creation myth, Egyptian creation ideas)

But, every creation story (even Genesis 1 and 2) has some similarities.

- There is a chaotic beginning
- There is a primal condition
- Land and everything came into existence in some fashion
- Order is formed despite the chaos

Even with all these similarities, there are some significant emphases found within the Hebrew Scriptures (our book of Genesis) that set the Jewish and Christian creation story apart from everyone else and every other story.

How?

Look at the first words of Genesis 1, “In the beginning God...” There is it. The Hebrew word used here for God is אֱלֹהִים “Elohim.” Elohim is the plural form of El, one of the oldest designations for divinity in the word. The plural form (Elohim) does not indicate belief in many gods but emphasizes the majesty of the One true God. In essence, the first words of Genesis are taking a jab at the other creation myths by saying it is ONE God, our God, who created everything.

NOTE: Keep in mind, the Bible does NOT dismiss the idea/notion of any other “gods” in our world. The Bible DOES downplay their authority on humanity because scripture says that our God is the ONE, ONLY God that matters.

The whole point of Genesis 1 and 2 is not the arguments of how the world was created. The entire point is GOD CREATED. The book of Genesis was revolutionary for the ancient world, and it still is today.

CHALLENGE: do a Google search for creation myths (i.e. Babylonian, Egyptian, Native American, etc.). Compare/Contrast to the account in Genesis 1 and 2.
Question: What can you say about these myths to help people see why God is the One True God to follow?

KNOWING WHO WE ARE

In a world where people are constantly searching for meaning and their place, Genesis 1 and 2 answer the question of WHO we are, WHOSE we are, and WHAT our purpose is.

Humanity was made in the imago Dei (image of God). This means humanity was God’s image bearers (idols) in the world (this is one reason why God prohibits idols and idol worship--it would be creation worshipping creation instead of creation worshipping the Creator). We, you and I, are made in the very essence of God. This means we’ve been given creative abilities (thus, we are stewards of the earth, and work was given as an original gift). We’ve been given the ability to live in deep, meaningful relationships, we’ve been given the gift of love, and we’ve also been given the gift of a direct relationship with God.

Notice that when God creates humans, in Genesis 1:27, he says, “very good.” When God speaks “good,” he’s not patting himself on the back. No. God is saying what the creation’s condition, the state, is in. God said humanity was very good. God has given his breath and his very life to humankind.

To know where we are heading (perfect, restored union with God through Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit), we must understand where we began before everything fell and became corrupted.

Humanity was created as good.

This is what God wants you and me to know. We live knowing we were initially created as good, not flawed. God does not make mistakes (our fallen world does).

SABBATH

To help humanity live in this image, God created something no other god would have thought to create. For that matter, no human would have considered.

God created the sabbath.

This is the time of resting in the work God has done. This is the time we use to praise God and allow him, and him alone, to guide us and strengthen us. Sabbath is a gift because we trust in the One who created everything and live our lives for his glory.

CHALLENGE: Take ONE whole day off of “regular” work this week. Spend some time reading the scriptures, listing to/singing with worship music, extra prayers, take extra time to “play.” Record how you feel mentally, emotionally, physically, relational, spiritually after doing this.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We have just skimmed the surface of Genesis 1 and 2. When we take time to study and see what is deep within the text, we can see even more of the grandness of God.

You can compare these chapters with other passages throughout the Bible:

Genesis 12 (God is using ONE man to go into the world following God and God alone as originally intended) - this passage shows a continual theme of “recreation” found throughout scripture.

Job 38-42

Psalms 8 and 19

John 1

MISSION OPPORTUNITY: Before you leave the park, look for trash and put it in the trashcan. As you work to be an agent of cleaning the litter, take time to praise God for the gift of the incredible creation he made just for us and how we are entrusted with the care of all of creation.

Sermon: “Image of God” by John Wesley

So God created man in his own image. Genesis 1:27

[1.] A truth that does so much honour to human nature, that gives so advantageous an account of it as this, could not fail, one would think, of being well entertained by all to whom that nature belonged. And accordingly some there have been in all ages who gladly received and firmly retained it; who asserted, not only that man was sprung from God, but that he was his likeness from whom he sprung; that the image of his divine Parent was still visible upon him, who had transfused as much of himself into this his picture as the materials on which he drew would allow.

[2.] But to this it has constantly been opposed: if man was made in the image of God, whence flow those numberless imperfections that stain and dishonour his nature? Why is his body exposed to sickness and pain, and at last to a total dissolution? Why is his soul still more disgraced and deformed by ignorance and error, by unruly passions, and what is worse than all, as it contains them all, by vice? A fine picture—this ignorant, wretched, guilty creature—of a wise, happy, and holy Creator!

[3.] I am ashamed to say there are [those] of our age and nation who greedily close with this old objection, and eagerly maintain that they were not made in the image of the living God, but of the beasts that perish; who heartily contend that it was not the divine but the brutal likeness in which they were created, and earnestly assert 'that they themselves are beasts' in a more literal sense than ever Solomon meant it. These consequently reject with scorn the account God has given of man, and affirm it to be contrary to reason and [to the account] itself, as well as it is to their practice.

[4.] The substance of his account is this: 'God created man upright; in the image of God created he him; but man found out to himself many inventions.' Abusing the liberty wherewith he was endowed, he rebelled against his Creator, and wilfully changed the image of the incorruptible God into sin, misery, and corruption. Yet his merciful, though rejected, Creator would not forsake even the depraved work of his own hands, but provided for him, and offered to him a means of being 'renewed after the image of him that created him'.

[5.] That it may appear whether this account of man is contrary to itself and reason or no, I shall endeavour to show the parts of it more distinctly, by inquiring: I, how man was made in the image of God; II, how he lost that image; and III, how he may recover it.

I. Man was originally made in the image of God.

1. First with regard to his understanding. He was endued, after the likeness of his Maker, with a power of distinguishing truth from falsehood; either by a simple view wherein he made the nearest approach to that all-seeing Nature, or by comparing one thing with another (a manner of knowledge perhaps peculiar to himself) and often inferring farther truths from these preceding comparisons.

(1) And in several properties of it, as well as in the faculty itself, man at first resembled God. His understanding was just; everything appeared to him according to its real nature. It never was betrayed into any mistake; whatever he perceived, he perceived as it was. He thought not at all of many things, but he thought wrong of none.

(2) And as it was just, it was likewise clear. Truth and evidence went hand in hand; as nothing appeared in a false light, so neither in a glimmering one. Light and darkness there were, but no twilight; whenever the shades of ignorance withdrew, in that moment the broader day appeared, the full blaze of knowledge shined. He was equally a stranger to error and doubt; either he saw not at all, or he saw plainly.

(3) And hence arose that other excellence of his understanding: being just and clear, it was swift in its motion. Nothing was then as quick as thought but that which alone is capable of it—spirit. How far anything of which we have any conception must fall short of expressing its swiftness will be readily seen by all who observe but one instance of it in our first father: in how short a space he 'gave names to all cattle, and to the fowls of the air, and to every beast of the field'. And names not arbitrarily imposed, but expressive of their inward natures. (4) Sufficiently showing thereby not only the swiftness, but likewise the greatness of his understanding. For how extensive a view must he have had who could command so vast a prospect! What a comprehension was that, to take in at once almost an infinity of objects! Such doubtless it was that the visible creation would soon have been too small for its capacity.

2. And yet even this just, this clear, this swift, this comprehensive understanding was the least part of that image of God wherein man was originally made. Far greater and nobler was his second endowment, namely, a will equally perfect. It could not but be perfect while it followed the dictates of such an understanding. His affections were rational, even, and regular—if we may be allowed to say 'affections', for properly speaking he had but one: man was what God is, Love. Love filled the whole expansion of his soul; it possessed him without a rival. Every movement of his heart was love: it knew no other fervour. Love was his vital heat; it was the genial warmth that animated his whole frame. And the flame of it was continually streaming forth, directly to him from whom it came, and by reflection to all sensitive natures, inasmuch as they too were his offspring; but especially to those superior beings who bore not only the superscription, but likewise the image of their Creator.

3. What made his image yet plainer in his human offspring was, thirdly, the liberty he originally enjoyed; the perfect freedom implanted in his nature, and interwoven with all its parts. Man was made with an entire indifference, either to keep or change his first estate: it was left to himself what he would do; his own choice was to determine him in all things. The balance did not incline to one side or the other unless by his own deed. His Creator would not, and no creature besides himself could, weigh down either scale. So that, in this sense, he was the sole lord and sovereign judge of his own actions.

4. The result of all these—an unerring understanding, an uncorrupt will, and perfect freedom—gave the last stroke to the image of God in man, by crowning all these with happiness. Then indeed to live was to enjoy, when every faculty was in its perfection, amidst abundance of objects which infinite wisdom had purposely suited to it, when man's understanding was satisfied with truth, as his will was with good; when he was at full liberty to enjoy either the Creator or the creation; to indulge in rivers of pleasure, ever new, ever pure from any mixture of pain.

II. How it was this wise, virtuous, happy creature was deprived of these perfections, how man lost the image of God, we are, secondly, to inquire. And the plain answer is this: the liberty of man necessarily required that he should have some trial; else he would have had no choice whether he would stand or no, that is, no liberty at all. In order to this necessary trial God said unto him, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayst freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it' To secure him from transgressing this sole command, as far as could be done without destroying his liberty, the consequence was laid before him: 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' Yet man did eat of it, and the consequence accordingly was death on him and all his descendants, and preparatory to death, sickness and pain, and folly and vice and slavery.

And 'tis easy to observe by what regular steps all these would succeed each other, if God did not miraculously prevent it, but suffer nature to take its course. But we should observe, first, that man even at his creation was a compound of matter and spirit; and that it was ordained by the original law that during this vital union neither part of the compound should act at all but together with its companion; that the dependence of each upon the other should be inviolably maintained; that even the operations of the soul should so far depend upon the body as to be exerted in a more or less perfect manner, as this was more or less aptly disposed.

This being observed, we may easily conceive how the forbidden fruit might work all those effects which are implied in the word 'death', as being introductory to, and paving the way for it. Which particulars of the following account are founded on Scripture and consequently certain, and which are built on conjecture and therefore proposed only as probable, it will not be hard to distinguish.

1. Its first effect must have been on his body, which, being before prepared for immortality, had no seeds of corruption within itself and adopted none from without. All its original particles were incorruptible, and therefore the additional ones taken in, being for pleasure rather than use, cannot be supposed ever to have cleaved to its native substance, ever to have adhered to any part of it, as none needed any reparation. By this means both the juices contained must have been .still of the same consistence, and the vessels containing them have kept the same spring, and remained ever clear and open.

On the contrary, the fruit of that tree alone of whose deadly nature he was forewarned seems to have contained a juice, the particles of which were apt to cleave to whatever they touched. Some of these, being received into the human body, might adhere to the inner coats of the finer vessels; to which again other particles that before floated loose in the blood, continually joining, would naturally lay a foundation for numberless disorders in all parts of the machine. For death in particular; since, more foreign matter cleaving to the former every day, the solid parts of the body would every day lose something of their spring, and so be less able to contribute their necessary assistance to the circulation of the fluids. The smaller channels would gradually fill up, especially those that lie near the extremities, where the current, by reason of its distance from the fountain, was always more slow and languid. The whole tide, as the force that threw it forward abated, must [also] have abated its swiftness in proportion, till at length that force utterly failing, it ceased to move, and rested in death.

Indeed had Adam taken the antidote as well as the poison, had he again put forth his hand, and taken of the fruit of the Tree of Life, nothing of this could have followed. 'Tis sure this would have made him live for ever, naturally speaking, notwithstanding he had eaten death. 'Tis likely it would have done so by its thin, abstersive nature, particularly fitted to counteract the other, to wipe off its particles, wheresoever adhering, and so restore the eater to immortality.

However this be, thus much is certain: the moment wherein that fruit was tasted, the sentence of death passed on that body, which before was impassive and immortal. And this immortal having put on mortality, the next stroke fell on its companion: the soul felt a like change through all her powers, except only that she could not the. The instrument being now quite untuned, she could no longer make the same harmony: 'the corruptible body pressed down the soul', with which it soared so high during its incorruption.

2. His understanding first found the want of suitable organs; its notions were just no longer. It mistook falsehood for truth, and truth for falsehood. Error succeeded and increased ignorance. And no wonder, when it was no longer clear; when it not only saw through a glass, but darkly too, that glass being now grown thick and dull, having lost great part of its transparency. And hence it was that doubt perplexed it as well as error, that it could neither rest in knowledge nor ignorance. Through clouds like these its most laborious steps could win but little ground. With its clearness went its swiftness too; confusion and slowness came together. Instead of being able to find out the natures of ten thousand creatures almost in a moment, it became unable to trace out fully the nature of any one in many years. Nay, unable (so was the largeness of its capacity impaired, as well as the swiftness of its progress) with that apprehension for which the visible world was before but a scanty prospect, to take in at one view all the properties of any single creature therein.

3. How much the will suffered when its guide was thus blinded we may easily comprehend. Instead of the glorious one that possessed it whole before, it was now seized by legions of vile affections. Grief and anger and hatred and fear and shame, at once rushed in upon it; the whole train of earthly, sensual, and devilish passions fastened on and tore it in pieces. Nay, love itself, that ray of the Godhead, that balm of life, now became a torment. Its light being gone, it wandered about seeking rest and finding none; till at length, equally unable to subsist without any and to feel out its proper object, it reclined itself upon the painted trifles, the gilded poison of earthly enjoyments.

4. Indeed, what else could the human mind do when it had no freedom left? Liberty went away with virtue; instead of an indulgent master it was under a merciless tyrant. The subject of virtue became the slave of vice. It was not willingly that the creature obeyed vanity; the rule was now perforce; the sceptre of gold was changed into a rod of iron. Before, the bands of love indeed drew him toward heaven; yet if he would, he could stoop down to earth. But now, he was so chained down to earth he could not so much as lift up his eyes toward heaven.

5. The consequence of his being enslaved to a depraved understanding and a corrupted will could be no other than the reverse of that happiness which flowed from them when in their perfection. Then were the days of man evil as well as few; then, when both his faculties were decayed, and bitterness poured on their earthly objects, and heavenly ones withdrawn, the mortal, foolish, vicious, enslaved creature was delivered over to his [un]sought-for misery. How such a creature as this, as every fair inquirer finds by experience himself to be, could come from the hands of the good God, has been the just wonder of all ages. And let the infidel look to it; let him surmount the difficulty if he can upon any scheme beside the Christian. Upon this indeed it is no difficulty at all; all is rational, plain, and easy, while we observe, on the one hand, that not the good God but man himself made man what he is now; on the other, how he may recover what he wilfully lost, which is the subject of our third inquiry.

III. Who indeed shall recover us from the body of this death? Who shall restore our native immortality? We answer with the Apostle, 'I thank God, Jesus Christ our Lord!' 'As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive'—all who accept of the means which he hath prepared, who walk by the rules which he hath given them. All these shall by dying conquer the first death, and shall never taste the second. The seeds of spiritual death they shall gradually expel, before this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, that this too, when it has been taken down and thoroughly purged, may be rebuilt 'eternal in the heavens'.

1. The first step to this glorious change is humility, a knowledge of ourselves, a just sense of our condition: which the evil spirit himself, either overruled by or mimicking the true God, recommended on the front of his temple in those celebrated words, 'Know Thyself,' which a better prophet than he recommends to all those who would 'be transformed by the renewing of their minds'—'I say unto every man—not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.'

'Tis almost needless to remark how conducive this is to the attainment of all other knowledge; or, in other words, how conducive it is to the improvement of the understanding. An erroneous opinion of ourselves naturally leads us into numberless errors; whereas to those who know their own folly (beside the natural advantage of it) the Lord of nature 'giveth the spirit of wisdom, and enlightens the eyes of their understanding, after the likeness in which they were created' (Eph. 1:17-18; [Col. 3:10]).

2. The understanding, thus enlightened by humility, immediately directs us to reform our will by charity. To root out of our souls all unmanly passions, and to give place to them, no, not an hour; to put away all malice, uncleanness, intemperance, 'all bitterness, wrath, and evil-speaking'; to collect the scattered beams of that affection which is truly human, truly divine, and fix them on that Sovereign Good 'in whom we live, move, and have our being'; for his sake, lastly, and after his example, to be 'kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us' (Eph. 4:32).

3. Thus it is that the 'law of the Spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death'; thus it restores us, first to knowledge, and then to virtue, and freedom, and happiness. Thus are we 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God'; into that liberty which not only implies the absence of all pain, unless what is necessary to future pleasure, but such a measure of present happiness as is a fit introduction to that which flows at God's right hand for evermore!

[IV.1.] One thing I would observe from what has been said—how extremely pitiable their condition is who are insensible of their innate disease, or refuse the only cure of it. 'Tis true, even those who are not invested with authority (such doubtless 'bear not the sword in vain') are apt to look upon these as the proper objects of anger, and not of compassion. Yet our Lord, when he beheld even that city which had killed the servants, and was about to murder the son, of its master, wept over it, and suffered all other passions to melt down into commiseration. Yet those whom we are often tempted to behold with passions of quite another nature, 'who are alienated from the image of God through the ignorance that is in them', are by our confession not more guilty than these, and little less unhappy. They are always sick, often in pain; destruction and unhappiness are in their ways; the way of peace have they not known, 'an evil disease cleaves to them'; their inward parts are very misery. Their understanding is darkened; clouds of ignorance and error are ever before their eyes, 'because the God of this world hath blinded their hearts', and infinitely increased its native corruption. Their love is fixed on mean, perishing, unsatisfying objects, and the frequent anguish that must flow from such a choice is sharpened by innumerable restless passions, that tear asunder their helpless prey. God help him who is a slave to such masters! Man cannot; he can only pity him! He can only, when he seeth such a one dragging his chain, and possibly talking loud of his own freedom, plunging through the flames of a fever into those that never shall be quenched, and perhaps dreaming he is in perfect health, recommend [him] to that All-sufficient Mercy to which all things are possible!

2. Yes, one step farther he may, he ought to go: he ought to acknowledge the riches of that mercy shown to himself, and indeed to all of us who have our education in a truly Christian country; who have all the opportunities of obtaining a better mind which the art of man and the wisdom of God can give; of obtaining this knowledge—knowledge, the basis of whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are honourable or lovely—[which] is held out to us with no sparing hand; we are suffered, courted, pressed to enjoy it Others are glad if they can snatch a few drops from the rivulets that flow hence: we lie at the fountain-head of these living waters, and command all their various streams. The attainment of knowledge is the pleasure of many; of us, 'tis the business too. Our business it is to know in particular that we are all originally foolish and vicious, and that there is no truth in our whole religion more absolutely necessary to be known than this. Because if man be not naturally corrupt, then all religion, Jewish and Christian, is vain, seeing it is all built on this—all method[s] of cure presupposing the disease. We can scarce avoid knowing how slight all objections against this fundamental truth must be while there is even this one argument for it: if man be naturally mortal, then he is naturally sinful; seeing one cause must work both sin and death. The seeds of natural being likewise the seeds of moral corruption, must undermine our understanding as well as our life, and the affections with the understanding. We are almost forced to know both the necessity and the divine efficacy of our religion; to see that if man be naturally corrupt, then Christianity is of God; seeing there is no other religion, as 'there is no other God which can deliver after this sort* from that corruption. We, lastly, have daily opportunities of knowing, if Christianity be of God, then of how glorious a privilege are they thought worthy who persuade others to accept of its benefits. Seeing when the author of it 'cometh in the clouds of heaven', and 'those that slept in the dust of the earth shall awake,' they who have saved others from sin and its attendant death 'shall shine as the brightness of the firmament'; they who have reprinted the image of God on many souls 'as the stars for ever'!

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and praise, now and for ever.

FALL

EVER-WORKING GOD

There are way too many memories in my head about things I have done wrong. I have said “I am sorry” too many times to count. I keep messing up. Many things I do unintentionally. I go into times of sadness and despair, but is this all I am?

Absolutely not.

There are many things I feel guilty about. These are situations I do my best not to repeat. Why? Because I want to learn and grow. It is no fun to sit in a place of despair. I don’t want to be remembered for my faults; I want to be remembered for what was right and good and how God changed my life. I don’t want to live a life of guilt or shame. Guilt, which says “I did something wrong,” will turn to shame, which says “I am something wrong.”

Growing up, there were many times I was bullied. These were some hard days. I still remember the name of the person who bullied me the most. His name is...wait, I shouldn’t do that here. It is still easy to get upset and feel low when I think about the times I was bullied. But this wasn’t the end of the story.

Later on, in junior high and high school, there were times I felt I was better than others and began to bully them. I would call them names and criticize everything, even if I thought what they did was cool. Why did I do this? Because this is how I learned kids treat each other. I still struggle with insecurity from earlier days, but I know I am a different person now than I was.

Fast forward to today. My wife and I have been married for almost eight and a half years. In all this time, I continually learn how much I miss the mark of being the man she needs me to be. We learn. We laugh. We talk. We grow.

I am sure you can find many reasons to stay in a mindset of sadness and depression (not clinical), but I am asking that you hold off on feeling sorry for yourself. Why? Because we can miss the presence and work of God.

A phrase I heard several years ago still rings true: “If we let God into our situation, how would the situation change?” What this means is if we know God is sitting right there with us in the chaos of our lives, how would that change our outlook? The consequences may or may not change. But our minds would be focused on the presence of God to guide and shape us.

Right now, before you dive into this next chapter, pause and pray something like:
God, I know I do not deserve your grace, but you give it anyway. Help me see your hand in the chaos of my life to know how you have never left and how much you love and adore me as your masterpiece. Amen.

FALL

Genesis 3 - 11

LOCATION: Police Station

LOOK AROUND this location.

What are some things you notice?

What kinds of feelings/thoughts arise in you?

What stereotypes are you thinking about right now?

DEFINE: brokenness

I have come to learn "brokenness" is the state of being incomplete...NOTE: God is calling his people to be holy—>complete)

INTRODUCTION:

Last week, we focused on the Creation narrative in Genesis 1-2.

Through this narrative, we discussed that "God, the One True God, created everything." We also talked about how, through this scripture, we learn WHO we are (created in the image of God), WHOSE we are (we belong to God), and WHAT our purpose is (to steward and care for creation AND to glorify God).

Creation is the point we begin when we speak about salvation in Christ. We must understand our original design to know better where we are heading and what God is up to.

Yes, initially, we were supposed to live in paradise. But something got in the way. Something changed everything.

What went wrong? That's what the focus is now.

(Read through, quickly, Genesis 3-11).

QUESTIONS:

What stands out?

Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

What questions do you have so far?

CORRUPTION ENTERS

I'm sure you have heard, for years, that the man and woman ate the fruit because they wanted to be like God, their pride got in the way, and their will was more important than God's will.

I'm asking us to rethink this paradigm. In the last chapter, we talked about how man and woman were created in the image of God, so they were already like God (God's image). So, this can't be the reason they ate the fruit (note it doesn't say apple)

The man and woman had a perfect relationship with their Creator, so their will was in line with God's. There was no room for pride in their relationship with God.

The downfall for man and woman and all of creation came from one of the created beings (the serpent) and planted the seed of doubt by twisting what God had said. This doubt, left unchecked, turned to unbelief in what God has said, that God will provide, and who God is.

Unbelief is the root cause of sin (Greek and Hebrew word means "to miss the mark").

Think about it.

We don't believe God provides, so we will take it upon ourselves to be the primary source of provision--so we work harder--some illegally.

We don't believe in what God says, so we try to find our truth.

We don't believe in who God says we are, so we create narratives about ourselves and find everything we think is wrong.

See where unbelief is the root of sin?

The picture we get next is one of fear and shame.

The man, then the woman, could not bring themselves to speak the truth to God, so they deflect and place blame. The man blames the woman, and the woman blames the serpent. No one could take responsibility for themselves, and the humans felt shame because they knew what they did was wrong.

THE GREAT REVERSAL

When God confronted the man, the woman, and the serpent, God could not let this disobedience, this sin, go unpunished. This is where we read about curses. What's going on here is not something added to the created order. God is saying because of the actions of listening to the serpent and eating the fruit; there is a reversal of the blessings originally enacted in the creation process.

The serpent crawls and eats dust.

Disunity in the relationship between the man and woman

Pain in childbearing

The ground does not produce for thriving--the man has to work harder

What was NOT cursed?

The humans.

Now we get to the point, the man (adama אָדָמָה) gives the woman a name. Why?

When man and woman were created, they were in perfect harmony with God and each other. Each one was for the other. Now, curses (sin) have entered the picture. There is a disconnection and, therefore, new identities. The man and woman are now individuals instead of being one. So the adama (adama means human in Hebrew) gives the woman a name (still carrying on his naming obligation).

But it doesn't end here. God shows grace to the human (adama "adam") and Eve in 2 ways.

- God makes clothes for the humans out of the skins of animals to cover their shame
- The man and woman were kicked out of Eden (paradise)
- This is grace because they wouldn't be near the Tree of Life, so they could not live forever in this corrupted state.

What was broken in the fall? (4 relationships)

Our relationship with God, with others, with ourselves, with creation

CAIN & ABEL AND FURTHER GENERATIONS

We often think about Genesis 3 as “the Fall,” but the reality is the fall is the whole account of Genesis 3-11. Genesis 3 is just the “trip.” Genesis 4-11 shows how far humanity goes in their unbelief in the One True God and have made themselves higher than God (in their minds).

Even though we said humanity did not receive a “curse” per se, the corruption in nature and now death enter humanity, and we see the deterioration of the minds and hearts growing. Humanity now lives with a sinful nature because of the curse. Sin increases and causes us to do things we never would have done had we remained in our perfect relationship with God.

Look at what happens.

Shame, guilt, and fear quickly become hatred and cause Cain to kill his brother. The further down the generations we go, the more we see how belief in God goes by the wayside, and people think more of themselves and become more prideful.

Notice how unbelief in who God is, what God says, and what God can do quickly changes and begins to corrupt, even more, the people God created. It got so bad God said the world, especially humanity, needed to be destroyed.

Enter Noah in Genesis 6-9.

NOAH

Humanity had been so corrupted that scripture reveals God felt a new start was needed for creation. The flood narrative (Gen. 6-9) is not a children’s story as we have made it. Thousands of people’s lives were lost.

But, we see God re-creating the world to bring back some order.

Notice the chaos from the water. Land emerging again from the water. A covenant of life given. Through ONE family, one lineage, God seeks to multiply and fill the earth (see the similarities to Genesis 1-2?...This is why the creation narrative is vital to know to help understand what God is doing).

Unfortunately, the consequences of sin have been so deeply embedded in humanity that we begin to see corruption creep back into the human race.

Once again, the genealogies demonstrate this corruption.

Tower of Babel

REACHING TO GOD

It turns out humanity has always wanted to make a name for themselves. People are always striving to be as powerful and mighty as God. Why?

We can easily forget WHO we are.

We can easily forget WHOSE we are.

We can easily forget our purpose.

SO WHAT IS THE POINT?

We all know how humanity and the world are messed up. There is brokenness and flaws because of the corruption from the beginning. The good news? God has not stopped working. God continues to work to bring wholeness and holiness to his people and is working to reconcile humans and all of creation to himself. God is all about working to redeem and transform the world to reverse the effects of the fall and the corruption Sin brings.

The Sin nature causes sinful acts. If left unchecked, we see some horrible things happen in this world because of our unbelief in God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you considered the root of sin is unbelief?
2. What do you not trust God to do, be, or say?
3. Where do you see yourself doing anything to be like God?
4. God is always working. Where are you seeing God's work in our broken world?
5. How will you seek God this week, finding where he is already working and finding you?

MISSION OPPORTUNITY: Gather some people to talk about, pray about, and act upon, how to help in your city and neighborhood (i.e. neighborhood crime watch). Volunteer at a local homeless shelter or prison. Find a way to be a source of hope and light where you live and work. Pray for God to bring transformation, and the revelation of his kingdom, to your area.

Sermon: "Original Sin" by John Wesley

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

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

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

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

4. But, in the mean time, what must we do with our Bibles -- for they will never agree with this. These accounts, however pleasing to flesh and blood, are utterly irreconcilable with the scriptural. The Scripture avers, that "by one man's disobedience all men were constituted sinners;" that "in Adam all died," spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God; that fallen, sinful Adam then "begat a son in his own likeness;" -- nor was it possible he should beget him in any other; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean" -- that consequently we, as well as other men, were by nature "dead in trespasses and sins," "without hope, without God in the world," and therefore "children of wrath;" that every man may say, "I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me;" that "there is no difference," in that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," of that glorious image of God wherein man was originally created. And hence, when "the Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, he saw they were all gone out of the way; they were altogether become abominable, there was none righteous, no, not one," none that truly sought after God: Just agreeable this, to what is declared by the Holy Ghost in the words above recited, "God saw," when he looked down from heaven before, "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth;" so great, that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. 1. I proceed to draw a few inferences from what has been said. And, First, from hence we may learn one grand fundamental difference between Christianity, considered as a system of doctrines, and the most refined Heathenism. Many of the ancient Heathens have largely described the vices of particular men. They have spoken much against their covetousness, or cruelty; their luxury, or prodigality. Some have dared to say that "no man is born without vices of one kind or another." But still as none of them were apprized of the fall of man, so none of them knew of his total corruption. They knew not that all men were empty of all good, and filled with all manner of evil. They were wholly ignorant of the entire depravation of the whole human nature, of every man born into the world, in every faculty of his soul, not so much by those particular vices which reign in particular persons, as by the general flood of Atheism and idolatry, of pride, self-will, and love of the world. This, therefore, is the first grand distinguishing point between Heathenism and Christianity. The one acknowledges that many men are infected with many vices, and even born with a proneness to them; but supposes withal, that in some the natural good much over-balances the evil: The other declares that all men are conceived in sin," and "shapen in wickedness;" -- that hence there is in every man a "carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not, cannot be, subject to" his "law;" and which so infects the whole soul, that "there dwelleth in" him, "in his flesh," in his natural state, "no good thing;" but "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is evil," only evil, and that "continually."

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

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

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

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

Sermon: “Satan’s Devices” by John Wesley

2 Corinthians 2:11

We are not ignorant of his devices.

1. The devices whereby the subtle ‘god of this world’ labours to destroy the children of God, or at least to torment whom he cannot destroy, to perplex and hinder them in running the race which is set before them, are numberless as the stars of heaven or the sand upon the sea-shore. But it is of one of them only that I now propose to speak (although exerted in various ways), whereby he endeavours to divide the gospel against itself, and by one part of it to overthrow the other.

2. The inward kingdom of heaven, which is set up in the heart of all that ‘repent and believe the gospel’, is no other than ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost’. Every babe in Christ knows we are made partakers of these the very hour that we believe in Jesus. But these are only the first-fruits of his Spirit; the harvest is not yet. Although these blessings are inconceivably great, yet we trust to see greater than these. We trust to ‘love the Lord our God’ not only as we do now, with a weak though sincere affection, but ‘with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength’. We look for power to ‘rejoice evermore’, to ‘pray without ceasing’, and ‘in everything to give thanks’; knowing ‘this is the will of God concerning’ us ‘in Christ Jesus’.

3. We expect to be ‘made perfect in love’, in that love which ‘casts out’ all painful ‘fear’, and all desire but that of glorifying him we love, and of loving and serving him more and more. We look for such an increase in the experimental knowledge and love of God our Saviour as will enable us always to ‘walk in the light, as he is in the light’. We believe the whole ‘mind’ will be in us ‘which was also in Christ Jesus’; that we shall love every man so as to be ready ‘to lay down our life for his sake’, so as by this love to be freed from anger and pride, and from every unkind affection. We expect to be ‘cleansed’ from all our idols, ‘from all filthiness’, whether ‘of flesh or spirit’; to be ‘saved from all our uncleannesses’, inward or outward; to be ‘purified as he is pure’.

4. We trust in his promise who cannot lie, that the time will surely come when in every word and work we shall ‘do his’ blessed ‘will on earth, as it is done in heaven’; when all our conversation shall be ‘seasoned with salt’, all meet to ‘minister grace to the hearers’; when ‘whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do’, it shall be done ‘to the glory of God’; when all our words and deeds shall be ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God, even the Father, through him’.

5. Now this is the grand device of Satan: to destroy the first work of God in the soul, or at least to hinder its increase by our expectation of that greater work. It is therefore my present design, first, to point out the several ways whereby he endeavours this; and, secondly, to observe how we may retort these fiery darts of the wicked one—how we may rise the higher by what he intends for an occasion of our falling.

I.1. I am, first, to point out the several ways whereby Satan endeavours to destroy the first work of God in the soul, or at least to hinder its increase by our expectation of that greater work. And, (1), he endeavours to damp our joy in the Lord by the consideration of our own vileness, sinfulness, unworthiness; added to this, that there must be a far greater change than is yet, or we cannot see the Lord. If we knew we must remain as we are, even to the day of our death, we might possibly draw a kind of comfort, poor as it was, from that necessity. But as we know, we need not remain in this state, as we are assured, there is a greater change to come—and that unless sin be all done away in this life we cannot see God in glory—that subtle adversary often damps the joy we should otherwise feel in what we have already attained, by a perverse representation of what we have not attained, and the absolute necessity of attaining it. So that we cannot rejoice in what we have, because there is more which we have not. We cannot rightly taste the goodness of God, who hath done so great things for us, because there are so much greater things which as yet he hath not done. Likewise the deeper conviction God works in us of our present unholiness, and the more vehement desire we feel in our heart of the entire holiness he hath promised, the more are we tempted to think lightly of the present gifts of God, and to undervalue what we have already received because of what we have not received.

2. If he can prevail thus far, if he can damp our joy, he will soon attack our peace also. He will suggest, 'Are you fit to see God? He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. How then can you flatter yourself so as to imagine he beholds you with approbation? God is holy; you are unholy. What communion hath light with darkness? How is it possible that you, unclean as you are, should be in a state of acceptance with God? You see indeed the mark, the prize of your high calling. But do you not see it is afar off? How can you presume then to think that all your sins are already blotted out? How can this be until you are brought nearer to God, until you bear more resemblance to him?' Thus will he endeavour, not only to shake your peace, but even to overturn the very foundation of it; to bring you back by insensible degrees to the point from whence you set out first: even to seek for justification by works, or by your own righteousness; to make something in you the ground of your acceptance, or at least necessarily previous to it.

3. Or if we hold fast—'other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ;' and I am 'justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus'—yet he will not cease to urge, 'But "the tree is known by its fruits." And have you the fruits of justification? Is "that mind in you which was in Christ Jesus"? Are you "dead unto sin and alive unto" righteousness? Are you made conformable to the death of Christ, and do you know the power of his resurrection?' And then, comparing the small fruits we feel in our souls with the fullness of the promises, we shall be ready to conclude: 'Surely God hath not said that my sins are forgiven me! Surely I have not received the remission of my sins; for what lot have I among them that are sanctified?'

4. More especially in the time of sickness and pain he will press this with all his might: 'Is it not the word of him that cannot lie, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord"? But you are not holy. You know it well; you know holiness is the full image of God. And how far is this above, out of your sight? You cannot attain unto it. Therefore all your labour has been in vain. All these things you have suffered in vain. You have spent your strength for nought. You are yet in your sins and must therefore perish at the last.' And thus, if your eye be not steadily fixed on him who hath borne all your sins, he will bring you again under that 'fear of death' whereby you was so long 'subject unto bondage'; and by this means impair, if not wholly destroy, your peace as well as joy in the Lord.

5. But his masterpiece of subtlety is still behind. Not content to strike at your peace and joy, he will carry his attempts farther yet: he will level his assault against your righteousness also. He will endeavour to shake, yea, if it be possible, to destroy the holiness you have already received by your very expectation of receiving more, of attaining all the image of God.

6. The manner wherein he attempts this may partly appear from what has been already observed. For, first, by striking at our joy in the Lord he strikes likewise at our holiness: seeing joy in the Holy Ghost is a precious means of promoting every holy temper; a choice instrument of God whereby he carries on much of his work in a believing soul. And it is a considerable help not only to inward but also to outward holiness. It strengthens our hands to go on in the work of faith and in the labour of love; manfully to 'fight the good fight of faith,' and to 'lay hold on eternal life.' It is peculiarly designed of God to be a balance both against inward and outward sufferings; to 'lift up the hands that hang down' and confirm 'the feeble knees'. Consequently, whatever damps our joy in the Lord proportionably obstructs our holiness. And therefore so far as Satan shakes our joy he hinders our holiness also.

7. The same effect will ensue if he can by any means either destroy or shake our peace. For the peace of God is another precious means of advancing the image of God in us. There is scarce a greater help to holiness than this: a continual tranquility of spirit, the evenness of a mind stayed upon God, a calm repose in the blood of Jesus. And without this it is scarce possible to grow in grace, and in the vital knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For all fear (unless the tender, filial fear) freezes and benumbs the soul. It binds up all the springs of spiritual life, and stops all motion of the heart toward God. And doubt, as it were, bemires the soul, so that it sticks fast in the deep clay. Therefore in the same proportion as either of these prevail, our growth in holiness is hindered.

8. At the same time that our wise adversary endeavours to make our conviction of the necessity of perfect love an occasion of shaking our peace by doubts and fears, he endeavours to weaken, if not destroy, our faith. Indeed these are inseparably connected, so that they must stand or fall together. So long as faith subsists we remain in peace; our heart stands fast while it believes in the Lord. But if we let go our faith, our filial confidence in a loving, pardoning God, our peace is at an end, the very foundation on which it stood being overthrown. And this is the only foundation of holiness as well as of peace. Consequently whatever strikes at this strikes at the very root of all holiness. For without this faith, without an abiding sense that Christ loved me and gave himself for me, without a continuing conviction that God for Christ's sake is merciful to me a sinner, it is impossible that I should love God. 'We love him because he first loved us;' and in proportion to the strength and clearness of our conviction that he hath loved us and accepted us in his Son. And unless we love God it is not possible that we should love our neighbour as ourselves; nor, consequently, that we should have any right affections either toward God or toward man. It evidently follows that whatever weakens our faith must in the same degree obstruct our holiness. And this is not only the most effectual but also the most compendious way of destroying all holiness; seeing it does not affect any one Christian temper, any single grace or fruit of the Spirit, but, so far as it succeeds, tears up the very root of the whole work of God.

9. No marvel, therefore, that the ruler of the darkness of this world should here put forth all his strength. And so we find by experience. For it is far easier to conceive than it is to express the unspeakable violence wherewith this temptation is frequently urged on them who hunger and thirst after righteousness. When they see in a strong and clear light, on the one hand the desperate wickedness of their own hearts, on the other hand the unspotted holiness to which they are called in Christ Jesus; on the one hand the depth of their own corruption, of their total alienation from God; on the other the height of the glory of God, that image of the Holy One wherein they are to be renewed; there is many times no spirit left in them; they could almost cry out, 'With God this is impossible.' They are ready to give up both faith and hope, to cast away that very confidence whereby they are to overcome all things, and do all things, through Christ strengthening them; whereby, 'after' they 'have done the will of God', they are to 'receive the promise'.

10. And if they 'hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end', they shall undoubtedly receive the promise of God, reaching through both time and eternity. But here is another snare laid for our feet. While we earnestly pant for that part of the promise which is to be accomplished here, for 'the glorious liberty of the children of God', we may be led unawares from the consideration of the glory which shall hereafter be revealed. Our eye may be insensibly turned aside from that 'crown which the righteous Judge' hath promised to 'give at that day to all that love his appearing'; and we may be drawn away from the view of that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us. But this also would be a loss to our souls, and an obstruction to our holiness. For to walk in the continual sight of our goal is a needful help in our running the race that is set before us. This it was, the having 'respect unto the recompense of reward', which of old time encouraged Moses rather 'to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt'. Nay, it is expressly said of a greater than him, that 'for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame,' till he 'sat down at the right hand of the throne of God'. Whence we may easily infer how much more needful for us is the view of that joy set before us, that we may endure whatever cross the wisdom of God lays upon us, and press on through holiness to glory.

11. But while we are reaching to this, as well as to that glorious liberty which is preparatory to it, we may be in danger of falling into another snare of the devil, whereby he labours to entangle the children of God. We may take too much ‘thought for tomorrow’, so as to neglect the improvement of today. We may so expect ‘perfect love’ as not to use that which is already ‘shed abroad in our hearts’. There have not been wanting instances of those who have greatly suffered hereby. They were so taken up with what they were to receive hereafter as utterly to neglect what they had already received. In expectation of having five talents more, they buried their one talent in the earth. At least they did not improve it as they might have done to the glory of God and the good of their own souls.

12. Thus does the subtle adversary of God and man endeavour to make void the counsel of God by dividing the gospel against itself, and making one part of it overthrow the other—while the first work of God in the soul is destroyed by the expectation of his perfect work. We have seen several of the ways wherein he attempts this by cutting off, as it were, the springs of holiness; but this he likewise does more directly by making that blessed hope an occasion of unholy tempers.

13. Thus, whenever our heart is eagerly athirst for all the great and precious promises, when we pant after the fullness of God, as the hart after the water brook, when our soul breaketh out in fervent desire, ‘Why are his chariot wheels so long a-coming?’ he will not neglect the opportunity of tempting us to murmur against God. He will use all his wisdom and all his strength if haply, in an unguarded hour, we may be influenced to repine at our Lord for thus delaying his coming. At least he will labour to excite some degree of fretfulness or impatience; and perhaps of envy at those whom we believe to have already attained the prize of our high calling. He well knows that by giving way to any of these tempers we are pulling down the very thing we would build up. By thus following after perfect holiness we become more unholy than before. Yea, there is great danger that our last state should be worse than the first; like them of whom the Apostle speaks in those dreadful words, ‘It had been better they had never known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.’

14. And from hence he hopes to reap another advantage, even to bring up an evil report of the good way. He is sensible how few are able to distinguish (and too many are not willing so to do) between the accidental abuse and the natural tendency of a doctrine. These, therefore, will he continually blend together with regard to the doctrine of Christian perfection, in order to prejudice the minds of unwary men against the glorious promises of God. And how frequently, how generally—I had almost said, how universally—has he prevailed herein! For who is there that observes any of these accidental ill effects of this doctrine, and does not immediately conclude, ‘This is its natural tendency’? And does not readily cry out, ‘See, these are the fruits (meaning the natural, necessary fruits) of such doctrine!’ Not so. They are fruits which may accidentally spring from the abuse of a great and precious truth. But the abuse of this, or any other scriptural doctrine, does by no means destroy its use. Neither can the unfaithfulness of man, perverting his right way, ‘make the promise of God of none effect’. No; let God be true and every man a liar. The word of the Lord, it shall stand. ‘Faithful is he that hath promised;’ ‘he also will do it.’ Let not us then be ‘removed from the hope of the gospel’. Rather let us observe—which was the second thing proposed—how we may retort these fiery darts of the wicked one; how we may rise the higher by what he intends for an occasion of our falling.

II.1. And, first, does Satan endeavour to damp your joy in the Lord by the consideration of your sinfulness, added to this, that without entire, universal ‘holiness no man can see the Lord’? You may cast back this dart upon his own head while, through the grace of God, the more you feel of your own vileness the more you rejoice in confident hope that all this shall be done away. While you hold fast this hope, every evil temper you feel, though you hate it with a perfect hatred, may be a means, not of lessening your humble joy, but rather of increasing it. ‘This and this’, may you say, ‘shall likewise perish from the presence of the Lord. Like as the wax melteth at the fire, so shall this melt away before his face.’ By this means the greater that change is which remains to be wrought in your soul, the more may you triumph in the Lord and rejoice in the God of your salvation—who hath done so great things for you already, and will do so much greater things than these.

2. Secondly, the more vehemently he assaults your peace with that suggestion: 'God is holy; you are unholy. You are immensely distant from that holiness without which you cannot see God. How then can you be in the favour of God? How can you fancy you are justified?'—take the more earnest heed to hold fast that, 'not by works of righteousness which I have done' I am 'found in him'. I am 'accepted in the Beloved', 'not having my own righteousness' (as the cause either in whole or in part of our justification before God), 'but that which is by faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith'. O bind this about your neck; write it upon the table of thy heart; wear it as a bracelet upon thy arm, as frontlets between thine eyes: I am 'justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ'. Value and esteem more and more that precious truth, 'By grace we are saved through faith.' Admire more and more the free grace of God in so loving the world as to give 'his only Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish but have everlasting life'. So shall the sense of the sinfulness you feel on the one hand, and of the holiness you expect on the other, both contribute to establish your peace, and to make it flow as a river. So shall that peace flow on with an even stream, in spite of all those mountains of ungodliness, which shall become a plain in the day when the Lord cometh to take full possession of your heart. Neither will sickness or pain, or the approach of death, occasion any doubt or fear. You know a day, an hour, a moment with God is as a thousand years. He cannot be straitened for time wherein to work whatever remains to be done in your soul. And God's time is always the best time. Therefore be thou 'careful for nothing'. Only 'make thy request known unto him,' and that, not with doubt or fear, but 'thanksgiving'; as being previously assured, he cannot withhold from thee any manner of thing that is good.

3. Thirdly, the more you are tempted to give up your shield, to cast away your faith, your confidence in his love, so much the more take heed that you hold fast that whereunto you have attained. So much the more labour to 'stir up the gift of God which is in you.' Never let that slip: I have 'an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'; and 'the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' Be this thy glory and crown of rejoicing. And see that no one take thy crown. Hold that fast: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.' And I now 'have redemption in his blood, even the forgiveness of sins'. Thus, being filled with all peace and joy in believing, press on in the peace and joy of faith to the renewal of thy whole soul in the image of him that created thee. Meanwhile, cry continually to God that thou mayst see that prize of thy high calling, not as Satan represents it, in a horrid dreadful shape, but in its genuine native beauty; not as something that must be, or thou wilt go to hell, but as what may be, to lead thee to heaven. Look upon it as the most desirable gift which is in all the stores of the rich mercies of God. Beholding it in this true point of light, thou wilt hunger after it more and more: thy whole soul will be athirst for God, and for this glorious conformity to his likeness. And having received a good hope of this, and strong consolation through grace, thou wilt no more be weary or faint in thy mind, but wilt follow on till thou attainest.

4. In the same power of faith press on to glory. Indeed this is the same prospect still. God hath joined from the beginning pardon, holiness, heaven. And why should man put them asunder? O beware of this. Let not one link of the golden chain be broken. God for Christ's sake hath forgiven me. He is now renewing me in his own image. Shortly he will make me meet for himself, and take me to stand before his face. I, whom he hath justified through the blood of his Son, being thoroughly sanctified by his Spirit, shall quickly ascend to the 'New Jerusalem, the city of the living God'. Yet a little while and I shall 'come to the general assembly and church of the first-born, and to God the judge of all, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant'. How soon will these shadows flee away, and the day of eternity dawn upon me! How soon shall I drink of 'the river of the water of life, going out of the throne of God and of the Lamb! There all his servants shall praise him, and shall see his face, and his name shall be upon their foreheads. And no night shall be there; and they have no need of a candle or the light of the sun. For the Lord God enlighteneth them, and they shall reign for ever and ever.'

5. And if you thus 'taste of the good word, and of the powers of the world to come', you will not murmur against God, because you are not yet 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light'. Instead of repining at your not being wholly delivered, you will praise God for thus far delivering you. You will magnify God for what he hath done, and take it as an earnest of what he will do. You will not fret against him because you are not yet renewed, but bless him because you shall be; and because 'now is your salvation' from all sin 'nearer than when you' first 'believed'. Instead of uselessly tormenting yourself because the time is not fully come you will calmly and quietly wait for it, knowing that it 'will come and will not tarry'. You may therefore the more cheerfully endure as yet the burden of sin that still remains in you, because it will not always remain. Yet a little while and it shall be clean gone. Only 'tarry thou the Lord's leisure: be strong, and he shall comfort thy heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord.'

6. And if you see any who appear (so far as man can judge, but God alone searcheth the hearts) to be already partakers of their hope, already 'made perfect in love'; far from envying the grace of God in them, let it rejoice and comfort your heart. Glorify God for their sake. 'If one member is honoured', shall not 'all the members rejoice with it'? Instead of jealousy or evil surmising concerning them, praise God for the consolation. Rejoice in having a fresh proof of the faithfulness of God in fulfilling all his promises. And stir yourself up the more to 'apprehend that for which you also are apprehended of Christ Jesus'.

7. In order to this, redeem the time. Improve the present moment. Buy up every opportunity of growing in grace, or of doing good. Let not the thought of receiving more grace tomorrow make you negligent of today. You have one talent now. If you expect five more, so much the rather improve that you have. And the more you expect to receive hereafter, the more labour for God now. Sufficient for the day is the grace thereof. God is now pouring his benefits upon you. Now approve yourself a faithful steward of the present grace of God. Whatever may be tomorrow, give all diligence today to 'add to your faith courage, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, and the fear of God,' till you attain that pure and perfect love. Let 'these things be' now 'in you and abound'. Be not now slothful or unfruitful. So shall an entrance be ministered 'into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

[8]. Lastly, if in time past you have abused this blessed hope of being holy as he is holy, yet do not therefore cast it away. Let the abuse cease, the use remain. Use it now to the more abundant glory of God and profit of your own soul. In steadfast faith, in calm tranquility of spirit, in full assurance of hope, rejoicing evermore for what God hath done, 'press' ye 'on unto perfection.' Daily growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and going on from strength to strength, in resignation, in patience, in humble thankfulness for what ye have attained and for what ye shall, run the race set before you, 'looking unto Jesus', till through perfect love ye enter into his glory.

ISRAEL

TRUE IDENTITY

I remember being a teenager and thinking, “If I only acted a certain way...”, “If I were only this kind of person...”, “then I would be who I was meant to be and be the definition of what it means to be a man. I had a mistaken way of thinking that I had to conform to everyone else around me to fit in and and “be accepted” in this world, to be accepted with the people I thought were cool.

It wasn’t until I was in my twenties that I realized I was chasing the wrong identity. I was seeking to be like other people, what other people thought of as a man, what other people thought was being a “success.” In the process, I discovered I lost myself. This caused me to go into a long period of searching for the real Ryan and who I am supposed to be in this world, in this life.

A few months after I turned 29, I sensed a calling from God to go into pastoral ministry. I had yet to learn what that looked like. I had grown up in the church and had always said I believed in God, but there was no evidence other than the fact I didn’t get into that big of trouble.

Interestingly, after I entered into ministry—first with PowerPoint for worship, then youth director, then pastor—I discovered who I was and who I am. I am a child of the King of the universe. I belong to God, and my life is in his hands. My purpose is to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven in this world.

The rest of the world will always try to put a label on me. I will never be good enough for some, and I will be too much for others. The only thing I can do is be true to who I am.

I still feel moments of self-doubt, but then I am reminded of who I am. As long as I live with the identity of a child of God, a follower of Jesus the Christ, everything I do seeks to glorify God and bring glory and honor to him and him alone.

Finding our real identity is difficult. It will change how we live in and view this world. But knowing who we are is vital to living a life of deep joy and purpose.

Before we begin this chapter, I invite you to pray something like:

Father in Heaven, Help me know who I am. Reveal the worth you see in me and help me live as your representative in this world. Let the truth of me being your child guide everything I do and say. Amen.

ISRAEL

Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19-20

LOCATION: Ethnic Restaurant

LOOK AROUND this location.
What are some things you notice?
What gives this place a unique identity?

DEFINE: Identity. In other words, what makes a person who they are?

We live in a world today that is struggling with identity. This identity crisis in millions of people is causing mental conditions and breakdowns detrimental to themselves and those around them.

We are people who identify ourselves by what we do for a living. This even translates to saying we are a Christian _____. But this even misses the point. We are not a certain kind of Christian. Our identity comes from who God is and who God says we are. We are Christians, period. This means our identity is that of a COGPOW (Child of God, Person of Worth).

As you read the Old Testament from Genesis 12 through Malachi, we see Israel learning who they are and how they should live out their identity as God’s people.

INTRODUCTION (ABRAHAM):
In this chapter, we get to the Father of all Israelites, Abraham. Abraham (first called Abram in this particular passage) was the son of Terah. His family was nomadic and polytheistic (meaning they worshipped many gods). Toward the end of Genesis 11, we see Terah, Abraham, and the family leaving Ur of the Chaldeans (Babylon/modern-day Iraq) and heading toward Canaan (later known as Israel). This is important because Abram was on his way to Canaan and settled about halfway to the destination.

Think about that. He did not know it, but Abram was going to the Promised Land. Instead of arriving at the destination, the family decided to settle. In other words, they stopped trying to live to their fullest.

This happens to many people. The journey may be too challenging, so we stop because we get tired, we get complacent, we get comfortable, and we find we are carrying too much baggage to go any further.

When settling, we settle for less than what God has in store. And what God has in store is better than anything we could have imagined. Not only that but when we settle, we miss out on becoming who God says we are and who God says we will become.

(Read through, quickly, Genesis 12:1-3).

QUESTIONS:

What stands out?

Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

What questions do you have so far?

What promises does God offer to Abram?

- Become a great nation
- Make his name great
- Will be a blessing
- Those who bless will be blessed; those who curse will be cursed
- all the earth will be blessed because of Abram.

That's A LOT of blessings in these few verses. Those blessings signify who God says Abram is and who he will be. Because of God, Abram has been given status and significance and will be used in incredible ways to bless the whole world. This blessing is still being carried out today through the lives of those who follow Jesus.

What does this say about who God says you are?

What does this say about who God is?

Abram had to leave behind his old ways to become someone new (think about 2 Corinthians 5:17). His thoughts about the world and the significance he found in his family have changed because God called him out.

Because of his obedience to the voice of God, Abraham's family was experiencing God's blessings. They tied their identity to who God said Abraham was/is.

In Genesis 32, Abraham's grandson (Jacob) has a wrestling match with God that ends with Jacob being given a new name--Israel, which means one who wrestles with God. (notice how when God intervenes, the people are given a new identity? Think about how you are different because of an encounter with God.)

Now, the children of Jacob and all the descendants later will be called the people of Israel because of their lineage through Jacob. The identity of the people has been marked by who their family is.

Abraham and his family have been given their identities through the grace of God.

EXODUS

Fast forward over 500 years from this point, and we find the people of Israel enslaved in Egypt. The people of Israel have now had a new identity pressed down on them--that of enslaved people. This new identity has been forced upon them. They had no choice but to believe this identity (as people beneath the Egyptians).

But God cannot let his people live in these conditions or with the degradation they had been living with because of the oppression.

Remember we said how devaluing human life is a product of Sin? This is what is happening here. The people of Israel, the people of God, have been devalued so much that their lives have become disposable to the Egyptians. They needed a deliverer to get them out of Egypt so they could live into their true identity.

Enter Moses.

God eventually calls Moses (Exodus 3-6) to be the one who will deliver and set free the people of God and lead them to the promised land. A series of encounters with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, bring about plagues. The tenth one, the death of the firstborn, is the final straw that made Pharaoh free the people of Israel.

After they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, the people camped at the base of Mt. Sinai. This is where God reveals to Moses to deliver to the people their real identity as the people of God. They will soon be able to live into this identity, which will be a blessing for the world (we'll see this next chapter when we talk about Jesus).

(Read through, quickly, Exodus 19-20).

QUESTIONS:

So, who is Israel according to God?

Look specifically at 19:4-6. What do these verses reveal about who Israel is?

- They are God's people
- people kept secure in God's protection
- Treasured possession
- Kingdom of priests
- Holy nation

This is a high and lofty calling for the people of Israel. For them to know how to live this new identity out, God gives them the covenant so they can reflect God's light and law for the rest of the world.

There is something we need to understand about our identity. Our identity is not just for ourselves. It is not so we feel good about ourselves. We live into the identity (look at who God says the Israelites are, who we are also) by showing the world God's goodness, grandness, and grace.

Who we are should always point to the Living God who is among us and who has created us.

This is why it is always essential to point people to Jesus by first revealing who God says they are, especially from the very origin of life itself.

SO WHAT IS THE POINT?

Identity is a fragile thing. Because of our broken, human, sinful state, it is too easy to be defined by what we do as opposed to who God says we are.

Psalm 46:10 says, “be still and know that I am God.” Our identity is based upon how much we rest in and rely on God to be who he says he is.

Knowing who God says we are, especially after we profess faith in Christ, gives us a greater understanding, appreciation, and hopefully desire to become who we are being transformed into--the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. To know Christ is to know humanity's authentic, original nature and who humanity is.

Take time to reflect on these Bible verses to see who God says you are:

1. John 1:12 ~"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."
2. Romans 8:28~ "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. "
3. Ephesians 1:7 ~ "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. "
4. John 15:16 ~ "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. "
5. Romans 6:6~ "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."
6. Genesis 1:27 ~ "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
7. Jeremiah 1:5 ~ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."
8. 1 Peter 2:9 ~ "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. "
9. Galatians 2:20~ "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
10. John 15:15~ "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."
11. Ephesians 2:10~ "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."
12. Philippians 3:20~ "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."
13. 2 Timothy 1:7~ "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."
14. Colossians 3:1-4~ "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."
15. Romans 8:37~ "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. "
16. Psalm 139:14 ~ "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."
17. 2 Corinthians 5:17~ "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Identity is vital. We have to know who we are so we know how to live to the fullest. Who are you, according to God?
2. Is this easy to believe and live into?
3. How is your life reflecting your identity and who God is to the world?
4. What can you do this week to remember who you are and help another person know who God says they are?

MISSION OPPORTUNITY: This week, gather together with some people and observe a Love Feast. Feel free to use the liturgy found here:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-love-feast>

Sermon: “The Great Privilege of Those That are Born of God” by John Wesley

1 John 3:9

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.

1. It has been frequently supposed that the being born of God was all one with the being justified; that the new birth and justification were only different expressions denoting the same thing: it being certain on the one hand that whoever is justified is also born of God, and on the other that whoever is born of God is also justified; yea, that both these gifts of God are given to every believer in one and the same moment. In one point of time his sins are blotted out and he is born of God.

2. But though it be allowed that justification and the new birth are in point of time inseparable from each other, yet are they easily distinguished as being not the same, but things of a widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us: in begetting us again he does the work in us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image of God. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin. So that although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures.

3. The not discerning this, the not observing the wide difference there is between being justified and being born again, has occasioned exceeding great confusion of thought in many who have treated on this subject; particularly when they have attempted to explain this great privilege of the children of God, to show how ‘whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.’

4. In order to apprehend this clearly it may be necessary, first, to consider what is the proper meaning of that expression, ‘whosoever is born of God’; and, secondly, to inquire in what sense he ‘doth not commit sin’.

I.1. First, we are to consider what is the proper meaning of that expression, 'whosoever is born of God'. And in general, from all the passages of Holy Writ wherein this expression, the being 'born of God', occurs, we may learn that it implies not barely the being baptized, or any outward change whatever; but a vast inward change; a change wrought in the soul by the operation of the Holy Ghost, a change in the whole manner of our existence; for from the moment we are 'born of God' we live in quite another manner than we did before; we are, as it were, in another world.

2. The ground and reason of the expression is easy to be understood. When we undergo this great change we may with much propriety be said 'to be born again', because there is so near a resemblance between the circumstances of the natural and of the spiritual birth; so that to consider the circumstances of the natural birth is the most easy way to understand the spiritual.

3. The child which is not yet born subsists indeed by the air, as does everything which has life; but feels it not, nor anything else, unless in a very dull and imperfect manner. It hears little, if at all, the organs of hearing being as yet closed up. It sees nothing, having its eyes fast shut, and being surrounded with utter darkness. There are, it may be, some faint beginnings of life when the time of its birth draws nigh, and some motion consequent thereon, whereby it is distinguished from a mere mass of matter. But it has no senses; all these avenues of the soul are hitherto quite shut up. Of consequence it has scarce any intercourse with this visible world, nor any knowledge, conception, or idea of the things that occur therein.

4. The reason why he that is not yet born is wholly a stranger to the visible world is not because it is afar off—it is very nigh; it surrounds him on every side—but partly because he has not those senses (they are not yet opened in his soul) whereby alone it is possible to hold commerce with the material world; and partly because so thick a veil is cast between, through which he can discern nothing.

5. But no sooner is the child born into the world than he exists in a quite different manner. He now feels the air with which he is surrounded, and which pours into him from every side, as fast as he alternately breathes it back, to sustain the flame of life. And hence springs a continual increase of strength, of motion, and of sensation; all the bodily senses being now awakened and furnished with their proper objects.

His eyes are now opened to perceive the light, which silently flowing in upon them discovers not only itself but an infinite variety of things with which before he was wholly unacquainted. His ears are unclosed, and sounds rush in with endless diversity. Every sense is employed upon such objects as are peculiarly suitable to it. And by these inlets the soul, having an open intercourse with the visible world, acquires more and more knowledge of sensible things, of all the things which are under the sun.

6. So it is with him that is born of God. Before that great change is wrought, although he subsists by him in whom all that have life 'live and move and have their being', yet he is not sensible of God. He does not feel, he has no inward consciousness of his presence. He does not perceive that divine breath of life without which he cannot subsist a moment. Nor is he sensible of any of the things of God. They make no impression upon his soul. God is continually calling to him from on high, but he heareth not; his ears are shut; so that 'the voice of the charmer' is lost to him, 'charm he never so wisely'. He seeth not the things of the Spirit of God, the eyes of his understanding being closed, and utter darkness covering his whole soul, surrounding him on every side. It is true he may have some faint dawns of life, some small beginnings of spiritual motion; but as yet he has no spiritual senses capable of discerning spiritual objects. Consequently, he 'discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God. He cannot know them; because they are spiritually discerned.'

7. Hence he has scarce any knowledge of the invisible world, as he has scarce any intercourse with it. Not that it is afar off. No; he is in the midst of it: it encompasses him round about. The ‘other world’, as we usually term it, is not far from every one of us. It is above, and beneath, and on every side. Only the natural man discerneth it not; partly because he has no spiritual senses, whereby alone we can discern the things of God; partly because so thick a veil is interposed as he knows not how to penetrate.

8. But when he is born of God, born of the Spirit, how is the manner of his existence changed! His whole soul is now sensible of God, and he can say by sure experience, ‘Thou art about my bed, and about my path;’ I feel thee in ‘all my ways’. ‘Thou besettest me behind and before, and layest thy hand upon me.’ The Spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returns to God. As it is continually received by faith, so it is continually rendered back by love, by prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving—love and praise and prayer being the breath of every soul which is truly born of God. And by this new kind of spiritual respiration, spiritual life is not only sustained but increased day by day, together with spiritual strength and motion and sensation; all the senses of the soul being now awake, and capable of ‘discerning’ spiritual ‘good and evil’.

9. ‘The eyes of his understanding’ are now open, and he ‘seeth him that is invisible’. He sees what is ‘the exceeding greatness of his power’ and of his love toward them that believe. He sees that God is merciful to him a sinner; that he is reconciled through the Son of his love. He clearly perceives both the pardoning love of God and all his ‘exceeding great and precious promises’. ‘God, who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness, hath shined’ and doth shine ‘in his heart, to enlighten him with the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ All the darkness is now passed away, and he abides in the light of God’s countenance.

10. His ears are now opened, and the voice of God no longer calls in vain. He hears and obeys the heavenly calling: he ‘knows the voice of his shepherd’. All his spiritual senses being now awakened, he has a clear intercourse with the invisible world. And hence he knows more and more of the things which before it ‘could not enter into his heart to conceive’. He now knows what the peace of God is; what is joy in the Holy Ghost; what the love of God which is shed abroad in the hearts of them that believe through Christ Jesus. Thus the veil being removed which before interrupted the light and voice, the knowledge and love of God, he who is born of the Spirit, ‘dwelling in love, dwelleth in God and God in him’.

II.1. Having considered the meaning of that expression, ‘whosoever is born of God’, it remains in the second place to inquire in what sense he ‘doth not commit sin’.

Now one who is so born of God as hath been above described, who continually receives into his soul the breath of life from God, the gracious influence of his Spirit, and continually renders it back; one who thus believes and loves, who by faith perceives the continual actings of God upon his spirit, and by a kind of spiritual re-action returns the grace he receives in unceasing love, and praise, and prayer; not only ‘doth not commit sin’ while he thus ‘keepeth himself’, but so long as this ‘seed remaineth in him he cannot sin’, because he is born of God.

2. By ‘sin’ I here understand outward sin, according to the plain, common acceptation of the word: an actual, voluntary ‘transgression of the law’; of the revealed, written law of God; of any commandment of God acknowledged to be such at the time that it is transgressed. But ‘whosoever is born of God’, while he abideth in faith and love and in the spirit of prayer and thanksgiving, not only ‘doth not’, but ‘cannot’ thus ‘commit sin’. So long as he thus believeth in God through Christ and loves him, and is pouring out his heart before him, he cannot voluntarily transgress any command of God, either by speaking or acting what he knows God hath forbidden—so long that ‘seed’ which ‘remaineth in him’ (that loving, praying, thankful faith) compels him to refrain from whatsoever he knows to be an abomination in the sight of God.

3. But here a difficulty will immediately occur, and one that to many has appeared insuperable, and induced them to deny the plain assertion of the Apostle, and give up the privilege of the children of God.

It is plain, in fact, that those whom we cannot deny to have been truly 'born of God' (the Spirit of God having given us in his Word this infallible testimony concerning them) nevertheless not only could but did commit sin, even gross, outward sin. They did transgress the plain, known laws of God, speaking or acting what they knew he had forbidden.

4. Thus David was unquestionably born of God or ever he was anointed king over Israel. He knew in whom he had believed; he was strong in faith, giving glory to God. 'The Lord', saith he, 'is my shepherd; therefore can I lack nothing. He shall feed me in green pastures, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. [. . .] Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me' (Ps. 23:1, 2, 4). He was filled with love, such as often constrained him to cry out, 'I will love thee, O Lord, my God; the Lord is my stony rock, and my defence; the horn also of my salvation, and my refuge' (Ps. 18:1, 2). He was a man of prayer, pouring out his soul before God in all circumstances of life; and abundant in praises and thanksgiving. 'Thy praise', saith he, 'shall be ever in my mouth' (Ps. 34:1). 'Thou art my God, and I will thank thee; thou art my God, and I will praise thee' (Ps. 118:28). And yet such a child of God could and did commit sin; yea, the horrid sins of adultery and murder.

5. And even after the Holy Ghost was more largely given, after ‘life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel’, we want not instances of the same melancholy kind, which were also doubtless written for our instruction. Thus he who (probably from his selling all that he had, and bringing the price for the relief of his poor brethren) was ‘by the apostles’ themselves ‘surnamed Barnabas’, that is, ‘the son of consolation’ (Acts 4:36-37); who was so honoured at Antioch as to be selected with Saul out of all the disciples to carry their ‘relief unto the brethren in Judea’ (Acts 11:29): this Barnabas, who at his return from Judea was by the peculiar direction of the Holy Ghost solemnly ‘separated’ from the other ‘prophets and teachers’ ‘for the work whereunto God had called him’ (Acts 13:1-2), even to accompany the great Apostle among the Gentiles, and to be his fellow-labourer in every place; nevertheless was afterward so ‘sharp’ in his ‘contention’ with St. Paul (because he ‘thought it not good to take with them’ John in his ‘visiting the brethren’ a second time, ‘who had departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work’) that he himself also departed from the work; that he ‘took John, and sailed unto Cyprus’ (Acts 15:35, 38, 39), forsaking him to whom he had been in so immediate a manner joined by the Holy Ghost.

6. An instance more astonishing than both these is given by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians. ‘When Peter’, the aged, the zealous, the first of the apostles, one of the three most highly favoured by his Lord, ‘was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James he did eat with the Gentiles’—the heathens converted to the Christian faith—as having been peculiarly taught of God that he ‘should not call any man common or unclean’ (Acts 10:28). But ‘when they were come, [. . .] he separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles’, not regarding the ceremonial law of Moses, ‘why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?’ (Gal. 2:12-14). Here is also plain undeniable sin, committed by one who was undoubtedly ‘born of God’. But how can this be reconciled with the assertion of St. John, if taken in the obvious literal meaning, that ‘whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin’?

7. I answer, what has been long observed is this: so long as 'he that is born of God keepeth himself' (which he is able to do, by the grace of God) 'the wicked one toucheth him not.' But if he keepeth not himself, if he abide not in the faith, he may commit sin even as another man. It is easy therefore to understand how any of these children of God might be moved from his own steadfastness, and yet the great truth of God, declared by the Apostle, remain steadfast and unshaken. He did not keep himself by that grace of God which was sufficient for him. He fell step by step, first into negative, inward sin—not 'stirring up the gift of God' which was in him, not 'watching unto prayer', not 'pressing on to the mark of the prize of his high calling'; then into positive, inward sin—inclining to wickedness with his heart, giving way to some evil desire or temper. Next he lost his faith, his sight of a pardoning God, and consequently his love of God. And being then weak and like another man he was capable of committing even outward sin.

8. To explain this by a particular instance. David was born of God, and saw God by faith. He loved God in sincerity. He could truly say, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth' (neither person or thing) 'that I desire in comparison to thee!' But still there remained in his heart that corruption of nature which is the seed of all evil.

He was 'walking upon the roof of his house' (2 Sam. 11:2), probably praising the God whom his soul loved, when he looked and saw Bathsheba. He felt a temptation, a thought which tended to evil. The Spirit of God did not fail to convince him of this. He doubtless heard and knew the warning voice. But he yielded in some measure to the thought, and the temptation began to prevail over him. Hereby his spirit was sullied. He saw God still; but it was more dimly than before. He loved God still; but not in the same degree, not with the same strength and ardour of affection. Yet God checked him again, though his spirit was grieved; and his voice, though fainter and fainter, still whispered, 'Sin lieth at the door;' 'look unto me, and be thou saved.' But he would not hear. He looked again, not unto God, but unto the forbidden object, till nature was superior to grace, and kindled lust in his soul.

The eye of his mind was now closed again, and God vanished out of his sight. Faith, the divine, supernatural intercourse with God, and the love of God ceased together. He then rushed on as a horse into the battle, and knowingly committed the outward sin.

9. You see the unquestionable progress from grace to sin. Thus it goes on, from step to step. (1). The divine seed of loving, conquering faith remains in him that is 'born of God'. 'He keepeth himself', by the grace of God, and 'cannot commit' sin; (2). A temptation arises, whether from the world, the flesh, or the devil, it matters not; (3). The Spirit of God gives him warning that sin is near, and bids him more abundantly watch unto prayer; (4). He gives way in some degree to the temptation, which now begins to grow pleasing to him; (5). The Holy Spirit is grieved; his faith is weakened, and his love of God grows cold; (6). The Spirit reproves him more sharply, and saith, 'This is the way; walk thou in it.' (7). He turns away from the painful voice of God and listens to the pleasing voice of the tempter; (8). Evil desire begins and spreads in his soul, till faith and love vanish away; (9). He is then capable of committing outward sin, the power of the Lord being departed from him.

10. To explain this by another instance. The Apostle Peter was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; and hereby keeping himself he had a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.

Walking thus in simplicity and godly sincerity, 'before that certain came from James he did eat with the Gentiles', knowing that what God had cleansed was not common or unclean.

But 'when they were come' a temptation arose in his heart to 'fear those of the circumcision' (the Jewish converts who were zealous for circumcision and the other rites of the Mosaic law) and regard the favour and praise of these men more than the praise of God.

He was warned by the Spirit that sin was near. Nevertheless, he yielded to it in some degree, even to sinful fear of man, and his faith and love were proportionably weakened.

God reproved him again for giving place to the devil. Yet he would not hearken to the voice of his Shepherd, but gave himself up to that slavish fear, and thereby quenched the Spirit.

Then God disappeared, and faith and love being extinct he committed the outward sin. 'Walking not uprightly, not according to the truth of the gospel', he 'separated himself' from his Christian brethren, and by his evil example, if not advice also, 'compelled' even 'the Gentiles to live after the manner of the Jews'; to entangle themselves again with that 'yoke of bondage' from which 'Christ had set them free'.

Thus it is unquestionably true that he who is born of God, keeping himself, doth not, cannot commit sin; and yet if he keepeth not himself he may commit all manner of sin with greediness.

III.1. From the preceding considerations we may learn, first, to give a clear and incontestable answer to a question which has frequently perplexed many who were sincere of heart. Does sin precede or follow the loss of faith? Does a child of God first commit sin, and thereby lose his faith? Or does he lose his faith first, before he can commit sin?

I answer: some sin, of omission at least, must necessarily precede the loss of faith—some inward sin. But the loss of faith must precede the committing outward sin.

The more any believer examines his own heart, the more will he be convinced of this: that 'faith working by love' excludes both inward and outward sin from a soul 'watching unto prayer'; that nevertheless we are even then liable to temptation, particularly to the sin that did easily beset us; that if the loving eye of the soul be steadily fixed on God the temptation soon vanishes away. But if not, if we are (as the Apostle James speaks), 'drawn out' of God by our 'own desire', and, 'caught by the bait' of present or promised pleasure: then that 'desire conceived' in us 'brings forth sin'; and having by that inward sin destroyed our faith, it casts us headlong into the snare of the devil, so that we may commit any outward sin whatever.

2. From what has been said we may learn, secondly, what the life of God in the soul of a believer is, wherein it properly consists, and what is immediately and necessarily implied therein. It immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God's Holy Spirit: God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be an holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus.

3. And hence we may, thirdly, infer the absolute necessity of this re-action of the soul (whatsoever it be called) in order to the continuance of the divine life therein. For it plainly appears God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. He prevents us indeed with the blessings of his goodness. He first loves us, and manifests himself unto us. While we are yet afar off he calls us to himself, and shines upon our hearts. But if we do not then love him who first loved us; if we will not hearken to his voice; if we turn our eye away from him, and will not attend to the light which he pours upon us: his Spirit will not always strive; he will gradually withdraw, and leave us to the darkness of our own hearts. He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him, a sacrifice wherewith he is well pleased.

4. Let us learn, lastly, to follow that direction of the great Apostle: 'Be not high-minded, but fear.' Let us fear sin more than death or hell. Let us have a jealous (though not painful) fear, lest we should lean to our own deceitful hearts. 'Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall.' Even he who now standeth fast in the grace of God, in the faith that 'overcometh the world', may nevertheless fall into inward sin, and thereby 'make shipwreck of his faith'. And how easily then will outward sin regain its dominion over him! Thou, therefore, O man of God, watch always, that thou mayest always hear the voice of God. Watch that thou mayest pray without ceasing, at all times and in all places pouring out thy heart before him. So shalt thou always believe, and always love, and never commit sin.

Sermon: “Scripture Way of Salvation” by John Wesley

Ephesians 2:8

Ye are saved through faith.

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

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

Let us then seriously inquire,

I. What is salvation?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. 'But does not God command us to repent also? Yea, and to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance"? To "cease", for instance, "from doing evil", and "learn to do well"? And is not both the one and the other of the utmost necessity? Insomuch that if we willingly neglect either we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all? But if this be so, how can it be said that faith is the only condition of justification?'

God does undoubtedly command us both to repent and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; which if we willingly neglect we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all. Therefore both repentance and fruits meet for repentance are in some sense necessary to justification. But they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for those fruits are only necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be justified without them, as was the 'thief' upon the cross (if we may call him so; for a late writer has discovered that he was no thief, but a very honest and respectable person!). But he cannot be justified without faith: this is impossible. Likewise let a man have ever so much repentance, or ever so many of the fruits meet for repentance, yet all this does not at all avail: he is not justified till he believes. But the moment he believes, with or without those fruits, yea, with more or less repentance, he is justified. Not in the same sense: for repentance and its fruits are only remotely necessary, necessary in order to faith; whereas faith is immediately and directly necessary to justification. It remains that faith is the only condition which is immediately and proximately necessary to justification.

3. 'But do you believe we are sanctified by faith? We know you believe that we are justified by faith; but do not you believe, and accordingly teach, that we are sanctified by our works?'

So it has been roundly and vehemently affirmed for these five and twenty years. But I have constantly declared just the contrary, and that in all manner of ways. I have continually testified in private and in public that we are sanctified, as well as justified, by faith. And indeed the one of these great truths does exceedingly illustrate the other. Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the only condition of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification. It is the condition: none is sanctified but he that believes; without faith no man is sanctified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for sanctification. Everyone that believes is sanctified, whatever else he has or has not. In other words: no man is sanctified till he believes; every man when he believes is sanctified.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13. But to return. Though it be allowed that both this repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation, yet they are not necessary either in the same sense with faith or in the same degree. Not in the same degree; for these fruits are only necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be sanctified without them. But he cannot be sanctified without faith. Likewise let a man have ever so much of this repentance, or ever so many good works, yet all this does not at all avail: he is not sanctified till he believes. But the moment he believes, with or without those fruits, yea, with more or less of this repentance, he is sanctified. Not in the same sense; for this repentance and these fruits are only remotely necessary, necessary in order to the continuance of his faith, as well as the increase of it; whereas faith is immediately and directly necessary to sanctification. It remains that faith is the only condition which is immediately and proximately necessary to sanctification.

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

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

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

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

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

Sermon: “The Righteousness of Faith” by John Wesley

Romans 10:5-8

Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise: Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above;)

Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ again from the dead.)

But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. Now this covenant saith not to sinful man, 'Perform unsinning obedience and live.' If this were the term, he would have no more benefit by all which Christ hath done and suffered for him than if he was required, in order to life, to 'ascend into heaven and bring down Christ from above'; or to 'descend into the deep', into the invisible world, and 'bring up Christ from the dead'. It doth not require any impossibility to be done (although to mere man what it requires would be impossible, but not to man assisted by the Spirit of God); this were only to mock human weakness. Indeed, strictly speaking, the covenant of grace doth not require us to do anything at all, as absolutely and indispensably necessary in order to our justification, but only to believe in him who for the sake of his Son and the propitiation which he hath made, 'justifieth the ungodly that worketh not', and 'imputes his faith to him for righteousness'. Even so Abraham 'believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness' (Gen. 15:6). 'And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith . . . ; that he might be the father of all them that believe . . . ; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also' (Rom. 4:11). 'Now it was not written for his sake alone that it (i.e. faith) was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed' (to whom faith shall be imputed for righteousness, shall stand in the stead of perfect obedience, in order to our acceptance with God) 'if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered' to death 'for our offences, and was raised again for our justification' (Rom. 4:23-25), 'for the assurance of the remission of our sins, and of a second life to come to them that believe.'

9. What saith then the covenant of forgiveness, of unmerited love, of pardoning mercy? 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' In the day thou believest, thou shalt surely live. Thou shalt be restored to the favour of God; and in his pleasure is life. Thou shalt be saved from the curse and from the wrath of God. Thou shalt be quickened from the death of sin into the life of righteousness. And if thou endure to the end, believing in Jesus, thou shalt never taste the second death, but having suffered with the Lord shalt also live and reign with him for ever and ever.

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

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

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

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

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

II.1. These things considered, it will be easy to show, as I proposed to do in the second place, the folly of trusting in the ‘righteousness which is of the law’, and the wisdom of ‘submitting to the righteousness which is of faith’.

The folly of those who still trust in the ‘righteousness which is of the law’, the terms of which are, ‘Do this and live’, may abundantly appear from hence. They set out wrong. Their very first step is a fundamental mistake. For before they can ever think of claiming any blessing on the terms of this covenant, they must suppose themselves to be in his state with whom this covenant was made. But how vain a supposition is this, since it was made with Adam in a state of innocence. How weak therefore must that whole building be which stands on such a foundation! And how foolish are they who thus build on the sand! Who seem never to have considered that the covenant of works was not given to man when he was dead in trespasses and sins, but when he was alive to God, when he knew no sin, but was holy as God is holy; who forget that it was never designed for the recovery of the favour and life of God once lost, but only for the continuance and increase thereof, till it should be complete in life everlasting.

2. Neither do they consider, who are thus ‘seeking to establish their own righteousness which is of the law’, what manner of obedience or righteousness that is which the law indispensably requires. It must be perfect and entire in every point, or it answers not the demand of the law. But which of you is able to perform such obedience? Or, consequently, to live thereby? Who among you fulfils every jot and tittle even of the outward commandments of God? Doing nothing, great or small, which God forbids? Leaving nothing undone which he enjoins? Speaking no ‘idle word’? Having your conversation always ‘meet to minister grace to the hearers’? And ‘whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, doing all to the glory of God’? And how much less are you able to fulfil all the inward commandments of God? Those which require that every temper and motion of your soul should be holiness unto the Lord? Are you able to ‘love God with all your heart’? To love all mankind as your own soul? To ‘pray without ceasing’? ‘In everything to give thanks’? To have God always before you? And to keep every affection, desire, and thought in obedience to his law?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





JESUS

THE SAVIOR

I remember the day well. July, 17, 2001. I had been participating in a weekly lunch Bible Study with a pastor of a friend of mine. We had been meeting for a few months, and I realized there was something I needed to do. We discussed the Ten Commandments that day, and I had broken just about every one.

A sense of conviction flooded my spirit, and I prayed for forgiveness. Right then, the presence of Jesus became real to me. At that moment, I received forgiveness for my past. I was someone different.

But the challenge came. Learning to live like Jesus is more challenging than I ever dreamed. I would return to my old way of thinking and become a person I did not like. Then something changed again. I felt a conviction I needed to restart going to church. While there, I rediscovered the person of Jesus, who was always with me.

Though it took a few more years, I finally realized the importance of a Savior. I cannot live by the rules by myself. I need someone to take my place. I need the power of another to give me the strength to endure. I need the identity of Jesus to remake, remold, and reshape me into the person God created me to be.

Since that lunch in 2001, I have been learning and experiencing each day how much Jesus truly is Lord, King, and Master of all. Only by learning how Jesus lived and seeking to live in a way that emulates Jesus to the world can I experience salvation.

What I have also learned is salvation is a continual process. It is a reshaping and transforming of the person to be made holy and into the likeness and image of Jesus Christ. Through this process of becoming like Jesus, I have discovered my taste for what I thought was good has changed. We need a renewal of the mind to fully experience grace because we need to get out of the way and let Jesus do his work.

You have your own experience of Jesus, and I invite you to keep that in mind as you begin this chapter. Take time to pray, inviting the presence and love of Jesus to fill your heart and mind. Ask him to transform you into his image (not the image of Jesus you like). Allow his Spirit to transform you fully.

Lord Jesus, I am yours. Teach me what you want. Make me who you need in this world. I am yours, and you are mine. May I reflect you, faithfully, in this world. Amen.

JESUS

Matthew 1:1-17; John 1:1-18

LOCATION: Local Food Pantry or Mission Center

Who is Jesus to you?

How did you come to know this?

Explain how Jesus guides your life.

Jesus' mission, in Luke 19:10, is to "seek and to save the lost." He is on a mission to reclaim what belongs to God. People especially. So many people do not know Jesus is the Lord of creation. Too many people live as though they are the master of their destiny. Too many people do not understand why knowing and living as if we belong to God and not ourselves is essential.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW WHO WE BELONG TO?

Remember the three questions everyone must answer. "Who am I?"

The next question people ask when asking for meaning in life is, "Who do I belong to?" The final question we'll discuss in the next chapter: "What is my purpose?"

Jesus came to show the world who is really in charge and who the world belongs to.

INTRODUCTION

Today, we're looking at the Gospels of Matthew and John, specifically the first chapter of each. We have all heard stories and different things about Jesus. Most of the time, what we've heard lines up with scripture. Other times, not so much.

To begin, I want us to begin with the beginning of Jesus' existence and try to write as much about his life as possible (trying to stay in chronological order):

Read through Matthew 1:17 and John 1:1-18.

QUESTIONS:

1. What stands out?
2. Who do these passages say Jesus is?
3. Why are these chapters significant to learning about who Jesus is?

MATTHEW

Notice how the Matthew passages point to Jesus' identity as through the line of King David (something God promised David would happen)

Now, look at the genealogical list again. What do you notice? I hope you say the women's names. This was unheard of in Jewish culture as the Jewish people only kept lineage through the male descendants. Also, notice how these women had something in their past that most of us would try to hide. We wouldn't want to have the past brought up and be defined by our past.

We'll say, "Our past does not define us." But the past does shape us into who we will become in the future. These opening verses in Matthew show how Jesus is the fulfillment to bring something good out of a rocky past. (Look at Romans 8:28) It doesn't matter what we've done; Jesus can and will take the time and care to redeem, for his glory, our mistakes/sins/failures.

The other thing to notice in Matthew 1 is the number of generations. Each set can be broken down into 14 generations, divisible by 7. In scripture, 7 is a state of perfection. So, to have this happen, in this list, Matthew is saying Jesus is the perfection of God who comes to redeem and reconcile the world to himself.

JOHN

Now, we look at John's gospel. John goes back even further than Matthew. John goes all the way back to the beginning of creation. Jesus always was, is, and will be. Jesus was never created. He was always in existence. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.

Through the power of his words (and actions), Jesus brings about complete healing and wholeness.

The Apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:15-20, makes the case for this truth. Everything is held together by and for Jesus. God has written the story of Jesus and redemption into the fabric of creation and humanity.

Have you ever heard about Laminin?

Laminin is a type of protein each cell contains. It is essential for communicating to the other functions of the cells. This protein is VITAL to the health and vitality of ALL tissues to function correctly. When this protein is healthy and strong, life is strong. When this protein is weak or diminished, life suffers.

What's cool about this micro-protein is its shape.

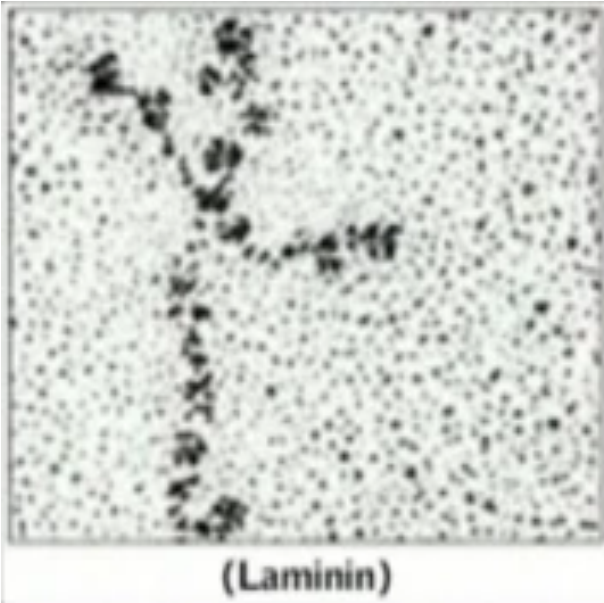


Photo cred: <https://lantsandlaminins.com/laminins/>

This sign is embedded in every cell in the human body. God is faithful and has allowed his law and love/grace to be written in the core of who we are.

SO WHAT IS THE POINT?

We go through too much of our day not thinking about Jesus or his impact on and in our lives. We quickly forget life is not about us. God is doing everything he can to make himself known in the world, so we are without any excuse (Romans 1).

Jesus is the source of life; he holds everything together. Knowing who Jesus is, the events in his life, and trusting in his death/resurrection/ascension is the key to understanding and living true life.

Like the Laminin protein, our physical life is much better when our spiritual life is in order. A significant source of our issues is our unwillingness to get our spiritual lives in order. We want a quick fix: to put a bandage on the wound. The deeper problem is what's going on in us. If we confess and repent of our sinful nature, we will allow God to make us whole (holy and complete). This is what Jesus does.

So, who do we belong to?

We belong to God. He has made his mark in and on our lives.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What have you done today to have your life reflect Jesus?
2. What is something you learned today you can share with others about who Jesus is and who we belong to?
3. How would you rate (on a scale of 1-10) your devotion to Jesus?
4. Is Christ real to you?

MISSION OPPORTUNITY: Find 3-5 people to talk with about Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Be bold and confident. Trust that God is leading and speaking through you.

Pray: for God to do his thing to bring within the person (and yourself) to know him more and be transformed into the likeness and image of Jesus Christ.

Sermon: “Scriptural Christianity” by John Wesley

Acts 4:31

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

1. The same expression occurs in the second chapter, where we read, ‘When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all’ (the apostles, with the women, and the mother of Jesus, and his brethren) ‘with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind. . . . And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost’ (Acts 2:1-4). One immediate effect whereof was, they ‘began to speak with other tongues’ (Acts 2:4); insomuch that both the ‘Parthians, Medes, Elamites’, and the other strangers who ‘came together’ ‘when this was noised abroad’, ‘heard them speak’ in their several ‘tongues, the wonderful works of God’ (Acts 2:6, 9, 11).

2. In this chapter we read that when the apostles and brethren had been praying and praising God, ‘the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost’ (Acts 4:31). Not that we find any visible appearance here, such as had been in the former instance: nor are we informed that the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were then given to all or any of them, such as ‘the gifts of healing, of working other miracles, of prophecy, of discerning spirits’, the speaking with ‘divers kinds of tongues’, and ‘the interpretation of tongues’ (1 Cor. 12:9-10).

3. Whether these gifts of the Holy Ghost were designed to remain in the church throughout all ages, and whether or not they will be restored at the nearer approach of the ‘restitution of all things’, are questions which it is not needful to decide. But it is needful to observe this, that even in the infancy of the church God divided them with a sparing hand. ‘Were all’ even then ‘prophets?’ Were ‘all workers of miracles?’ Had all the gifts of healing? Did all speak with tongues? No, in no wise. Perhaps not one in a thousand. Probably none but the teachers in the church, and only some of them (1 Cor. 12:28-30). It was therefore for a more excellent purpose than this that ‘they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. This then was the very essence of his faith, a divine (evidence or conviction) of the love of God the Father, through the Son of his love, to him a sinner, now 'accepted in the beloved'. And 'being justified by faith, he had peace with God' (Rom. 5:1), yea, 'the peace of God ruling in his heart'; a peace 'which, passing all understanding' (, all barely rational conception), 'kept his heart and mind' from all doubt and fear, through the 'knowledge of him in whom he had believed'. He could not therefore 'be afraid of any evil tidings'; for his 'heart stood fast, believing in the Lord'. He feared not what man could do unto him, knowing 'the very hairs of his head were all numbered'. He feared not all the powers of darkness, whom God was daily 'bruising under his feet'. Least of all was he afraid to die; nay, he 'desired to depart and be with Christ' (Phil. 1:23); who 'through death had destroyed him that had the power of death, even the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime', till then, 'subject to bondage' (Heb. 2:14-15).

3. 'His soul' therefore 'magnified the Lord, and his spirit rejoiced in God his Saviour.' He rejoiced in him 'with joy unspeakable', who 'had reconciled him to God, even the Father'; 'in whom he had redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.' He rejoiced in that 'witness of God's Spirit with his spirit that he was a child of God'; and more abundantly 'in hope of the glory of God'; in hope of the glorious image of God, the full 'renewal of his soul in righteousness and true holiness'; and in hope of that 'crown of glory', that 'inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. They endeavoured herein to speak to every man severally as he had need. To the careless, to those who lay unconcerned in darkness and in the shadow of death, they thundered, 'Awake, thou that sleepest; . . . arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' But to those who were already awakened out of sleep, and groaning under a sense of the wrath of God, their language was, 'We have an advocate with the Father; . . . he is the propitiation for our sins.' Meantime those who had believed they 'provoked to love and to good works'; to 'patient continuance in well-doing'; and to 'abound more and more' in that 'holiness, without which no man can see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14).

5. And their labour was not in vain in the Lord. His 'word ran and was glorified'. It 'grew mightily and prevailed'. But so much the more did offences prevail also. The world in general were offended, 'because they testified of it that the works thereof were evil' (John 7:7). The men of pleasure were offended, not only because these men were 'made', as it were, 'to reprove their thoughts' ('He professeth', said they, 'to have the knowledge of God; he calleth himself the child of the Lord; his life is not like other men's; his ways are of another fashion; he abstaineth from our ways, as from filthiness; he maketh his boast that God is his Father'; Wisd. 2:13-16), but much more because so many of their companions were taken away and would no more 'run with them to the same excess of riot' (1 Pet. 4:4). The men of reputation were offended, because as the gospel spread they declined in the esteem of the people; and because many no longer dared to 'give them flattering titles', or to pay man the homage due to God only. The men of trade called one another together and said, 'Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. But ye see and hear that these men have persuaded and turned away much people; . . . so that this our craft is in danger to be set at nought' (Acts 19:25-27). Above all the men of religion, so called—the men of outside religion, 'the saints of the world'—were offended, and ready at every opportunity to cry out, 'Men of Israel, help!' (Acts 21:28). 'We have found these men pestilent fellows, movers of sedition throughout the world' (Acts 24:5). 'These are the men that teach all men everywhere against the people and against the law' (Acts 21:28).

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

7. Meanwhile they did not fail to 'cast out their name as evil' (Luke 6:22); so that this 'sect was everywhere spoken against' (Acts 28:22). 'Men said all manner of evil of them', even as had been done of 'the prophets that were before them' (Matt 5:11, 12). And whatever any would affirm, others would believe; so that offences grew as the stars of heaven for multitude. And hence arose, at the time foreordained of the Father, persecution in all its forms. Some, for a season, suffered only shame and reproach; some, 'the spoiling of their goods' (Heb. 10:34); some 'had trial of mocking and scourging'; some 'of bonds and imprisonment' (Heb. 11:36); and others 'resisted unto blood'.

8. Now it was that the pillars of hell were shaken, and the kingdom of God spread more and more. Sinners were everywhere 'turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God'. He gave his children 'such a mouth, and such wisdom, as all their adversaries could not resist'. And their lives were of equal force with their words. But above all, their sufferings spake to all the world. They 'approved themselves' the servants of God 'in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses; in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours' (2 Cor. 6:4-5); 'in perils in the sea, in perils in the wilderness; in weariness and painfulness, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness'. And when, having 'fought the good fight', they were 'led as . . . sheep to the slaughter', and 'offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith', then the blood of each found a voice, and the heathen owned, 'He being dead, yet speaketh.'

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

III.1. But shall we not see greater things than these? Yea, greater than have been yet from the beginning of the world? Can Satan cause the truth of God to fail? Or his promises to be of none effect? If not, the time will come when Christianity will prevail over all, and cover the earth. Let us stand a little, and survey (the third thing which was proposed) this strange sight, a Christian world. ‘Of this the prophets of old inquired and searched diligently:’ of this ‘the Spirit which was in them testified’ (1 Pet. 1:10, 11, etc.): ‘It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. . . . And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more’ (Isa. 2:2, 4). ‘In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people. To it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again to recover the remnant of his people; . . . and he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth’ (Isa. 11:10-12). ‘The wolf shall (then) dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy (saith the Lord) in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea’ (Isa. 11:6, 9).

2. To the same effect are the words of the great Apostle, which it is evident have never yet been fulfilled: 'Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. . . . But through their fall, salvation is come to the Gentiles. And if the diminishing of them be the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness? . . . For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery; . . . that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in: and so all Israel shall be saved' (Rom. 11:1, 11-12, 25-26).

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

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

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

6. Thus, where ‘the Lord God omnipotent taketh to himself his mighty power, and reigneth’, doth he ‘subdue all things to himself’, cause every heart to overflow with love, and fill every mouth with praise. ‘Happy are the people that are in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God’ (Ps. 144:15). ‘Arise, shine (saith the Lord), for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. . . . Thou hast known that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty God of Jacob. . . . I have made thy officers peace, and thy exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls “Salvation”, and thy gates “Praise”. . . . Thy people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified’ (Isa. 60:1, 16-18, 21). ‘The sun shall no more be thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory’ (Isa. 60:19).

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

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

2. I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, if ye do account me a madman or a fool, yet 'as a fool bear with me.' It is utterly needful that someone should use great plainness of speech toward you. It is more especially needful at this time; for who knoweth but it is the last? Who knoweth how soon the righteous judge may say, 'I will no more be entreated for this people'? 'Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in this land, they should but deliver their own souls.' And who will use this plainness if I do not? Therefore I, even I, will speak. And I adjure you, by the living God, that ye steel not your breasts against receiving a blessing at my hands. Do not say in your heart, *Non persuadebis, etiamsi persuaseris*; or, in other words, Lord, thou shalt not 'send by whom thou wilt send'! Let me rather perish in my blood than be saved by this man!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lord, save, or we perish! Take us out of the mire, that we sink not! O help us against these enemies! For vain is the help of man. Unto thee all things are possible. According to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die. And preserve us in the manner that seemest thee good; not as we will, but as thou wilt!

Sermon: “The New Birth” by John Wesley

John 3:7

Ye must be born again.

1. If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental they are doubtless these two—the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth: the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature. In order of time neither of these is before the other. In the moment we are justified by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Jesus we are also ‘born of the Spirit’; but in order of thinking, as it is termed, justification precedes the new birth. We first conceive his wrath to be turned away, and then his Spirit to work in our hearts.

2. How great importance, then, must it be of to every child of man throughly to understand these fundamental doctrines! From a full conviction of this, many excellent men have wrote very largely concerning justification, explaining every point relating thereto, and opening the Scriptures which treat upon it. Many likewise have wrote on the new birth—and some of them largely enough—but yet not so clearly as might have been desired, nor so deeply and accurately; having either given a dark, abstruse account of it, or a slight and superficial one. Therefore a full and at the same time a clear account of the new birth seems to be wanting still. Such as may enable us to give a satisfactory answer to these three questions: First, why must we be born again? What is the foundation of this doctrine of the new birth? Secondly, how must we be born again? What is the nature of the new birth? And thirdly, wherefore must we be born again? To what end is it necessary? These questions, by the assistance of God, I shall briefly and plainly answer, and then subjoin a few inferences which will naturally follow.

I.1. And, first, why must we be born again? What is the foundation of this doctrine? The foundation of it lies near as deep as the creation of the world, in the scriptural account whereof we read, ‘And God’, the three-one God, ‘said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him’ (Gen. 1:26-27). Not barely in his natural image, a picture of his own immortality, a spiritual being endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections; nor merely in his political image, the governor of this lower world, having ‘dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth’; but chiefly in his moral image, which, according to the Apostle, is ‘righteousness and true holiness’ (Eph. 4:24). In this image of God was man made. ‘God is love:’ accordingly man at his creation was full of love, which was the sole principle of all his tempers, thoughts, words, and actions. God is full of justice, mercy, and truth: so was man as he came from the hands of his Creator. God is spotless purity: and so man was in the beginning pure from every sinful blot. Otherwise God could not have pronounced him as well as all the other works of his hands, ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31). This he could not have been had he not been pure from sin, and filled with righteousness and true holiness. For there is no medium. If we suppose an intelligent creature not to love God, not to be righteous and holy, we necessarily suppose him not to be good at all; much less to be ‘very good’.

2. But although man was made in the image of God, yet he was not made immutable. This would have been inconsistent with that state of trial in which God was pleased to place him. He was therefore created able to stand, and yet liable to fall. And this God himself apprised him of, and gave him a solemn warning against it. Nevertheless ‘man did not abide in honour.’ He fell from his high estate. He ‘ate of the tree whereof the Lord had commanded him, Thou shalt not eat thereof.’ By this wilful act of disobedience to his Creator, this flat rebellion against his sovereign, he openly declared that he would no longer have God to rule over him; that he would be governed by his own will, and not the will of him that created him, and that he would not seek his happiness in God, but in the world, in the works of his hands. Now God had told him before, ‘In the day that thou eatest’ of that fruit ‘thou shalt surely die.’ And the word of the Lord cannot be broken. Accordingly in that day he did die: he died to God, the most dreadful of all deaths. He lost the life of God: he was separated from him in union with whom his spiritual life consisted. The body dies when it is separated from the soul, the soul when it is separated from God. But this separation from God Adam sustained in the day, the hour, he ate of the forbidden fruit. And of this he gave immediate proof; presently showing by his behaviour that the love of God was extinguished in his soul, which was now ‘alienated from the life of God’. Instead of this he was now under the power of servile fear, so that he fled from the presence of the Lord. Yea, so little did he retain even of the knowledge of him who filleth heaven and earth that he endeavoured to ‘hide himself from the Lord God, among the trees of the garden’ (Gen. 3:8). So had he lost both the knowledge and the love of God, without which the image of God would not subsist. Of this therefore he was deprived at the same time, and became unholy as well as unhappy. In the room of this he had sunk into pride and self-will, the very image of the devil, and into sensual appetites and desires, the image of the beasts that perish.

3. If it be said, ‘Nay, but that threatening, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” refers to temporal death, and that alone, to the death of the body only;’ the answer is plain: to affirm this is flatly and palpably to make God a liar—to aver that the God of truth positively affirmed a thing contrary to truth. For it is evident Adam did not die in this sense ‘in the day that he ate thereof’. He lived, in the sense opposite to this death, above nine hundred years after; so that this cannot possibly be understood of the death of the body without impeaching the veracity of God. It must therefore be understood of spiritual death, the loss of the life and image of God.

4. And ‘in Adam all died,’ all humankind, all the children of men who were then in Adam’s loins. The natural consequence of this is that everyone descended from him comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God, wholly ‘dead in sin’; entirely void of the life of God, void of the image of God, of all that ‘righteousness and holiness’ wherein Adam was created. Instead of this every man born into the world now bears the image of the devil, in pride and self-will; the image of the beast, in sensual appetites and desires. This then is the foundation of the new birth—the entire corruption of our nature. Hence it is that being ‘born in sin’ we ‘must be born again’. Hence everyone that is born of a woman must be born of the Spirit of God.

II.1. But how must a man be born again? What is the nature of the new birth? This is the second question. And a question it is of the highest moment that can be conceived. We ought not, therefore, in so weighty a concern, to be content with a slight inquiry, but to examine it with all possible care, and to ponder it in our hearts, till we fully understand this important point, and clearly see how we are to be born again.

2. Not that we are to expect any minute, philosophical account of the manner how this is done. Our Lord sufficiently guards us against any such expectation by the words immediately following the text: wherein he reminds Nicodemus of as indisputable a fact as any in the whole compass of nature—which, notwithstanding, the wisest man under the sun is not able fully to explain. ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth’, not by thy power or wisdom, ‘and thou hearest the sound thereof.’ Thou art absolutely assured, beyond all doubt, that it doth blow. ‘But thou canst not tell whence it cometh, neither whither it goeth.’ The precise manner how it begins and ends, rises and falls, no man can tell. ‘So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.’ Thou mayst be as absolutely assured of the fact as of the blowing of the wind; but the precise manner how it is done, how the Holy Spirit works this in the soul, neither thou nor the wisest of the children of men is able to explain.

3. However, it suffices for every rational and Christian purpose that without descending into curious, critical inquiries, we can give a plain scriptural account of the nature of the new birth. This will satisfy every reasonable man who desires only the salvation of his soul. The expression, ‘being born again’, was not first used by our Lord in his conversation with Nicodemus. It was well known before that time, and was in common use among the Jews when our Saviour appeared among them. When an adult heathen was convinced that the Jewish religion was of God, and desired to join therein, it was the custom to baptize him first, before he was admitted to circumcision. And when he was baptized he was said to be ‘born again’: by which they meant that he who was before a child of the devil was now adopted into the family of God, and accounted one of his children. This expression therefore which Nicodemus, being ‘a teacher in Israel’, ought to have understood well, our Lord uses in conversing with him; only in a stronger sense than he was accustomed to. And this might be the reason of his asking, ‘How can these things be?’ They cannot be literally. ‘A man’ cannot ‘enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born’. But they may, spiritually. A man may be ‘born from above’, ‘born of God’, ‘born of the Spirit’—in a manner which bears a very near analogy to the natural birth.

4. Before a child is born into the world he has eyes, but sees not; he has ears, but does not hear. He has a very imperfect use of any other sense. He has no knowledge of any of the things of the world, nor any natural understanding. To that manner of existence which he then has we do not even give the name of life. It is then only when a man is born that we say, he begins to live. For as soon as he is born he begins to see the light and the various objects with which he is encompassed. His ears are then opened, and he hears the sounds which successively strike upon them. At the same time all the other organs of sense begin to be exercised upon their proper objects. He likewise breathes and lives in a manner wholly different from what he did before. How exactly does the parallel hold in all these instances! While a man is in a mere natural state, before he is born of God, he has, in a spiritual sense, eyes and sees not; a thick impenetrable veil lies upon them. He has ears, but hears not; he is utterly deaf to what he is most of all concerned to hear. His other spiritual senses are all locked up; he is in the same condition as if he had them not. Hence he has no knowledge of God, no intercourse with him; he is not at all acquainted with him. He has no true knowledge of the things of God, either of spiritual or eternal things. Therefore, though he is a living man, he is a dead Christian. But as soon as he is born of God there is a total change in all these particulars. The 'eyes of his understanding are opened' (such is the language of the great Apostle). And he who of old 'commanded light to shine out of darkness shining on his heart', he sees 'the light of the glory of God', his glorious love, 'in the face of Jesus Christ'. His ears being opened, he is now capable of hearing the inward voice of God, saying, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee:' 'Go and sin no more.' This is the purport of what God speaks to his heart; although perhaps not in these very words. He is now ready to hear whatsoever 'he that teacheth man knowledge' is pleased from time to time to reveal to him. He 'feels in his heart' (to use the language of our Church) 'the mighty working of the Spirit of God'. Not in a gross, carnal sense, as the men of the world stupidly and wilfully misunderstand the expression, though they have been told again and again, we mean thereby neither more nor less than this: he feels, is inwardly sensible of, the graces which the Spirit of God works in his heart. He feels, he is conscious of, a 'peace which passeth all understanding'. He many times feels such a joy in God as is 'unspeakable and full of glory'. He feels 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him'. And all his spiritual senses are then 'exercised to

discern' spiritual 'good and evil'. By the use of these he is daily increasing in the knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and of all the things pertaining to his inward kingdom. And now he may properly be said to live: God having quickened him by his Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ. He lives a life which the world knoweth not of, a 'life' which 'is hid with Christ in God'. God is continually breathing, as it were, upon his soul, and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven. And by this intercourse between God and man, this fellowship with the Father and the Son, as by a kind of spiritual respiration, the life of God in the soul is sustained: and the child of God grows up, till he comes to 'the full measure of the stature of Christ'.

5. From hence it manifestly appears what is the nature of the new birth. It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life: when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is 'created anew in Christ Jesus', when it is 'renewed after the image of God', 'in righteousness and true holiness', when the love of the world is changed into the love of God, pride into humility, passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice, into a sincere, tender, disinterested love for all mankind. In a word, it is that change whereby the 'earthly, sensual, devilish' mind is turned into 'the mind which was in Christ'. This is the nature of the new birth. 'So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.'

III.1. It is not difficult for any who has considered these things to see the necessity of the new birth, and to answer the third question: Wherefore, to what ends, is it necessary that we should be born again? It is very easily discerned that this is necessary, first, in order to holiness. For what is holiness, according to the oracles of God? Not a bare external religion, a round of outward duties, how many soever they be, and how exactly soever performed. No; gospel holiness is no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart. It is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus. It consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one. It implies such a continual, thankful love to him who hath not withheld from us his Son, his only Son, as makes it natural, and in a manner necessary to us, to love every child of man; as fills us with 'bowels of mercies, kindness, gentleness, long-suffering'. It is such a love of God as teaches us to be blameless in all manner of conversation; as enables us to present our souls and bodies, all we are and all we have, all our thoughts, words, and actions, a continual sacrifice to God, acceptable through Christ Jesus. Now this holiness can have no existence till we are renewed in the image of our mind. It cannot commence in the soul till that change be wrought, till by the power of the highest overshadowing us we are brought 'from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God'; that is, till we are born again; which therefore is absolutely necessary in order to holiness.

2. But ‘without holiness no man shall see the Lord,’ shall see the face of God in glory. Of consequence the new birth is absolutely necessary in order to eternal salvation. Men may indeed flatter themselves (so desperately wicked and so deceitful is the heart of man!) that they may live in their sins till they come to the last gasp, and yet afterward live with God. And thousands do really believe that they have found a ‘broad way which leadeth’ not ‘to destruction’. What danger, say they, can a woman be in, that is so harmless and so virtuous? What fear is there that so honest a man, one of so strict morality, should miss of heaven? Especially if over and above all this they constantly attend on church and sacrament. One of these will ask with all assurance, ‘What, shall not I do as well as my neighbours?’ Yes, as well as your unholy neighbours; as well as your neighbours that die in their sins. For you will all drop into the pit together, into the nethermost hell. You will all lie together in the lake of fire, ‘the lake of fire burning with brimstone’. Then at length you will see (but God grant you may see it before!) the necessity of holiness in order to glory—and consequently of the new birth, since none can be holy except he be born again.

3. For the same reason, except he be born again none can be happy even in this world. For it is not possible in the nature of things that a man should be happy who is not holy. Even the poor ungodly poet could tell us,

Nemo malus felix—

no wicked man is happy. The reason is plain: all unholy tempers are uneasy tempers. Not only malice, hatred, envy, jealousy, revenge, create a present hell in the breast, but even the softer passions, if not kept within due bounds, give a thousand times more pain than pleasure. Even ‘hope’, when ‘deferred’ (and how often must this be the case!) ‘maketh the heart sick.’ And every desire which is not according to the will of God is liable to ‘pierce us through with many sorrows’. And all those general sources of sin, pride, self-will, and idolatry, are, in the same proportion as they prevail, general sources of misery. Therefore as long as these reign in any soul happiness has no place there. But they must reign till the bent of our nature is changed, that is, till we are born again. Consequently the new birth is absolutely necessary in order to happiness in this world, as well as in the world to come.

IV. I proposed in the last place to subjoin a few inferences which naturally follow from the preceding observations.

1. And, first, it follows that baptism is not the new birth: they are not one and the same thing. Many indeed seem to imagine they are just the same; at least, they speak as if they thought so. But I do not know that this opinion is publicly avowed by any denomination of Christians whatever. Certainly it is not by any within these kingdoms, whether of the Established Church, or dissenting from it. The judgment of the latter is clearly declared in their Larger Catechism: ‘Q. What are the parts of a sacrament? A. The parts of a sacrament are two: the one, an outward and sensible sign [. . .]; the other, an inward and spiritual grace thereby signified: [. . .] Q. What is baptism? A. Baptism is a sacrament [. . .] wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water [. . .] to be a sign and seal of [. . .] regeneration by his Spirit’ (Qq. 163, 165). Here it is manifest [that] baptism, the sign, is spoken of as distinct from regeneration, the thing signified.

In the Church Catechism likewise the judgment of our Church is declared with the utmost clearness. ‘What meanest thou by this word, “sacrament”? I mean an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. [. . .] What is the outward part or form in baptism? Water, wherein the person is baptized, “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”. What is the inward part or thing signified? A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.’ Nothing therefore is plainer than that, according to the Church of England, baptism is not the new birth.

But indeed the reason of the thing is so clear and evident as not to need any other authority. For what can be more plain than that the one is an external, the other an internal work? That the one is a visible, the other an invisible thing, and therefore wholly different from each other: the one being an act of man, purifying the body, the other a change wrought by God in the soul. So that the former is just as distinguishable from the latter as the soul from the body, or water from the Holy Ghost.

2. From the preceding reflections we may, secondly, observe that as the new birth is not the same thing with baptism, so it does not always accompany baptism; they do not constantly go together. A man may possibly be 'born of water', and yet not be 'born of the Spirit'. There may sometimes be the outward sign where there is not the inward grace. I do not now speak with regard to infants: it is certain, our Church supposes that all who are baptized in their infancy are at the same time born again. And it is allowed that the whole office for the baptism of infants proceeds upon this supposition. Nor is it an objection of any weight against this that we cannot comprehend how this work can be wrought in infants: for neither can we comprehend how it is wrought in a person of riper years. But whatever be the case with infants, it is sure all of riper years who are baptized are not at the same time born again. 'The tree is known by its fruits.' And hereby it appears too plain to be denied that divers of those who were children of the devil before they were baptized continue the same after baptism: 'For the works of' their 'father they do'; they continue servants of sin, without any pretence either to inward or outward holiness.

3. A third inference which we may draw from what has been observed is that the new birth is not the same with sanctification. This is indeed taken for granted by many; particularly by an eminent writer in his late treatise on 'the nature and grounds of Christian regeneration'. To waive several other weighty objections which might be made to that tract, this is a palpable one: it all along speaks of regeneration as a progressive work carried on in the soul by slow degrees from the time of our first turning to God. This is undeniably true of sanctification; but of regeneration, the new birth, it is not true. This is a part of sanctification, not the whole; it is the gate of it, the entrance into it. When we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness, begins. And thenceforward we are gradually to 'grow up in him who is our head'. This expression of the Apostle admirably illustrates the difference between one and the other, and farther points out the exact analogy there is between natural and spiritual things. A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time. Afterward he gradually and slowly grows till he attains the stature of a man. In like manner a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ. The same relation therefore which there is between our natural birth and our growth there is also between our new birth and our sanctification.

4. One point more we may learn from the preceding observations. But it is a point of so great importance as may excuse the considering it the more carefully, and prosecuting it at some length. What must one who loves the souls of men, and is grieved that any of them should perish, say to one whom he sees living in sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, or any other wilful sin? What can he say, if the foregoing observations are true, but 'you must be born again.' 'No', says a zealous man, 'that cannot be. How can you talk so uncharitably to the man? Has he not been baptized already? He cannot be born again now.' Can he not be born again? Do you affirm this? Then he cannot be saved. Though he be as old as Nicodemus was, yet, 'except he be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Therefore in saying, 'he cannot be born again,' you in effect deliver him over to damnation. And where lies the uncharitableness now? On my side, or on yours? I say, 'He may be born again, and so become an heir of salvation.' You say, 'He cannot be born again.' And if so, he must inevitably perish. So you utterly block up his way to salvation, and send him to hell out of mere charity!

But perhaps the sinner himself, to whom in real charity we say, 'You must be born again,' has been taught to say, 'I defy your new doctrine; I need not be born again. I was born again when I was baptized. What! Would you have me deny my baptism?' I answer, first, there is nothing under heaven which can excuse a lie. Otherwise I should say to an open sinner, 'If you have been baptized, do not own it.' For how highly does this aggravate your guilt! How will it increase your damnation! Was you devoted to God at eight days old, and have you been all these years devoting yourself to the devil? Was you, even before you had the use of reason, consecrated to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? And have you, ever since you had the use of it, been flying in the face of God, and consecrating yourself to Satan? Does the abomination of desolation, the love of the world, pride, anger, lust, foolish desire, and a whole train of vile affections, stand where it ought not? Have you set up all these accursed things in that soul which was once a 'temple of the Holy Ghost'? Set apart for 'an habitation of God through the Spirit'? Yea, solemnly given up to him? And do you glory in this, that you once belonged to God? O, be ashamed! Blush! Hide yourself in the earth! Never boast more of what ought to fill you with confusion, to make you ashamed before God and man! I answer, secondly, you have already denied your baptism; and that in the most effectual manner. You have denied it a thousand and a thousand times; and you do so still day by day. For in your baptism you renounced the devil and all his works. Whenever therefore you give place to him again, whenever you do any of the works of the devil, then you deny your baptism. Therefore you deny it by every wilful sin; by every act of uncleanness, drunkenness, or revenge; by every obscene or profane word; by every oath that comes out of your mouth. Every time you profane the day of the Lord you thereby deny your baptism; yea, every time you do anything to another which you would not he should do to you. I answer, thirdly, be you baptized or unbaptized, you must be born again. Otherwise it is not possible you should be inwardly holy: and without inward as well as outward holiness you cannot be happy even in this world; much less in the world to come. Do you say, 'Nay, but I do no harm to any man; I am honest and just in all my dealings; I do not curse, or take the Lord's name in vain; I do not profane the Lord's day; I am no drunkard, I do not slander my neighbour, nor live in any wilful sin'? If this be so, it were much to be wished that all men went as far as you do. But you must go farther yet, or you cannot be saved. Still you must be born again. Do you add, 'I do go farther yet;

for I not only do no harm, but do all the good I can.’ I doubt that fact; I fear you have had a thousand opportunities of doing good which you have suffered to pass by unimproved, and for which therefore you are accountable to God. But if you had improved them all, if you really had done all the good you possibly could to all men, yet this does not at all alter the case. Still you must be born again. Without this nothing will do any good to your poor, sinful, polluted soul. ‘Nay, but I constantly attend all the ordinances of God: I keep to my church and sacrament.’ It is well you do. But all this will not keep you from hell, except you be born again. Go to church twice a day, go to the Lord’s table every week, say ever so many prayers in private; hear ever so many sermons, good sermons, excellent sermons, the best that ever were preached; read ever so many good books—still you must be born again. None of these things will stand in the place of the new birth. No, nor anything under heaven. Let this, therefore, if you have not already experienced this inward work of God, be your continual prayer, ‘Lord, add this to all thy blessings: let me be “born again”. Deny whatever thou pleasest, but deny not this: let me be “born from above”.

‘Take away whatsoever seemeth thee good, reputation, fortune, friends, health. Only give me this: to be “born of the Spirit”! To be received among the children of God. Let me be born, “not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”. And then let me daily “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”!’

Sermon: “Marks of the New Birth” by John Wesley

John 3:8

So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.

1. How is everyone 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 the preceding verse the being ‘born of water and of the Spirit’) we know; but we would know what these privileges are. What is ‘the new birth’?

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

I.1. The first of these (and the foundation of all the rest) is faith. So St. Paul, ‘Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:26). So St. John, ‘To them gave he power’ (, 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 their 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 reject all 'confidence in the flesh'; that, 'having nothing to pay', having no trust in his own works or righteousness of any kind, he come 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 for us 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 the 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'—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 3:1-2, 9). But some men will say, "True; "whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1 John 3:6) 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 , this artful method of deceiving, the precious promise is utterly lost; by this , this 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.' To his enforcement of this important doctrine he premises an highly necessary caution: 'Little children, let no man deceive you' (for many will endeavour so to do; to persuade you that you may be unrighteous, that you may commit sin, and yet be children of God). 'He that doth 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' (1 John 3:7-10). By this plain mark (the committing or not committing sin) are they distinguished from each other. To the same effect are those words in his fifth chapter. 'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not' (1 John 3:18).

7. Another fruit of this living faith is peace. For ‘being justified by faith’, having all our sins blotted out, ‘we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:1). This indeed our Lord himself, the night before his death, solemnly bequeathed to all his followers. ‘Peace (saith he) I leave with you;’ (you who ‘believe in God’, and ‘believe also in me’) ‘my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid’ (John 14:27). And again, ‘These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace’ (John 16:33). This is that ‘peace of God which passeth all understanding’; that serenity of soul which it hath not entered into the heart of a natural man to conceive, and which it is not possible for even the spiritual man to utter. And it is a peace which all the powers of earth and hell are unable to take from him. Waves and storms beat upon it, but they shake it not; for it is founded upon a rock. It keepeth the hearts and minds of the children of God at all times and in all places. Whether they are in ease or in pain, in sickness or health, in abundance or want, they are happy in God. In every state they have learned to be content, yea, to give thanks unto God through Christ Jesus; being well assured that ‘whatsoever is, is best;’ because it is his will concerning them. So that in all the vicissitudes of life their ‘heart standeth fast, believing in the Lord’.

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

2. This hope (termed in the Epistle to the Hebrews [Heb. 10:22], and elsewhere [Heb. 6:11]—in our translation, the ‘full assurance of faith’, and the ‘full assurance of hope’; expressions the best which our language could afford, although far weaker than those in the original), as described in Scripture, implies, (1): the testimony of our own spirit or conscience that we walk ‘in simplicity and godly sincerity’; but, secondly and chiefly, 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’—‘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 be also 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’ (Rom. 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 have we one hope also. We and you are sealed with one ‘Spirit of promise’, the earnest of yours and of our inheritance: the same Spirit bearing witness with yours and with our spirit, ‘that we are the children of God’.

5. And thus is the Scripture fulfilled: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' For 'tis 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' (Rom. 5:11): 'by whom we have access into this grace'; this state of grace, of favour, of reconciliation with God, 'wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' 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 Pet. 1:3-8). 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 consolation of his Spirit doth much more abound: insomuch that the sons of God 'laugh at destruction when it cometh'; at want, pain, hell and the grave; as knowing him who 'hath the keys of death and hell', and will shortly 'cast them into the bottomless pit'; as hearing even now the 'great voice out of heaven' saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away' (Rev. 21:3-4).

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

2. And in this sense also ‘everyone 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’ (Cant. 2:16). ‘Thou art fairer than the children of men; full of grace are thy lips, because God hath anointed thee for ever!’ (Ps. 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. We ought’, then, as the Apostle justly infers, ‘to lay down our lives for our brethren’ (1 John 3:16). 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 our 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 everyone 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 the heart, but barely a course of outward works? To mention so wild an interpretation of the Apostle’s words is sufficiently to confute it. The plain indisputable meaning of that text is: ‘this is the’ sign or proof of the ‘love of God’, of our keeping the first and great commandment—to keep the rest of his commandments. For true love, if it be once shed abroad in our heart, will constrain us so to do; since whosoever loves God with all his heart cannot but serve him with all his strength.

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

IV.1. Thus have I plainly laid down those marks of the new birth which I find laid down in Scripture. Thus doth God himself answer that weighty question what it is to be born of God.

Such, if the appeal be made to the oracles of God, is ‘everyone 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 evermore 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 you are 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 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 of the preceding characters belong, '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 you 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 any help, without hope. And perhaps some may think this just and right. In their zeal for the Lord of Hosts they may say, 'Yea, cut off the sinners, the Amalekites! Let these Gibeonites be utterly destroyed! They deserve no less.' No; nor I, nor you—mine and your desert, as well as theirs, is hell. And it is mere mercy, free undeserved mercy, that we are not now in unquenchable fire. You will say, 'But we are washed, we were born again of water and of the Spirit.' So were they. This therefore hinders not at all, but that ye may now be even as they. Know ye not that 'what is highly esteemed of men is an abomination in the sight of God'? Come forth, ye 'saints of the world', ye that are honoured of men, and see who will cast the first stone at them, at these wretches not fit to live upon the earth, these common harlots, adulterers, murderers. Only learn ye first what that meaneth, 'He that hateth his brother is a murderer' (1 John 3:15)—'He that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matt. 5:28)—'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?' (Jas. 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'!

6. Amen, Lord Jesus! May everyone 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 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'!

CHURCH

NEW FRIENDS

Almost ten years after I accepted Jesus and the forgiveness he freely gives, I found my life begin to change dramatically. I was changing the kind of music I listened to. I was reading more. I even found myself hanging out with a different group of people.

I need this new group of friends to hold me accountable. I need this group of friends to remind me of the beauty and grace of Jesus. I need this group of friends to remind me who I am. It's not just a one-way relationship. These people also got me as a new friend, and I can do all that for them.

In the community, we can truly live out who we are called to be. We need community. I have found my mind will become focused on anything other than Jesus if I am by myself for too long. This means I may return to an old way of thinking or living. Which is scary to me but also a reminder of God's grace continually working in and through me, especially through the group of friends, to be constant, tangible reminders of who I am.

You need this kind of group as well. You can't do everything yourself, or you may not like what your friends say or do to hold you accountable. But just like we cannot save ourselves from ourselves, we cannot fully live into all God says we are if we try to do this on our own.

We need others to remind us, and we need others to be there for us; we need others who can rely on us. We need each other.

I am constantly grateful for my friends and the life they let me live. Knowing God has great things in store for me and my friends is a joy. God has great things in store for you as well.

Before you start with this chapter, I invite you to take time and pray for your friends and God to make sure you have the best people you need.

Lord God, I cannot do this life without you. I cannot do this life without friends. Your word even says, "it is not good for man to be alone." I praise You for the friends you have given me so far, and I ask you to help me be the friend others need to be an instrument of Your grace. Please help me to receive the friends you bring into my path. All praise and glory to you, O God. Amen.

CHURCH

Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 2:8-9

LOCATION: Fire Station

DEFINE “church”

How has your particular church (community of faith) guided and aided your faith development? In other words, how has this church helped you grow in your faith?

What would you like to see done to help the future generation know Jesus?

One of the things I LOVE about the church is how the church lives in and for mission in the world...to make disciples of Jesus Christ...to be God’s transformative agent in the world. The church gives each individual a purpose to live out.

Remember, we’ve said there are three questions every person has to have answered to understand better themselves and their original design by God—WHO AM I? WHOSE AM I? WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?

Now, think about yourself. WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE? How do you know this is your purpose? Is God being glorified? Does God get the credit for your work, or do you alone?

Think about a fire department. The Church gets to shower the community and the world with the life-saving water of Jesus Christ. The Church gets to work toward healing and wholeness and save lives from destruction.

INTRODUCTION

The Church is an interesting organism in the world. Many people say they do not need the church. Many people have been hurt by the church. Many people use the church. There are many people who obsess about the church and about “traditions” and such. These people want the church to be like it was when they were kids (all generations will feel this way at some point).

A hard truth we need to see is that in every one of those descriptions of the church, people have made the church about themselves, their preferences, and their source of anger/hurt. They have not made the church about Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12 says the Church is the “Body of Christ.” St. Teresa of Avila explains the church is “the hands and feet of Christ.” This should make clear that the Church is not about me but about Jesus, his community, and his mission.

So, how should we think about the church? What is the Church? Theologian and missiologist Christopher Wright reminds us the Church is God’s mission in the world. In other words, the Church is the instrument God uses to make His plans come to fruition. God is using the Church to reach out and work with God to transform the world. The best part? We do not do this alone.

The Church is guided, directed, empowered, provided for, and strengthened by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

This means the Church belongs to God and does the work of Jesus in the world. The Greek word (ekklesia) talks about a called out, set apart people. This is a gathering of people. The Church is a community. We need each other. We cannot do everything alone, but we can do more together. This is why I believe the best way to live out our faith is in community, connected with each other and other Churches working toward the same goal.

So what does the Church do? How does the Church act? How does the Church get strengthened?

READ ACTS 2:42-47

What stands out to you?

Use your own words; what does the Church do?

Does Acts 2:42-47 paint a realistic goal of how the Church should act and be?

What holds the Church back today?

So let's work with this definition of Church:

The Church is a community of believers gathered together to study God's Word, pray for and with each other and the world, practice the means of grace together, partake in the Lord's Supper together, and reach out with God's love to a hurting and broken world to work with God for transformation.

Does this definition cover it well enough? What's missing?

As we look at Acts 2:43, something stands out to me. The people were in awe of the signs and wonders God was performing in the midst of the community. When was the last time you saw a tangible, outward manifestation of the presence of God within your community of faith?

If we don't see the signs and wonders as often as we would like, do we expect God to show up and show off? Think about that. When God's people are united in their faith, mission, and passion for God, their eyes are open, and God can more clearly be seen and heard.

MEANS OF GRACE

John Wesley calls spiritual disciplines "means of grace" because these are means by which we can purposely experience the grace of God.

The spiritual list includes:

Prayer

Fasting

Study the Scriptures

Worship

The Lord's Supper (as often as possible)

There is also a missional/social holiness list:

This is working towards justice and lifting others up.

We do all of this because we live out our identity. This is why we must know WHO I AM, WHO I BELONG TO, because these truths point us to our purpose.

So, what is our purpose? To live out our faith/holiness in the world.
Remember our identity:

READ 1 PETER 2:8-9

As we live out this identity, we live out our purpose. As we live out our purpose, God is glorified.

QUESTIONS:

1. What is challenging about relinquishing control to the Holy Spirit and letting him guide the Church?
2. Is the Church living up to her purpose to glorify God in the world?
3. How is God calling you to live out your identity in the world?

SO WHAT IS THE POINT?

God makes it clear who his people are, who they belong to, and what their purpose is. The point is to live in a way that glorifies God with everything we have and are.

The Church exists to be the Body of Christ in the world and to show the world the kingdom of Heaven all around us. The Church points people to Christ by making disciples of Jesus and showing the world Jesus is the true Lord and Master.

We live with and for Christ. We do the mission and work of Jesus. We follow Jesus' example of doing what he sees the Father doing (John 5).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In your own words, now describe the Church.
2. Does the Church live up to the definition you just gave?
3. What do you think is the role God has given you in the Church?

Here is a link to see what your Spiritual Gifts are:

<https://gifts.churchgrowth.org/spiritual-gifts-survey/>

I invite you to take the quiz (it's about you, so you'll easily pass!) and share your results with another person, your church. This is to help show how the Holy Spirit has equipped and worked in and through you for his work in the world.

MISSION OPPORTUNITY: Find a way to put your Spiritual Gifts to work. Start a small group. Pray for others. Plan a party, or show some hospitality to another person. Let the Holy Spirit guide you in ways you never dreamed to reach the world through the gifts you have been given.

Sermon: “The Almost Christian” by John Wesley

Acts 26:28

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

And many there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was in the world there have been many in every age and nation who were ‘almost persuaded to be Christians’. But seeing it avails nothing before God to go only thus far, it highly imports us to consider, First, what is implied in being almost, Secondly, what in being altogether a Christian.

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. He that hath the form of godliness uses also the means of grace; yea, all of them, and at all opportunities. He constantly frequents the house of God; and that not as the manner of some is, who come into the presence of the Most High either loaded with gold and costly apparel, or in all the gaudy vanity of dress, and either by their unseasonable civilities to each other or the impertinent gaiety of their behaviour disclaim all pretensions to the form as well as to the power of godliness. Would to God there were none, even among ourselves, who fall under the same condemnation: who come into his house, it may be, gazing about, or with all the signs of the most listless, careless indifference, though sometimes they may seem to use a prayer to God for his blessing on what they are entering upon; who during that awful service are either asleep or reclined in the most convenient posture for it; or, as though they supposed God was asleep, talking with one another, or looking round, as utterly void of employment. Neither let these be accused of the form of godliness. No: he who has even this behaves with seriousness and attention in every part of that solemn service. More especially when he approaches the table of the Lord it is not with a light or careless behaviour, but with an air, gesture, and deportment which speaks nothing else but 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!'

8. To this if we add the constant use of family prayer by those who are masters of families, and the setting times apart for private addresses to God, with a daily serious-

ness of behaviour—he who uniformly practises this outward religion has the form of godliness. There needs but one thing more in order to his being ‘almost a Christian’, and that is, sincerity.

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

Oderunt peccare boni virtutis amore; Oderunt peccare mali formidine poenae.⁵

So that if a man only abstains from doing evil in order to avoid punishment,

Non pasces in cruce corvos

saith the pagan—there, ‘thou hast thy reward’. But even he will not allow such a harmless man as this to be so much as a good heathen. If then any man from the same motive (viz. to avoid punishment, to avoid the loss of his friends, or his gain, or his reputation) should not only abstain from doing evil but also do ever so much good—yea, and use all the means of grace—yet we could not with any propriety say, this man is even ‘almost a Christian’. If he has no better principle in his heart he is only a hypocrite altogether.

10. Sincerity therefore is necessarily implied in the being ‘almost a Christian’: a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will. It is necessarily implied that a man have a sincere view of pleasing God in all things: in all his conversation, in all his actions; in all he does or leaves undone. This design, if any man be ‘almost a Christian’, runs through the whole tenor of his life. This is the moving principle both in his doing good, his abstaining from evil, and his using the ordinances of God.

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

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

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

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

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

(II).2. The second thing implied in the being ‘altogether a Christian’ is the love of our neighbour. For thus said our Lord in the following words: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’ If any man ask, ‘Who is my neighbour?’ we reply, ‘Every man in the world; every child of his who is “the Father of the spirits of all flesh”.’ Nor may we in any wise except our enemies, or the enemies of God and their own souls. But every Christian loveth these also as himself; yea, ‘as Christ loved us’. He that would more fully understand what manner of love this is may consider St. Paul’s description of it. It is ‘long-suffering and kind. It envieth not. It is not rash or hasty in judging. It is not puffed up,’ but maketh him that loves, the least, the servant of all. Love ‘doth not behave itself unseemly’, but ‘becometh all things to all men’. She ‘seeketh not her own’, but only the good of others, that they may be saved. Love ‘is not provoked’. It casteth out wrath, which he who hath is wanting in love. It ‘thinketh no evil’. It ‘rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth’. It ‘covereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things’.

(III).3. There is yet one thing more that may be separately considered, though it cannot actually be separate from the preceding, which is implied in the being ‘altogether a Christian’, and that is the ground of all, even faith. Very excellent things are spoken of this throughout the oracles of God. ‘Everyone’, saith the beloved disciple, ‘that believeth, is born of God.’ ‘To as many as received him gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.’ And, ‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.’ Yea, our Lord himself declares, ‘He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life;’ and ‘cometh not into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life’.

4. But here let no man deceive his own soul. It is diligently to be noted, the ‘faith which bringeth not forth repentance’ and love, and all good works, is not that ‘right living faith’ which is here spoken of, ‘but a dead and devilish one. . . . For even the devils believe that Christ was born of a virgin, that he wrought all kind of miracles, declaring himself very God; that for our sakes he suffered a most painful death, to redeem us from death everlasting; that he rose again the third day; that he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, and at the end of the world shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. These articles of our faith the devils believe, and so they believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament. And yet for all this faith, they be but devils. They remain still in their damnable estate, lacking the very true Christian faith.’³⁷

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sermon: “The Means of Grace” by John Wesley

Malachi 3:7

Ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. We allow likewise that all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all, cannot conduce in any degree either to the knowledge or love of God. Without controversy, the help that is done upon earth, he doth it himself. It is he alone who, by his own almighty power, worketh in us what is pleasing in his sight. And all outward things, unless he work in them and by them, are mere weak and beggarly elements. Whosoever therefore imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God. We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord's Supper; but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby through any of these there is any blessing conveyed to our soul. We know likewise that he is able to give the same grace, though there were no means on the face of the earth. In this sense we may affirm that with regard to God there is no such thing as means, seeing he is equally able to work whatsoever pleaseth him by any or by none at all.

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

5. Yet once more. We allow (though it is a melancholy truth) that a large proportion of those who are called Christians do to this day abuse the means of grace to the destruction of their souls. This is doubtless the case with all those who rest content in the form of godliness without the power. Either they fondly presume they are Christians already, because they do thus and thus, although Christ was never yet revealed in their hearts, nor the love of God shed abroad therein: or else they suppose they shall infallibly be so, barely because they use these means; idly dreaming (though perhaps hardly conscious thereof) either that there is some kind of power therein whereby sooner or later (they know not when) they shall certainly be made holy; or that there is a sort of merit in using them, which will surely move God to give them holiness or accept them without it.

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

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

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

And in fact he hath not left us undetermined; he hath shown us the way wherein we should go. We have only to consult the oracles of God, to inquire what is written there. And if we simply abide by their decision, there can no possible doubt remain.

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

And first, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer. This is the express direction of our Lord himself.

In his Sermon upon the Mount, after explaining at large wherein religion consists, and describing the main branches of it, he adds: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened' (Matt. 7:7-8). Here we are in the plainest manner directed to ask in order to, or as a means of, receiving; to seek in order to find the grace of God, the pearl of great price; and to knock, to continue asking and seeking, if we would enter into his kingdom.

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

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

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

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

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

If it be objected, 'But this is no direction to unbelievers, to them who know not the pardoning grace of God; for the Apostle adds, "But let him ask in faith"; otherwise, "let him not think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."' I answer, the meaning of the word 'faith' in this place is fixed by the Apostle himself (as if it were on purpose to obviate this objection) in the words immediately following: 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering,' nothing doubting, —not doubting God heareth his prayer, and will fulfil the desire of his heart.

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

7. Secondly, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in ‘searching the Scriptures’.

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

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

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

8. And that this is a means whereby God not only gives, but also confirms and increases true wisdom, we learn from the words of St. Paul to Timothy: 'From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3:15). The same truth (namely, that this is the great means God has ordained for conveying his manifold grace to man) is delivered, in the fullest manner that can be conceived, in the words which immediately follow: 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' (consequently, all Scripture is infallibly true), 'and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;' to the end 'that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

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

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

11. Thirdly, all who desire an increase of the grace of God are to wait for it in partaking of the Lord's Supper. For this also is a direction himself hath given: "The same night in which he was betrayed, he took bread, and brake it, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body' (that is, the sacred sign of my body). 'This do in remembrance of me. Likewise he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the New Testament' (or covenant) 'in my blood' (the sacred sign of that covenant): 'this do ye . . . in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till he come' (1 Cor. 11:23-26)—ye openly exhibit the same by these visible signs, before God, and angels, and men; ye manifest your solemn remembrance of his death, till he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Nay, if you are troubled when you leave them off, it is plain you trusted in them.' By no means. If I am troubled when I wilfully disobey God, it is plain his Spirit is still striving with me. But if I am not troubled at wilful sin, it is plain I am given up to a reprobate mind. But what do you mean by 'trusting in them'? Looking for the blessing of God therein? Believing that if I wait in this way I shall attain what otherwise I should not? So I do. And so I will, God being my helper, even to my life's end. By the grace of God I will thus trust in them till the day of my death; that is, I will believe that whatever God hath promised he is faithful also to perform. And seeing he hath promised to bless me in this way, I trust it shall be according to his Word.

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

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

3. It has been vehemently objected, thirdly, that Christ is the only means of grace. I answer, this is mere playing upon words. Explain your term, and the objection vanishes away. When we say, ‘Prayer is a means of grace,’ we understand a channel through which the grace of God is conveyed. When you say, ‘Christ is the means of grace,’ you understand the sole price and purchaser of it; or, that ‘no man cometh unto the Father, but through him.’ And who denies it? But this is utterly wide of the question.

4. But does not the Scripture (it has been objected, fourthly) direct us to wait for salvation? Does not David say, ‘My soul waiteth upon God; for of him cometh my salvation’? And does not Isaiah teach us the same thing, saying, ‘O Lord, [. . .] we have waited for thee’? All this cannot be denied. Seeing it is the gift of God, we are undoubtedly to wait on him for salvation. But how shall we wait? If God himself has appointed a way, can you find a better way of waiting for him? But that he hath appointed a way hath been shown at large, and also what that way is. The very words of the Prophet which you cite put this out of the question. For the whole sentence runs thus: ‘In the way of thy judgments’ (or ordinances), ‘O Lord, have we waited for thee’ (Isa. 26:8). And in the very same way did David wait, as his own words abundantly testify: ‘I have waited for thy saving health, O Lord, and have kept thy law.’ ‘Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end.’

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

Let us examine the Scriptures to which you refer. The first of them, with the context, runs thus: ‘And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes . . . , and they were sore afraid. [. . .] And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not: stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. [. . .] And the Lord said unto Moses, [. . .] Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward. But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea’ (Exod. 14:10-11, 13, 15-16).

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

The other passage wherein this expression occurs stands thus: ‘There came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee, from beyond the sea. [. . .] And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord; even out of all the cities they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation, in the house of the Lord. . . . Then upon Jahaziel [. . .] came the Spirit of the Lord. . . . And he said, . . . Be not dismayed by reason of this great multitude. . . . Tomorrow go ye down against them; [. . .] ye shall not need to fight in this battle. Set yourselves: stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord. . . . And they rose early in the morning and went forth. [. . .] And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Moab, Ammon, and Mount Seir, . . . and everyone helped to destroy another.’
(2 Chron. 20:2-5, 14-17, 20, 22-23)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. As to the manner of using them, whereon indeed it wholly depends whether they should convey any grace at all to the user, it behoves us, first, always to retain a lively sense that God is above all means. Have a care therefore of limiting the Almighty. He doth whatsoever and whensoever it pleaseth him. He can convey his grace, either in or out of any of the means which he hath appointed. Perhaps he will. ‘Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?’ Look then every moment for his appearing! Be it at the hour you are employed in his ordinances; or before, or after that hour; or when you are hindered therefrom—he is not hindered. He is always ready; always able, always willing to save. ‘It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good!’

Secondly, before you use any means let it be deeply impressed on your soul: There is no power in this. It is in itself a poor, dead, empty thing: separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow. Neither is there any merit in my using this, nothing intrinsically pleasing to God, nothing whereby I deserve any favour at his hands, no, not a drop of water to cool my tongue. But because God bids, therefore I do; because he directs me to wait in this way, therefore here I wait for his free mercy, whereof cometh my salvation.

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

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

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

Lastly, after you have used any of these, take care how you value yourself thereon; how you congratulate yourself as having done some great thing. This is turning all into poison. Think, 'If God was not there, what does this avail? Have I not been adding sin to sin?'

How long, O Lord! Save, or I perish! O lay not this sin to my charge!'
If God was there, if his love flowed into your heart, you have forgot, as it were, the outward work. You see, you know, you feel, God is all in all. Be abased. Sink down before him. Give him all the praise. Let God 'in all things be glorified through Christ Jesus'. Let 'all your bones cry out', 'My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: With my mouth will I ever be telling of thy truth, from one generation to another!'

Sermon: “Catholic Spirit” by John Wesley

2 Kings 10:15

And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him. And he saluted him and said, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand.

1. It is allowed even by those who do not pay this great debt that love is due to all mankind, the royal law, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,’ carrying its own evidence to all that hear it. And that, not according to the miserable construction put upon it by the zealots of old times, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour,’ thy relation, acquaintance, friend, ‘and hate thine enemy.’ Not so. ‘I say unto you,’ said our Lord, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children’—may appear so to all mankind—‘of your Father which is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’

2. But it is sure, there is a peculiar love which we owe to those that love God. So David: ‘All my delight is upon the saints that are in the earth, and upon such as excel in virtue.’ And so a greater than he: ‘A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another’ (John 13:34-35). This is that love on which the Apostle John so frequently and strongly insists. ‘This,’ said he, ‘is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another’ (1 John 3:11). ‘Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. And we ought,’ if love should call us thereto, ‘to lay down our lives for the brethren’ (1 John 3:16). And again, ‘Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love’ (1 John 4:7-8). ‘Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another’ (1 John 4:10-11).

3. All men approve of this. But do all men practise it? Daily experience shows the contrary. Where are even the Christians who ‘love one another, as he hath given us commandment’? How many hindrances lie in the way! The two grand, general hindrances are, first, that they can’t all think alike; and in consequence of this, secondly, they can’t all walk alike; but in several smaller points their practice must differ in proportion to the difference of their sentiments.

4. But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we can’t think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.

5. Surely in this respect the example of Jehu himself, as mixed a character as he was of, is well worthy both the attention and imitation of every serious Christian. ‘And when he was departed thence, he lighted on Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him. And he saluted him and said, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is. If it be, give me thine hand.’

The text naturally divides itself into two parts. First a question proposed by Jehu to Jehonadab, ‘Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?’ Secondly, an offer made on Jehonadab’s answering, ‘It is.’—‘If it be, give me thine hand.’

I.1. And, first, let us consider the question proposed by Jehu to Jehonadab, ‘Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?’

The very first thing we may observe in these words is that here is no inquiry concerning Jehonadab's opinions. And yet 'tis certain he held some which were very uncommon, indeed quite peculiar to himself; and some which had a close influence upon practice, on which likewise he laid so great a stress as to entail them upon his children's children, to their latest posterity. This is evident from the account given by Jeremiah, many years after his death. 'I took Jaazaniah and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; . . . and set before them pots full of wine, and cups, and said unto them, Drink ye wine. But they said, We will drink no wine; for Jonadab (or Jehonadab) the son of Rechab our father' (it would be less ambiguous if the words were placed thus: Jehonadab 'our father the son of Rechab', out of love and reverence to whom he probably desired his descendants might be called by his name) 'commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever. Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any; but all your days ye shall dwell in tents. . . . And we have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us' (Jer. 35:3-10).

2. And yet Jehu (although it seems to have been his manner, both in things secular and religious, to 'drive furiously') does not concern himself at all with any of these things, but lets Jehonadab abound in his own sense. And neither of them appears to have given the other the least disturbance touching the opinions which he maintained.

3. 'Tis very possible that many good men now also may entertain peculiar opinions; and some of them may be as singular herein as even Jehonadab was. And 'tis certain, so long as 'we know' but 'in part', that all men will not see all things alike. It is an unavoidable consequence of the present weakness and shortness of human understanding that several men will be of several minds, in religion as well as in common life. So it has been from the beginning of the world, and so it will be 'till the restitution of all things'.

4. Nay farther: although every man necessarily believes that every particular opinion which he holds is true (for to believe any opinion is not true is the same thing as not to hold it) yet can no man be assured that all his own opinions taken together are true. Nay, every thinking man is assured they are not, seeing *humanum est errare et nescire*—to be ignorant of many things, and to mistake in some, is the necessary condition of humanity. This therefore, he is sensible, is his own case. He knows in the general that he himself is mistaken; although in what particulars he mistakes he does not, perhaps cannot, know.

5. I say, perhaps he cannot know. For who can tell how far invincible ignorance may extend? Or (what comes to the same thing) invincible prejudice; which is often so fixed in tender minds that it is afterwards impossible to tear up what has taken so deep a root. And who can say, unless he knew every circumstance attending it, how far any mistake is culpable? Seeing all guilt must suppose some concurrence of the will—of which he only can judge who searcheth the heart.

6. Every wise man therefore will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him; and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs. He bears with those who differ from him, and only asks him with whom he desires to unite in love that single question. ‘Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?’

7. We may, secondly, observe that here is no inquiry made concerning Jehonadab’s mode of worship, although ’tis highly probable there was in this respect also a very wide difference between them. For we may well believe Jehonadab, as well as all his posterity, worshipped God at Jerusalem, whereas Jehu did not; he had more regard to state policy than religion. And therefore although he slew the worshippers of Baal, and ‘destroyed Baal out of Israel’, yet ‘from the’ convenient ‘sin of Jeroboam’, the worship of ‘the golden calves, he departed not’ (2 Kgs. 10:28-29).

8. But even among men of an upright heart, men who desire 'to have a conscience void of offence', it must needs be that as long as there are various opinions there will be various ways of worshipping God; seeing a variety of opinion necessarily implies a variety of practice. And as in all ages men have differed in nothing more than in their opinions concerning the Supreme Being, so in nothing have they more differed from each other than in the manner of worshipping him. Had this been only in the heathen world it would not have been at all surprising, for we know these 'by their wisdom knew not God'; nor therefore could they know how to worship him. But is it not strange that even in the Christian world, although they all agree in the general, 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,' yet the particular modes of worshipping God are almost as various as among the heathens?

9. And how shall we choose among so much variety? No man can choose for or prescribe to another. But everyone must follow the dictates of his own conscience in simplicity and godly sincerity. He must be fully persuaded in his own mind, and then act according to the best light he has. Nor has any creature power to constrain another to walk by his own rule. God has given no right to any of the children of men thus to lord it over the conscience of his brethren. But every man must judge for himself, as every man must give an account of himself to God.

10. Although therefore every follower of Christ is obliged by the very nature of the Christian institution to be a member of some particular congregation or other, some church, as it is usually termed (which implies a particular manner of worshipping God; for ‘two cannot walk together unless they be agreed’); yet none can be obliged by any power on earth but that of his own conscience to prefer this or that congregation to another, this or that particular manner of worship. I know it is commonly supposed that the place of our birth fixes the church to which we ought to belong; that one, for instance, who is born in England ought to be a member of that which is styled ‘the Church of England’, and consequently to worship God in the particular manner which is prescribed by that church. I was once a zealous maintainer of this, but I find many reasons to abate of this zeal. I fear it is attended with such difficulties as no reasonable man can get over. Not the least of which is that if this rule had took place, there could have been no Reformation from popery, seeing it entirely destroys the right of private judgment on which that whole Reformation stands.

11. I dare not therefore presume to impose my mode of worship on any other. I believe it is truly primitive and apostolical. But my belief is no rule for another. I ask not therefore of him with whom I would unite in love, ‘Are you of my Church? Of my congregation? Do you receive the same form of church government and allow the same church officers with me? Do you join in the same form of prayer wherein I worship God?’ I inquire not, ‘Do you receive the Supper of the Lord in the same posture and manner that I do?’ Nor whether, in the administration of baptism, you agree with me in admitting sureties for the baptized, in the manner of administering it, or the age of those to whom it should be administered. Nay, I ask not of you (as clear as I am in my own mind) whether you allow baptism and the Lord’s Supper at all. Let all these things stand by: we will talk of them, if need be, at a more convenient season. My only question at present is this, ‘Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?’

12. But what is properly implied in the question? I do not mean what did Jehu imply therein, but what should a follower of Christ understand thereby when he proposes it to any of his brethren?

The first thing implied is this: Is thy heart right with God? Dost thou believe his being, and his perfections? His eternity, immensity, wisdom, power; his justice, mercy, and truth? Dost thou believe that he now ‘upholdeth all things by the word of his power’? And that he governs even the most minute, even the most noxious, to his own glory, and the good of them that love him? Hast thou a divine evidence, a supernatural conviction, of the things of God? Dost thou ‘walk by faith, not by sight’? ‘Looking not at temporal things, but things eternal’?

13. Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘God over all, blessed for ever’? Is he ‘revealed in’ thy soul? Dost thou ‘know Jesus Christ and him crucified’? Does he ‘dwell in thee, and thou in him’? Is he ‘formed in thy heart by faith’? Having absolutely disclaimed all thy own works, thy own righteousness, hast thou ‘submitted thyself unto the righteousness of God’, ‘which is by faith in Christ Jesus’? Art thou ‘found in him, not having thy own righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith’? And art thou, through him, ‘fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life’?

14. Is thy faith —filled with the energy of love? Dost thou love God? I do not say ‘above all things’, for it is both an unscriptural and an ambiguous expression, but ‘with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength’? Dost thou seek all thy happiness in him alone? And dost thou find what thou seekest? Does thy soul continually ‘magnify the Lord, and thy spirit rejoice in God thy Saviour’? Having learned ‘in everything to give thanks’, dost thou find it is ‘a joyful and a pleasant thing to be thankful’? Is God the centre of thy soul? The sum of all thy desires? Art thou accordingly ‘laying up’ thy ‘treasure in heaven’, and ‘counting all things else dung and dross’? Hath the love of God cast the love of the world out of thy soul? Then thou art ‘crucified to the world’. ‘Thou art dead’ to all below, ‘and thy life is hid with Christ in God.’

15. Art thou employed in doing ‘not thy own will, but the will of him that sent thee’? Of him that sent thee down to sojourn here a while, to spend a few days in a strange land, till having finished the work he hath given thee to do thou return to thy Father’s house? Is it thy meat and drink ‘to do the will of thy Father which is in heaven’? Is ‘thine eye single’ in all things? Always fixed on him? Always ‘looking unto Jesus’? Dost thou point at him in whatsoever thou dost? In all thy labour, thy business, thy conversation? Aiming only at the glory of God in all? ‘Whatsoever’ thou dost, either ‘in word or deed, doing it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God, even the Father, through him’?

16. Does the love of God constrain thee to ‘serve’ him ‘with fear’? To ‘rejoice unto him with reverence’? Art thou more afraid of displeasing God than either of death or hell? Is nothing so terrible to thee as the thought of ‘offending the eyes of his glory’? Upon this ground dost thou ‘hate all evil ways’, every transgression of his holy and perfect law? And herein ‘exercise’ thyself ‘to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man’?

17. Is thy heart right toward thy neighbour? Dost thou ‘love as thyself’ all mankind without exception? ‘If you love those only that love you, what thank have you?’ Do you ‘love your enemies’? Is your soul full of goodwill, of tender affection toward them? Do you love even the enemies of God? The unthankful and unholy? Do your bowels yearn over them? Could you ‘wish yourself (temporally) accursed’ for their sake? And do you show this by ‘blessing them that curse you, and praying for those that spitefully use you and persecute you’?

18. Do you show your love by your works? While you have time, as you have opportunity, do you in fact ‘do good to all men’—neighbours or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad? Do you do them all the good you can? Endeavouring to supply all their wants, assisting them both in body and soul to the uttermost of your power? If thou art thus minded, may every Christian say—yea, if thou art but sincerely desirous of it, and following on till thou attain—then ‘thy heart is right, as my heart is with thy heart.’

II.1. 'If it be, give me thine hand.' I do not mean, 'Be of my opinion.' You need not. I do not expect nor desire it. Neither do I mean, 'I will be of your opinion.' I cannot. It does not depend on my choice. I can no more think than I can see or hear as I will. Keep you your opinion, I mine; and that as steadily as ever. You need not even endeavour to come over to me, or bring me over to you. I do not desire you to dispute those points, or to hear or speak one word concerning them. Let all opinions alone on one side and the other. Only 'give me thine hand.'

2. I do not mean, 'Embrace my modes of worship,' or, 'I will embrace yours.' This also is a thing which does not depend either on your choice or mine. We must both act as each is fully persuaded in his own mind. Hold you fast that which you believe is most acceptable to God, and I will do the same. I believe the episcopal form of church government to be scriptural and apostolical. If you think the presbyterian or independent is better, think so still, and act accordingly. I believe infants ought to be baptized, and that this may be done either by dipping or sprinkling. If you are otherwise persuaded, be so still, and follow your own persuasion. It appears to me that forms of prayer are of excellent use, particularly in the great congregation. If you judge extemporary prayer to be of more use, act suitably to your own judgment. My sentiment is that I ought not to forbid water wherein persons may be baptized, and that I ought to eat bread and drink wine as a memorial of my dying Master. However, if you are not convinced of this, act according to the light you have. I have no desire to dispute with you one moment upon any of the preceding heads. Let all these smaller points stand aside. Let them never come into sight. 'If thine heart is as my heart', if thou lovest God and all mankind, I ask no more: 'Give me thine hand.'

3. I mean, first, love me. And that not only as thou lovest all mankind; not only as thou lovest thine enemies or the enemies of God, those that hate thee, that ‘despitefully use thee and persecute thee’; not only as a stranger, as one of whom thou knowest neither good nor evil. I am not satisfied with this. No; ‘If thine heart be right, as mine with thy heart’, then love me with a very tender affection, as a friend that is closer than a brother; as a brother in Christ, a fellow-citizen of the new Jerusalem, a fellow-soldier engaged in the same warfare, under the same Captain of our salvation. Love me as a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus, and a joint-heir of his glory.

4. Love me (but in an higher degree than thou dost the bulk of mankind) with the love that is ‘long-suffering and kind’; that is patient if I am ignorant or out of the way, bearing and not increasing my burden; and is tender, soft, and compassionate still; that ‘envieth not’ if at any time it please God to prosper me in his work even more than thee. Love me with the love that ‘is not provoked’ either at my follies or infirmities, or even at my acting (if it should sometimes so appear to thee) not according to the will of God. Love me so as to ‘think no evil’ of me, to put away all jealousy and evil surmising. Love me with the love that ‘covereth all things’, that never reveals either my faults or infirmities; that ‘believeth all things’, is always willing to think the best, to put the fairest construction on all my words and actions; that ‘hopeth all things’, either that the thing related was never done, or not done with such circumstances as are related, or, at least, that it was done with a good intention, or in sudden stress of temptation. And hope to the end that whatever is amiss will, by the grace of God, be corrected, and whatever is wanting supplied, through the riches of his mercy in Christ Jesus.

5. I mean, secondly, commend me to God in all thy prayers; wrestle with him in my behalf, that he would speedily correct what he sees amiss and supply what is wanting in me. In thy nearest access to the throne of grace beg of him who is then very present with thee that my heart may be more as thy heart, more right both toward God and toward man; that I may have a fuller conviction of things not seen, and a stronger view of the love of God in Christ Jesus; may more steadily walk by faith, not by sight, and more earnestly grasp eternal life. Pray that the love of God and of all mankind may be more largely poured into my heart; that I may be more fervent and active in doing the will of my Father which is in heaven, more zealous of good works, and more careful to abstain from all appearance of evil.

6. I mean, thirdly, provoke me to love and to good works. Second thy prayer as thou hast opportunity by speaking to me in love whatsoever thou believest to be for my soul's health. Quicken me in the work which God has given me to do, and instruct me how to do it more perfectly. Yea, 'smite me friendly and reprove me' whereinsoever I appear to thee to be doing rather my own will than the will of him that sent me. O speak and spare not, whatever thou believest may conduce either to the amending my faults, the strengthening my weakness, the building me up in love, or the making me more fit in any kind for the Master's use.

7. I mean, lastly, love me not in word only, but in deed and in truth. So far as in conscience thou canst (retaining still thy own opinions and thy own manner of worshipping God), join with me in the work of God, and let us go on hand in hand. And thus far, it is certain, thou mayst go. Speak honourably, wherever thou art, of the work of God, by whomsoever he works, and kindly of his messengers. And if it be in thy power, not only sympathize with them when they are in any difficulty or distress, but give them a cheerful and effectual assistance, that they may glorify God on thy behalf.

8. Two things should be observed with regard to what has been spoken under this last head. The one, that whatsoever love, whatsoever offices of love, whatsoever spiritual or temporal assistance, I claim from him whose heart is right, as my heart is with his, the same I am ready, by the grace of God, according to my measure, to give him. The other, that I have not made this claim in behalf of myself only, but of all whose heart is right toward God and man, that we may all love one another as Christ hath loved us.

III.1. One inference we may make from what has been said. We may learn from hence what is a ‘catholic spirit’.

There is scarce any expression which has been more grossly misunderstood and more dangerously misapplied than this. But it will be easy for any who calmly consider the preceding observations to correct any such misapprehensions of it, and to prevent any such misapplication.

For from hence we may learn, first, that a catholic spirit is not speculative latitudinarianism. It is not an indifference to all opinions. This is the spawn of hell, not the offspring of heaven. This unsettledness of thought, this being ‘driven to and fro, and tossed about with every wind of doctrine’, is a great curse, not a blessing; an irreconcilable enemy, not a friend, to true catholicism. A man of a truly catholic spirit has not now his religion to seek. He is fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine. ’Tis true he is always ready to hear and weigh whatsoever can be offered against his principles. But as this does not show any wavering in his own mind, so neither does it occasion any. He does not halt between two opinions, nor vainly endeavour to blend them into one. Observe this, you who know not what spirit ye are of, who call yourselves men of a catholic spirit only because you are of a muddy understanding; because your mind is all in a mist; because you have no settled, consistent principles, but are for jumbling all opinions together. Be convinced that you have quite missed your way: you know not where you are. You think you are got into the very spirit of Christ, when in truth you are nearer the spirit of antichrist. Go first and learn the first elements of the gospel of Christ, and then shall you learn to be of a truly catholic spirit.

2. From what has been said we may learn, secondly, that a catholic spirit is not any kind of practical latitudinarianism. It is not indifference as to public worship or as to the outward manner of performing it. This likewise would not be a blessing but a curse. Far from being an help thereto it would, so long as it remained, be an unspeakable hindrance to the worshipping of God in spirit and in truth. But the man of a truly catholic spirit, having weighed all things in the balance of the sanctuary, has no doubt, no scruple at all concerning that particular mode of worship wherein he joins. He is clearly convinced that this manner of worshipping God is both scriptural and rational. He knows none in the world which is more scriptural, none which is more rational. Therefore without rambling hither and thither he cleaves close thereto, and praises God for the opportunity of so doing.

3. Hence we may, thirdly, learn that a catholic spirit is not indifference to all congregations. This is another sort of latitudinarianism, no less absurd and unscriptural than the former. But it is far from a man of a truly catholic spirit. He is fixed in his congregation as well as his principles. He is united to one, not only in spirit, but by all the outward ties of Christian fellowship. There he partakes of all the ordinances of God. There he receives the Supper of the Lord. There he pours out his soul in public prayer, and joins in public praise and thanksgiving. There he rejoices to hear the word of reconciliation, the gospel of the grace of God. With these his nearest, his best beloved brethren, on solemn occasions he seeks God by fasting. These particularly he watches over in love, as they do over his soul, admonishing, exhorting, comforting, reproving, and every way building up each other in the faith. These he regards as his own household, and therefore according to the ability God has given him naturally cares for them, and provides that they may have all the things that are needful for life and godliness.

4. But while he is steadily fixed in his religious principles, in what he believes to be the truth as it is in Jesus; while he firmly adheres to that worship of God which he judges to be most acceptable in his sight; and while he is united by the tenderest and closest ties to one particular congregation; his heart is enlarged toward all mankind, those he knows and those he does not; he embraces with strong and cordial affection neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. This is catholic or universal love. And he that has this is of a catholic spirit. For love alone gives the title to this character—catholic love is a catholic spirit.

5. If then we take this word in the strictest sense, a man of a catholic spirit is one who in the manner above mentioned ‘gives his hand’ to all whose ‘hearts are right with his heart’. One who knows how to value and praise God for all the advantages he enjoys: with regard to the knowledge of the things of God, the true, scriptural manner of worshipping him; and above all his union with a congregation fearing God and working righteousness. One who, retaining these blessings with the strictest care, keeping them as the apple of his eye, at the same time loves as friends, as brethren in the Lord, as members of Christ and children of God, as joint partakers now of the present kingdom of God, and fellow-heirs of his eternal Kingdom, all of whatever opinion or worship or congregation who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; who love God and man; who, rejoicing to please and fearing to offend God, are careful to abstain from evil and zealous of good works. He is the man of a truly catholic spirit who bears all these continually upon his heart, who having an unspeakable tenderness for their persons, and longing for their welfare, does not cease to commend them to God in prayer, as well as to plead their cause before men; who speaks comfortably to them, and labours by all his words to strengthen their hands in God. He assists them to the uttermost of his power in all things, spiritual and temporal. He is ready ‘to spend and be spent for them’; yea, ‘to lay down his life for’ their sake.

6. Thou, O man of God, think on these things. If thou art already in this way, go on. If thou hast heretofore mistook the path, bless God who hath brought thee back. And now run the race which is set before thee, in the royal way of universal love. Take heed lest thou be either wavering in thy judgment or straitened in thy bowels. But keep an even pace, rooted in the faith once delivered to the saints and grounded in love, in true, catholic love, till thou art swallowed up in love for ever and ever.

NEW CREATION

ALWAYS HOPE

I was 15, going on 16, when I learned what hospice was. My great-grandmother, Gogo, had been a rock in my life. She was someone I looked up to and felt a strong connection with. She was always available to play. She even let me pretend to preach. (I should have known this is what I would do in life.)

Gogo died. I still remember the deep grief that overcame me.

At her funeral, I remember Steve, my cousin-in-law and speaker, giving a reminder of something Gogo used to say. “When I die, do not cry for me. I will be with Jesus.”

That is an incredible outlook of hope. I cling to this hope. No matter what happens, Jesus is always here. Jesus is the hope we need. He is the confidence we need for a bright future. Whenever I think of Gogo, I think of this truth.

As I sit at my desk writing this page, I have some different movies on in the background. What is cool is how every movie that is playing ends in a good way. The world and characters will never be the same, but the good news is the end does come, and it will be good.

What do you need to contemplate before you begin this chapter? Take time to pray and thank God for the gift of hope.

Almighty God, Alpha and Omega, Beginning and the End, fill us with the joy that comes from the assurance of the hope found in you. Remind me that you help me focus on you when it seems too difficult. Let me keep you as my focus. Amen.

NEW CREATION

Revelation 21 - 22

LOCATION: Cemetery

What do you think the new creation will be like?

Do you think this earth will be completely destroyed, and believers will go off to be somewhere else?

Do you think animals will be part of the New Creation?

Why do you think it is essential to discuss the New Creation?

Over the past six chapters, we have discussed how every person needs to be able to answer three questions to get fulfillment in their life—

WHO AM I, WHOSE AM I, WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?

Answering these questions is fundamental to understanding who we were made to be and our destiny. These questions answered through the lens of Jesus Christ, guide us to a better understanding of humanity and why we should be people who live with hope and not pessimism.

Revelation, really throughout the whole canon of scripture, teaches:

We are God's people.

We belong to God, and he is doing everything to prove that.

Our purpose is to glorify God in everything we do.

As we come to the close of this overview of the Bible, I pray you have felt encouraged in your identity as a child of God and have been able to see the continuous storyline of scripture throughout the whole biblical narrative.

INTRODUCTION

Revelation is a fascinating book filled with vision, symbols, and numbers that are challenging to understand completely. Here's the gist of the letter of Revelation—God ultimately wins!

Imagine how life could be if we focused on the victory of Christ Jesus rather than what's wrong in the world. God will ultimately redeem and make everything right. He is working on his time, and it is the perfect time.

To help us better understand this concept, let's look at Revelation 1:1-8. Take some time to read that passage, then look at these concepts about it.

CHRIST IS RISEN!

He has risen indeed.

Alleluia!

Amen.

Remember, as Christians, this is our victory cry. We always point to the victorious Christ who defeated death and lives forever, and gives us this chance, too.

So when we talk about “beginning with the end,” we are referring to this. We are referring to Jesus's ultimate victory over all evil and reigning eternally. So, the truth is we can always live with hope because of the victory of Jesus.

Worry, shame, anxiety, and even fear have zero place in the Christian life. We do not even find a source of hope in being greedy, putting others down, and always trying to be right. Why? Because as we read Revelation, we should have the picture that Jesus is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last. “God wants the readers to be encouraged by knowing that God, who knows all things from the beginning to the end, is the absolute source of all creation and history.

Nothing lies outside him, just as no other letter of the Greek alphabet lay outside the Alpha and the Omega--God is in total control.”

To help illustrate this, draw a circle on your paper.

Now, write the name Jesus in the center of the circle. This seems right, doesn't it? Jesus really is the center of everything.

But I want us to think about the circle a little differently:

This time, write the name JESUS.

Now, from the S to the J, draw a line representing a circle.

And now, write your name in the center of the new circle.

This is what we think about when we read the Book of Revelation. We are held together in the safe grip of Jesus, who holds everything together.

With this picture in mind, let's go through this passage.

One of the challenges with a book like Revelation is that we can miss its point because we immediately impose our thinking and interpretation based on our understanding.

For example, this is a letter written around AD90 that was distributed to seven actual churches.

Now, there were more churches than this, but it is very likely John, the author, sees these churches as representatives of the other Christian churches around at this time. What's interesting is each one of the churches (located in what is now Turkey) was about a 2-3 day walking distance from each other and in a horseshoe pattern.

Even the name Revelation can be misunderstood. Our word revelation comes from the Greek word apocalypse, which means "unveiling" or "lifting off a veil." The purpose is to reveal something not previously known. Jewish and Christian prophesy, at this time, was not just about "predicting the future." It was also primarily a declaration of what God is doing in the present--it was a declaration of God's perspective on the present life of God's people.

God's people were undergoing persecution and needed hope everything would be okay. They needed to be reminded God is still on the throne and is in control. They needed to know God was and is with them and were not alone. They needed to be reminded there is still hope

because of the risen Christ. John, the author, being exiled to the island of Patmos is evidence the governing authorities viewed John as a dangerous leader of the Christian sect.

The reality the Roman Christians lived with was the power of Rome, which seemed to show Christians were powerless; the Christians feared denunciation before Roman authorities. The Christians know about John's banishment and vividly remember Jerusalem's destruction.

This is why the letter of Revelation begins and ends with the words and presence of Christ. To show his people he is the one who will have ultimate victory. No one else is worthy to be worshipped, especially not the Roman emperor who demanded worship.

So, the main point of the letter of Revelation is not so much what will happen in the "end times." The point of Revelation is to show "who is worthy of honor and worship."

The greeting (Revelation 1:1-4), with the background we just discussed, is very powerful. This greeting was written in a typical New Testament way with the phrase "Grace and Peace."

Let's look at the word "grace." The Greek word is *charis*, which means love functioning under adverse conditions. This is a gift we do not deserve. God is giving us his grace and presence so we can know and live in a relationship with him. So John begins his letter by saying, "Cheer up! God is in control despite the situation that's going on that is caused by human rebellion."

It doesn't take much to see human rebellion is still going on. Some leaders are on a constant quest for power, attention, and living in incredible greed. But no matter what leaders try to impose on us, we must remember God is in control. Jesus is the victor, and we get to live a life of victory no matter what happens around us.

Even when hope seems lost, Christ is still on the throne, and his presence is with us always because of the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us.

Because of this truth, we can live into the reality of who Jesus says we are:

We are loved

We are free from our sins because of his blood

We are a kingdom of priests to represent God in all of the world

We are servants of the One True God who desires our holiness (wholeness/completeness)

All of this matters because of who Jesus is.

He is the One who has always been and is and will always be

He is the faithful witness, meaning we can always trust him

He defeated death

He is the rightful ruler of all the world's rulers

As we constantly say, knowing who Jesus is helps us better understand who we are and what our purpose is. And what is our purpose? To bring honor, glory, and power to him constantly.

How do we live this out?

In everything we do, we can find ways to give God credit and put attention on the greatness and grandness of God instead of keeping the focus on us and us alone.

As an example of this, think about the movie Chariots of Fire. It's the story of a heroic, committed Christian from Scotland named Eric Liddell, who competed in the 1924 Olympics. Refusing to compromise his principles, Liddell would not run on Sunday, forfeiting his event of choice, the 100-meter race. During one scene, Eric's sister, a dedicated believer, was upset that her brother was running competitively. She thought he was wasting a lot of time and should get into the ministry immediately. She reminded Eric that God made him for Himself. But Eric replied, "Aye, Jenny, I know. But He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure." (Source: Greg Laurie, oneplace.com)

Now, is this easy to do? It is if we remember that Jesus is Lord of all, holds everything together, is the source of all, and is coming back to demonstrate his rule over all.

Yes, Jesus is coming back. Why? Because he will be completing the task of redemption. He will be fixing everything and making all things right again. His judgment and justice will reign, and all people will witness this.

When we look up to the sky (the picture for something to look forward to), Jesus is coming back one day. When this happens, everyone will see and witness this happen. One day, ALL will know Jesus is King over ALL. This will cause mourning for ALL people.

Why? William Barclay, in his commentary on Revelation, points out:

1. People will realize they missed out on the chance to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior
2. People will be in grief because they did not completely submit their lives to him, so they missed out on so much from him
3. People will be in grief over loved ones who missed out on knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior

So now the question we all have to ask is, how does our life reflect this truth of who Jesus is?

We go through difficult, challenging, unbearable circumstances, yet Jesus is still Lord.

We all do things people will praise us for, yet Jesus is still Lord.

Jesus is Lord. This is the end, the beginning, and the reality now.

As we live, we keep the end in mind because we trust in the victory of Jesus. We trust everything will end up as perfection and peace because Jesus is on the throne.

If we can keep this picture of Jesus as the beginning and the end in our minds and keep in our hearts, we will better be able to handle everything here and now because Jesus is on the throne, and we already know what will happen when he comes back.

So, no matter what comes to your life, always keep the “end of the book” in mind and live as people of hope.

Now, take some time and read Revelation 21-22

QUESTIONS:

1. What stands out when you read these chapters?
2. Do you sense the hope that everything will be okay and God’s people are secure because God will show he has ultimately won?
3. Look at Psalm 91, Isaiah 59 - 66; you can also see this theme of a new creation and God’s victory.

SO WHAT IS THE POINT?

We have all heard about the rapture and about the end times. Notice how these theories are all fear-driven? God is not a God who brings fear to his people. God is the God who brings hope for the future and encouragement for his people to stay the course.

It is easy to look at the letter of Revelation and be confused by the symbols and everything. It is also easy to fear the future and what is to come. But if we stay in a place of fear, we can easily miss out on the goodness and grandness of God. Not only that, but we will also turn to God for the wrong reasons—we’ll turn to God to save ourselves instead of turning to God because of who God is. (Think about that statement)

Remember, we have said, from the beginning, we have to know the original design of creation to know what and how the New Creation will be like. Paradise was placed here on earth. God’s dwelling (Revelation 21) will come down (meaning descend to become known on a lower realm) and dwell on the earth. The Lord’s Prayer is teaching us to pray that God’s will is done on earth as in heaven. God will reform and redeem all of creation (Romans 1).

What will be different in the New Creation is there will be perfect peace, the ground will work with us and not bring disaster, and we will know perfection and worship perfectly. In other words, we live on the newly re-formed earth and dwell with God in life everlasting—forever.

Isaiah says the lion will lay down with the lamb. There will even be peace and harmony among the animals.

This is what we are hoping for. God will show his kingdom, dwelling, and perfection, and all will be made right and whole/holy.

Jesus is coming back! Praise God!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How does the theology of the New Creation affect your day-to-day life?

Do you live with hope, or do we live in fear?

Do we trust God has and will ultimately win? How does this affect your life?

Are you ready to live, in life everlasting, with people you did not know accepted the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

What have you learned from this overview of scripture and the biggest themes in scripture?

How have these past six chapters formed and shaped you?

Can you see and experience the presence of God more fully?

Do you feel like you can explain, even imperfectly, the storyline of scripture to another person? (Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, New Creation)

MISSION OPPORTUNITY: Does your area have a Grief Share or something to help people heal from grief? Everyone needs reminders of the hope and victory found through Jesus Christ. Mail cards of hope to families who lost loved ones. Look at local obituaries and deliver stamped envelopes (with cards sealed inside) and ask funeral home to mail out. Pray for the hope and peace of God to be known and shown.

Sermon: “The General Deliverance” by John Wesley

Romans 8:19-22

The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that subjected it.

Yet in hope that the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now.

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

2. But how are these Scriptures reconcilable to the present state of things? How are they consistent with what we daily see round about us in every part of the creation? If the Creator and Father of every living thing is rich in mercy towards all; if he does not overlook or despise any of the works of his own hands; if he wills even the meanest of them to be happy according to their degree—how comes it to pass that such a complication of evils oppresses, yea, overwhelms them? How is it that misery of all kinds overspreads the face of the earth? This is a question which has puzzled the wisest philosophers in all ages. And it cannot be answered without having recourse to the oracles of God. But taking these for our guide we may inquire,

I. What was the original state of the brute creation?

II. In what state is it at present? And

III. In what state will it be at the manifestation of the children of God?

I.1. We may inquire, in the first place, What was the original state of the brute creation? And may not we learn this even from the place which was assigned them, namely, the garden of God? All the beasts of the field, and all the fowls of the air, were with Adam in paradise. And there is no question but their state was suited to their place: it was paradisiacal, perfectly happy. Undoubtedly it bore a near resemblance to the state of man himself. By taking therefore a short view of the one we may conceive the other. Now ‘man was made in the image of God.’ But ‘God is a spirit.’ So therefore was man. Only that spirit, being designed to dwell on earth, was lodged in an earthly tabernacle. As such he had an innate principle of self-motion. And so, it seems, has every spirit in the universe; this being the proper distinguishing difference between spirit and matter, which is totally, essentially passive and inactive, as appears from a thousand experiments. He was, after the likeness of his Creator, endued with understanding, a capacity of apprehending whatever objects were brought before it, and of judging concerning them. He was endued with a will, exerting itself in various affections and passions; and, lastly, with liberty, or freedom of choice, without which all the rest would have been in vain, and he would have been no more capable of serving his Creator than a piece of earth or marble. He would have been as incapable of vice or virtue as any part of the inanimate creation. In these, in the power of self-motion, understanding, will, and liberty, the natural image of God consisted.

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

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

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

4. But what blessings were those that were then conveyed through man to the lower creatures? What was the original state of the brute creatures when they were first created? This deserves a more attentive consideration than has been usually given it. It is certain these, as well as man, had an innate principle of self-motion; and that at least in as high a degree as they enjoy it at this day. Again: they were endued with a degree of understanding not less than that they are possessed of now. They had also a will including various passions, which likewise they still enjoy. And they had liberty, a power of choice, a degree of which is still found in every living creature. Nor can we doubt but their understanding too was in the beginning perfect in its kind. Their passions and affections were regular, and their choice always guided by their understanding.

5. What then makes the barrier between men and brutes? The line which they cannot pass? It was not reason. Set aside that ambiguous term: exchange it for the plain word, understanding, and who can deny that brutes have this? We may as well deny that they have sight or hearing. But it is this: man is capable of God; the inferior creatures are not. We have no ground to believe that they are in any degree capable of knowing, loving, or obeying God. This is the specific difference between man and brute—the great gulf which they cannot pass over. And as a loving obedience to God was the perfection of men, so a loving obedience to man was the perfection of brutes. And as long as they continued in this they were happy after their kind; happy in the right state and the right use of their respective faculties. Yea, and so long they had some shadowy resemblance of even moral goodness. For they had gratitude to man for benefits received, and a reverence for him. They had likewise a kind of benevolence to each other, unmixed with any contrary temper. How beautiful many of them were we may conjecture from that which still remains; and that not only in the noblest creatures, but in those of the lowest order. And they were all surrounded not only with plenteous food, but with everything that could give them pleasure; pleasure unmixed with pain; for pain was not yet—it had not entered into paradise. And they too were immortal. For ‘God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the death of any living.’

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

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

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

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

Saevis inter se convenit ursoris—

Even savage bears will not each other tear.

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

4. And is not the very form, the outward appearance of many of the creatures, as horrid as their dispositions? Where is the beauty which was stamped upon them when they came first out of the hands of their Creator? There is not the least trace of it left: so far from it that they are shocking to behold! Nay, they are not only terrible and grisly to look upon, but deformed, and that to a high degree. Yet their features, ugly as they are at best, are frequently made more deformed than usual when they are distorted by pain, which they cannot avoid any more than the wretched sons of men. Pain of various kinds, weakness, sickness, diseases innumerable, come upon them, perhaps from within, perhaps from one another, perhaps from the inclemency of seasons, from fire, hail, snow, or storm, or from a thousand causes which they cannot foresee or prevent.

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

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

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

2. Nothing can be more express. Away with vulgar prejudices, and let the plain word of God take place. They ‘shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty’; even a measure, according as they are capable, of ‘the liberty of the children of God’.

A general view of this is given us in the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation. When he that ‘sitteth on the great white throne’ hath pronounced, ‘Behold I make all things new;’ when the word is fulfilled, ‘The tabernacle of God is with men, [. . .] and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God;’ then the following blessing shall take place (not only on the children of men—there is no such restriction in the text—but) on every creature according to its capacity: ‘God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. Neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.’

3. To descend to a few particulars. The whole brute creation will then undoubtedly be restored, not only to the vigour, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they ever enjoyed. They will be restored, not only to that measure of understanding which they had in paradise, but to a degree of it as much higher than that as the understanding of an elephant is beyond that of a worm. And whatever affections they had in the garden of God will be restored with vast increase, being exalted and refined in a manner which we ourselves are not now able to comprehend. The liberty they then had will be completely restored, and they will be free in all their motions. They will be delivered from all irregular appetites, from all unruly passions, from every disposition that is either evil in itself or has any tendency to evil. No rage will be found in any creature, no fierceness, no cruelty or thirst for blood. So far from it that ‘the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the young lion together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. [. . .] They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain’ (Isa. 11: 6, 7, 9).

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

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

He sees with equal eyes, as Lord of all, A hero perish or a sparrow fall!
By no means. This is exceeding pretty; but it is absolutely false. For though

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

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

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

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

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

9. May it not answer another end, namely, furnish us with a full answer to a plausible objection against the justice of God in suffering numberless creatures that never had sinned to be so severely punished? They could not sin, for they were not moral agents. Yet how severely do they suffer! Yea, many of them, beasts of burden in particular, almost the whole time of their abode on earth. So that they can have no retribution here below. But the objection vanishes away if we consider that something better remains after death for these poor creatures also! That these likewise shall one day be delivered from this bondage of corruption, and shall then receive an ample amends for all their present sufferings.

10. One more excellent end may undoubtedly be answered by the preceding considerations. They may encourage us to imitate him whose mercy is over all his works. They may soften our hearts towards the meaner creatures, knowing that the Lord careth for them. It may enlarge our hearts towards those poor creatures to reflect that, as vile as they appear in our eyes, not one of them is forgotten in the sight of our Father which is in heaven. Through all the vanity to which they are now subjected, let us look to what God hath prepared for them. Yea, let us habituate ourselves to look forward, beyond this present scene of bondage, to the happy time when they will be delivered therefrom into the liberty of the children of God.

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

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

Know God, and teach your souls to know The joys that from religion flow.

Give your hearts to him who, together with ten thousand blessings, has ‘given you his Son, his only Son!’ Let your continual ‘fellowship be with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ!’ Let God be in all your thoughts, and ye will be men indeed. Let him be your God and your all! The desire of your eyes, the joy of your heart, and your portion for ever!

Sermon: “The Great Assize” by John Wesley

Romans 14:10

We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

1. How many circumstances concur to raise the awfulness of the present solemnity! The general concourse of people of every age, sex, rank, and condition of life, willingly or unwillingly gathered together, not only from the neighbouring, but from distant parts: criminals, speedily to be brought forth, and having no way to escape; officers, waiting in their various posts to execute the orders which shall be given; and the representative of our gracious Sovereign, whom we so highly reverence and honour. The occasion likewise of this assembly adds not a little to the solemnity of it: to hear and determine causes of every kind, some of which are of the most important nature; on which depends no less than life or death—death, that uncovers the face of eternity! It was doubtless in order to increase the serious sense of these things, and not in the minds of the vulgar only, that the wisdom of our forefathers did not disdain to appoint even several minute circumstances of this solemnity. For these also, by means of the eye or ear, may more deeply affect the heart. And when viewed in this light, trumpets, staves, apparel, are no longer trifling or insignificant, but subservient in their kind and degree to the most valuable ends of society.

2. But as awful as this solemnity is, one far more awful is at hand. For yet a little while and ‘we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ And in that day ‘every one of us shall give account of himself to God.’

3. Had all men a deep sense of this, how effectually would it secure the interests of society! For what more forcible motive can be conceived to the practice of genuine morality? To a steady pursuit of solid virtue, an uniform walking in justice, mercy, and truth? What could strengthen our hands in all that is good, and deter us from all evil, like a strong conviction of this—‘The judge standeth at the door,’ and we are shortly to stand before him?

4. It may not therefore be improper, or unsuitable to the design of the present assembly, to consider, I. The chief circumstances which will precede our standing before the judgment seat of Christ.

II. The judgment itself, and

III. A few of the circumstances which will follow it.

I. Let us, in the first place, consider the chief circumstances which will precede our standing before the judgment seat of Christ.

And first, 1. ‘God will show signs in the earth beneath’ (Acts 2:19): particularly, he will ‘arise to shake terribly the earth’. ‘The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage.’ ‘There shall be earthquakes’ (not in divers only, but) ‘in all places’ (Luke 21:11)—not in one only, or a few, but in every part of the habitable world—even ‘such as were not since men were upon the earth, so mighty earthquakes and so great’. In one of these ‘every island shall flee away, and the mountains will not be found’ (Rev. 16:20). Meantime all the waters of the terraqueous globe will feel the violence of those concussions: ‘the sea and waves roaring’ (Luke 21:25), with such an agitation as had never been known before since the hour that ‘the fountains of the great deep were broken up,’ to destroy the earth which then ‘stood out of the water and in the water’. The air will be all storm and tempest, full of dark ‘vapours and pillars of smoke’ (Joel 2:30); resounding with thunder from pole to pole, and torn with ten thousand lightnings. But the commotion will not stop in the region of the air: ‘The powers of heaven also shall be shaken.’ ‘There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon and in the stars’ (Luke 21:25, 26)—those fixed as well as those that move round them. ‘The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come’ (Joel 2:31). ‘The stars shall withdraw their shining’ (Joel 3:15), yea and ‘fall from heaven’, being thrown out of their orbits. And then shall be heard the universal ‘shout’ from all the companies of heaven, followed by ‘the voice of the archangel’ proclaiming the approach of the Son of God and man, ‘and the trumpet of God’ (1 Thess. 4:16) sounding an alarm to all ‘that sleep in the dust of the earth’. In consequence of this all the graves shall open, and the bodies of men arise. ‘The sea also shall give up the dead which are therein’ (Rev. 20:13), and everyone shall rise with his own body—his own in substance, although so changed in its properties as we cannot now conceive. For ‘this corruptible will then put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality’ (1 Cor. 15:53). Yea, ‘death and Hades’, the invisible world, shall ‘deliver up the dead that are in them’ (Rev. 20:13); so that all who ever lived and died since God created man shall be raised incorruptible and immortal.

2. At the same time 'the Son of man shall send forth his angels' over all the earth, 'and they shall gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other' (Matt. 24:31). And the Lord himself shall 'come with clouds, in his own glory and the glory of his Father, with ten thousand of his saints, even myriads of angels', and 'shall sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, and shall set the sheep' (the good) 'on his right hand, and the goats' (the wicked) 'upon the left' (Matt. 25:31-33). Concerning this general assembly it is that the beloved disciple speaks thus: 'I saw the dead' (all that had been dead) 'small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened (a figurative expression, plainly referring to the manner of proceeding among men), and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works' (Rev. 20:12).

II. These are the chief circumstances which are recorded in the oracles of God as preceding the general judgment. We are, secondly, to consider the judgment itself, so far as it hath pleased God to reveal it.

1. The person by whom God 'will judge the world' is his only-begotten Son, whose 'goings forth are from everlasting', 'who is God over all, blessed for ever'. Unto him, 'being the out-beaming of his Father's glory, the express image of his person' (Heb. 1:3), the Father 'hath committed all judgment, [. . .] because he is the Son of man' (John 5:22, 27); because, though he was 'in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet he emptied himself, taking upon him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men' (Phil. 2:6-7). Yea, because 'being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself yet farther, 'becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted him,' even in his human nature, and 'ordained him' as man to try the children of men, to be the 'judge both of the quick and dead'; both of those who shall be found alive at his coming, and of those who were before 'gathered to their fathers'.

2. The time termed by the prophet 'the great and the terrible day' is usually in Scripture styled 'the day of the Lord'. The space from the creation of man upon the earth to the end of all things is the day of the sons of men. The time that is now passing over us is properly our day. When this is ended, the day of the Lord will begin. But who can say how long it will continue? 'With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (2 Pet. 3:8). And from this very expression some of the ancient Fathers drew that inference, that what is commonly called 'the day of judgment' would be indeed a thousand years. And it seems they did not go beyond the truth; nay, probably they did not come up to it. For if we consider the number of persons who are to be judged, and of actions which are to be inquired into, it does not appear that a thousand years will suffice for the transactions of that day. So that it may not improbably comprise several thousand years. But God shall reveal this also in its season.

3. With regard to the place where mankind will be judged we have no explicit account in Scripture. An eminent writer (but not he alone; many have been of the same opinion) supposes it will be on earth, where the works were done according to which they shall be judged, and that God will in order thereto employ the angels of his strength, To smooth and lengthen out the boundless space, And spread an area for all human race.

But perhaps it is more agreeable to our Lord's own account of his 'coming in the clouds' to suppose it will be above the earth, if not 'twice a planetary height'. And this supposition is not a little favoured by what St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians. 'The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who remain alive shall be caught up together with them, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess. 4:16-17). So that it seems most probable the 'great white throne' will be high exalted above the earth.

4. The persons to be judged who can count, any more than the drops of rain or the sands of the sea? I beheld, saith St. John, 'a great multitude which no man can number, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands'. How immense then must be the total multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues! Of all that have sprung from the loins of Adam since the world began, till time shall be no more! If we admit the common supposition, which seems noways absurd, that the earth bears at any one time no less than four hundred millions of living souls—men, women, and children—what a congregation must all those generations make who have succeeded each other for seven thousand years!

Great Xerxes' world in arms, proud Cannae's host, . . . They all are here, and here they all are lost:

Their numbers swell to be discerned in vain;

Lost as a drop in the unbounded main.

Every man, every woman, every infant of days that ever breathed the vital air will then hear the voice of the Son of God, and start into life, and appear before him. And this seems to be the natural import of that expression, 'the dead, small and great': all universally, all without exception, all of every age, sex, or degree; all that ever lived and died, or underwent such a change as will be equivalent with death. For long before that day the phantom of human greatness disappears and sinks into nothing. Even in the moment of death that vanishes away. Who is rich or great in the grave?

5. And every man shall there 'give an account of his own works', yea, a full and true account of all that he ever did while in the body, whether it was good or evil. O what a scene will then be disclosed in the sight of angels and men! While not the fabled Rhadamanthus, but the Lord God Almighty, who knoweth all things in heaven and earth, Castigatque, auditque dolos; subigitque fateri Quae quis apud superos, furto laetatus inani, Distulit in seram commissa piacula mortem.

Nor will all the actions alone of every child of man be then brought to open view, but all their words, seeing ‘every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.’ So that, ‘By thy words’ (as well as works) ‘thou shalt be justified; or by thy words thou shalt be condemned’ (Matt. 12:36-37). Will not God then bring to light every circumstance also that accompanied every word or action, and if not altered the nature, yet lessened or increased the goodness or badness of them? And how easy is this to him who is ‘about our bed and about our path, and spieth out all our ways!’ We know ‘the darkness is no darkness to him, but the night shineth as the day.’

6. Yea, he ‘will bring to light’ not ‘the hidden works of darkness’ only, but the very ‘thoughts and intents of the heart’. And what marvel? For he ‘searcheth the reins’, and ‘understandeth all our thoughts’. ‘All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.’ ‘Hell and destruction are before him’ without a covering; ‘how much more the hearts of the children of men!’

7. And in that day shall be discovered every inward working of every human soul: every appetite, passion, inclination, affection, with the various combinations of them, with every temper and disposition that constitute the whole complex character of each individual. So shall it be clearly and infallibly seen who was righteous, and who unrighteous; and in what degree every action or person or character was either good or evil.

8. ‘Then the king will say to them upon his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father. For I was hungry and ye gave me meat; thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me.’ In like manner, all the good they did upon earth will be recited before men and angels: whatsoever they had done either ‘in word or deed, in the name’, or for the sake ‘of the Lord Jesus’. All their good desires, intentions, thoughts, all their holy dispositions, will also be then remembered; and it will appear that though they were unknown or forgotten among men, yet God ‘noted’ them ‘in his book’. All their sufferings likewise for the name of Jesus and for the testimony of a good conscience will be displayed, unto their praise from the righteous judge, their honour before saints and angels, and the increase of that ‘far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory’.

9. But will their evil deeds too—since if we take in his whole life ‘there is not a man on earth that liveth and sinneth not’—will these be remembered in that day, and mentioned in the great congregation? Many believe they will not, and ask, ‘Would not this imply that their sufferings were not at an end, even when life ended? Seeing they would still have sorrow, and shame, and confusion of face to endure?’ They ask farther, ‘How can this be reconciled with God’s declaration by the Prophet, “If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right; . . . all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be once mentioned unto him”?’ (Ezek. 18:21-22). How is it consistent with the promise which God has made to all who accept of the gospel covenant, “I will forgive their iniquities, and remember their sin no more”?’ (Jer. 31:34). Or as the Apostle expresses it, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more”?’ (Heb. 8:12).

10. It may be answered, it is apparently and absolutely necessary, for the full display of the glory of God, for the clear and perfect manifestation of his wisdom, justice, power, and mercy toward the heirs of salvation, that all the circumstances of their life should be placed in open view, together with all their tempers, and all the desires, thoughts, and intents of their hearts. Otherwise how would it appear out of what a depth of sin and misery the grace of God had delivered them? And, indeed, if the whole lives of all the children of men were not manifestly discovered, the whole amazing contexture of divine providence could not be manifested; nor should we yet be able in a thousand instances to ‘justify the ways of God to man’. Unless our Lord’s words were fulfilled in their utmost sense, without any restriction or limitation, ‘there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, or hid that shall not be known’ (Matt. 10:26), abundance of God’s dispensations under the sun would still appear without their reasons. And then only when God hath brought to light all the hidden things of darkness, whosoever were the actors therein, will it be seen that wise and good were all his ways; that he ‘saw through the thick cloud’, and governed all things by the wise ‘counsel of his own will’; that nothing was left to chance or the caprice of men, but God disposed all ‘strongly and sweetly’, and wrought all into one connected chain of justice, mercy, and truth.

11. And in the discovery of the divine perfections the righteous will rejoice with joy unspeakable; far from feeling any painful sorrow or shame for any of those past transgressions which were long since blotted out as a cloud, washed away by the blood of the Lamb. It will be abundantly sufficient for them that ‘all the transgressions which they had committed shall not be once mentioned unto them’ to their disadvantage; that ‘their sins and transgressions and iniquities shall be remembered no more’ to their condemnation. This is the plain meaning of the promise; and this all the children of God shall find true, to their everlasting comfort.

12. After the righteous are judged, the king will turn to them upon his left hand, and they shall also be judged, every man ‘according to his works’. But not only their outward works will be brought into the account, but all the evil words which they have ever spoken; yea, all the evil desires, affections, tempers, which have or have had a place in their souls, and all the evil thoughts or designs which were ever cherished in their hearts. The joyful sentence of acquittal will then be pronounced upon those on the right hand, the dreadful sentence of condemnation upon those on the left—both of which must remain fixed and unmovable as the throne of God.

III.1. We may, in the third place, consider a few of the circumstances which will follow the general judgment. And the first is the execution of the sentence pronounced on the evil and on the good. ‘These shall go away into eternal punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.’ It should be observed, it is the very same word which is used both in the former and the latter clause: it follows that either the punishment lasts for ever, or the reward too will come to an end. No, never, unless God could come to an end, or his mercy and truth could fail. ‘Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,’ and shall ‘drink of those rivers of pleasure which are at God’s right hand for evermore’. But here all description falls short; all human language fails! Only one who is caught up into the third heaven can have a just conception of it. But even such an one cannot express what he hath seen—these things ‘it is not possible for man to utter.’

‘The wicked’, meantime, ‘shall be turned into hell,’ even ‘all the people that forget God’. They will be ‘punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power’. They will be ‘cast into the lake of fire burning with brimstone’, originally ‘prepared for the devil and his angels’; where they will ‘gnaw their tongues’ for anguish and pain; they will ‘curse God, and look upward’: there the dogs of hell—pride, malice, revenge, rage, horror, despair—continually devour them. There ‘they have no rest day or night, but the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever.’ ‘For their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.’

2. Then the heavens will be shrivelled up ‘as a parchment scroll’, and ‘pass away with a great noise’; they will ‘flee from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and there will be found no place for them’ (Rev. 20:11). The very manner of their passing away is disclosed to us by the Apostle Peter: ‘In the day of God, the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved’ (2 Pet. 3:12). The whole beautiful fabric will be overthrown by that raging element, the connection of all its parts destroyed, and every atom torn asunder from the others. By the same ‘the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up’ (2 Pet. 3:10). The enormous works of nature, ‘the everlasting hills’, mountains that have defied the rage of time, and stood unmoved so many thousand years, will sink down in fiery ruin. How much less will the works of art, though of the most durable kind, the utmost efforts of human industry—tombs, pillars, triumphal arches, castles, pyramids—be able to withstand the flaming conqueror. All, all will die, perish, vanish away, like a dream when one awaketh!

3. It has indeed been imagined by some great and good men that as it requires that same almighty power to annihilate things as to create, to speak into nothing or out of nothing; so no part of, no atom in the universe will be totally or finally destroyed. Rather, they suppose that as the last operation of fire which we have yet been able to observe is to reduce into glass what by a smaller force it had reduced to ashes; so in the day God hath ordained the whole earth, if not the material heavens also, will undergo this change, after which the fire can have no farther power over them. And they believe this is intimated by that expression in the Revelation made to St. John: ‘Before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal’ (Rev. 4:6). We cannot now either affirm or deny this; but we shall know hereafter.

4. If it be inquired by the scoffers, the minute philosophers: 'How can these things be? Whence should come such an immense quantity of fire as would consume the heavens and the whole terraqueous globe?' we would beg leave, first, to remind them that this difficulty is not peculiar to the Christian system. The same opinion almost universally obtained among the unbigoted heathens. So one of those celebrated 'free-thinkers' speaks according to the generally received sentiment: *Esse quoque in fatis reminiscitur, affore tempus, Quo mare, quo tellus, correptaue regia coeli Ardeat, et mundi moles operosa laboret.* But, secondly, it is easy to answer, even from our slight and superficial acquaintance with natural things, that there are abundant magazines of fire ready prepared, and treasured up against the day of the Lord. How soon may a comet, commissioned by him, travel down from the most distant parts of the universe? And were it to fix upon the earth in its return from the sun, when it is some thousand times hotter than a red-hot cannon-ball, who does not see what must be the immediate consequence? But, not to ascend so high as the ethereal heavens, might not the same lightnings which give 'shine to the world', if commanded by the Lord of nature give ruin and utter destruction? Or, to go no farther than the globe itself, who knows what huge reservoirs of liquid fire are from age to age contained in the bowels of the earth? Aetna, Hecla, Vesuvius, and all the other volcanoes that belch out flames and coals of fire, what are they but so many proofs and mouths of those fiery furnaces? And at the same time so many evidences that God hath in readiness wherewith to fulfil his word. Yea, were we to observe no more than the surface of the earth, and the things that surround us on every side, it is most certain (as a thousand experiments prove beyond all possibility of denial) that we ourselves, our whole bodies, are full of fire, as well as everything round about us. Is it not easy to make this ethereal fire visible even to the naked eye? And to produce thereby the very same effects on combustible matter which are produced by culinary fire? Needs there then any more than for God to unloose that secret chain whereby this irresistible agent is now bound down, and lies quiescent in every particle of matter? And how soon would it tear the universal frame in pieces, and involve all in one common ruin?

5. There is one circumstance more which will follow the judgment that deserves our serious consideration. 'We look', says the Apostle, 'according to his promise, for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' (2 Pet. 3:13). The promise stands in the prophecy of Isaiah: 'Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. And the former shall not be remembered' (Isa. 65:17); so great shall the glory of the latter be. These St. John did behold in the visions of God. 'I saw', saith he, 'a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away' (Rev. 21:1). And only 'righteousness dwelt therein.' Accordingly he adds, 'And I heard a great voice from' the third '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' (Rev. 21:3). Of necessity, therefore, they will all be happy: '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' (Rev. 21:4). 'There shall be no more curse; but [. . .] they shall see his face' (Rev. 22:3, 4), shall have the nearest access to, and thence the highest resemblance of him. This is the strongest expression in the language of Scripture to denote the most perfect happiness. 'And his name shall be on their foreheads.' They shall be openly acknowledged as God's own property; and his glorious nature shall most visibly shine forth in them. 'And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.'

IV. It remains only to apply the preceding considerations to all who are here before God. And are we not directly led so to do by the present solemnity, which so naturally points us to that day when the Lord 'will judge the world in righteousness'? This, therefore, by reminding us of that more awful season, may furnish many lessons of instruction. A few of these I may be permitted just to touch on. May God write them on all our hearts!

1. And, first, 'how beautiful are the feet' of those who are sent by the wise and gracious providence of God to execute justice on earth, to defend the injured, and punish the wrongdoer! Are they not 'the ministers of God to us for good', the grand supporters of the public tranquillity, the patrons of innocence and virtue, the great security of all our temporal blessings? And does not every one of these represent not only an earthly prince, but the Judge of the earth; him whose 'name is written upon his thigh, King of Kings, and

Lord of Lords'! O that all these sons 'of the right hand of the Most High' may be holy as he is holy! Wise with the 'wisdom that sitteth by his throne', like him who is the eternal wisdom of the Father! No respecters of persons, as he is none; but 'rendering to every man according to his works': like him inflexibly, inexorably just, though pitiful and of tender mercy! So shall they be terrible indeed to them that do evil, as 'not bearing the sword in vain'. So shall the laws of our land have their full use and due honour, and the throne of our King be still 'established in righteousness'.

2. Ye truly honourable men, whom God and the King have commissioned in a lower degree to administer justice, may not ye be compared to those ministering spirits who will attend the Judge coming in the clouds? May you, like them, burn with love to God and man! May you love righteousness and hate iniquity! May ye all minister in your several spheres (such honour hath God given you also!) to them that shall be heirs of salvation, and to the glory of your great Sovereign! May ye remain the establishers of peace, the blessing and ornaments of your country, the protectors of a guilty land, the guardian angels of all that are round about you!

3. You whose office it is to execute what is given you in charge by him before whom you stand, how nearly are you concerned to resemble those that stand before the face of the Son of man! Those 'servants of his that do his pleasure', 'and hearken to the voice of his words'. Does it not highly import you to be as uncorrupt as them? To approve yourselves the servants of God? To do justly and love mercy; to do to all as ye would they should do to you? So shall that great Judge, under whose eye you continually stand, say to you also, 'Well done, good and faithful servants: enter ye into the joy of your Lord!'

4. Suffer me to add a few words to all of you who are this day present before the Lord. Should not you bear it in your minds all the day long that a more awful day is coming? A large assembly this! But what is it to that which every eye will then behold—the general assembly of all the children of men that ever lived on the face of the whole earth! A few will stand at the judgment seat this day, to be judged touching what shall be laid to their charge. And they are now reserved in prison, perhaps in chains, till they are brought forth to be tried and sentenced. But we shall all, I that speak and you that hear, ‘stand at the judgment seat of Christ’. And we are now reserved on this earth, which is not our home, in this prison of flesh and blood, perhaps many of us in chains of darkness too, till we are ordered to be brought forth. Here a man is questioned concerning one or two facts which he is supposed to have committed. There we are to give an account of all our works, from the cradle to the grave: of all our words; of all our desires and tempers, all the thoughts and intents of our hearts; of all the use we have made of our various talents, whether of mind, body, or fortune, till God said, ‘Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.’ In this court it is possible some who are guilty may escape for want of evidence. But there is no want of evidence in that court. All men with whom you had the most secret intercourse, who were privy to all your designs and actions, are ready before your face. So are all the spirits of darkness, who inspired evil designs, and assisted in the execution of them. So are all the angels of God—those ‘eyes of the Lord that run to and fro over all the earth’—who watched over your soul, and laboured for your good so far as you would permit. So is your own conscience, a thousand witnesses in one, now no more capable of being either blinded or silenced, but constrained to know and to speak the naked truth touching all your thoughts and words and actions. And is conscience as a thousand witnesses? Yea, but God is as a thousand consciences! O who can stand before the face of ‘the great God, even our Saviour, Jesus Christ’!

See, see! He cometh! He maketh the clouds his chariots. He rideth upon the wings of the wind! A devouring fire goeth before him, and after him a flame burneth! See, he sitteth upon his throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour! Behold his eyes are as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters!

How will ye escape? Will ye call to the mountains to fall on you, the rocks to cover you? Alas, the mountains themselves, the rocks, the earth, the heavens, are just ready to flee away! Can ye prevent the sentence? Wherewith? With all the substance of thy house, with thousands of gold and silver? Blind wretch! Thou camest naked from thy mother's womb, and [shalt move] naked into eternity. Hear the Lord, the Judge! 'Come ye blessed of my Father! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Joyful sound! How widely different from that voice which echoes through the expanse of heaven, 'Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!' And who is he that can prevent or retard the full execution of either sentence? Vain hope! Lo, 'hell is moved from beneath' to receive those who are ripe for destruction! And the 'everlasting doors lift up their heads' that the heirs of glory may come in!

5. 'What manner of persons (then) ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?' We know it cannot be long before the Lord will descend 'with the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God'; when every one of us shall appear before him and 'give account of his own works'. 'Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for these things', seeing ye know he will come and will not tarry, 'be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.' Why should ye not? Why should one of you be found on the left hand at his appearing? He 'willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance'; by repentance to faith in a bleeding Lord; by faith to spotless love, to the full image of God renewed in the heart, and producing all holiness of conversation. Can you doubt of this when you remember the Judge of all is likewise 'the Saviour of all'? Hath he not bought you with his own blood, that ye might 'not perish, but have everlasting life'? O make proof of his mercy rather than his justice! Of his love rather than the thunder of his power! 'He is not far from every one of us'; and he is now come, 'not to condemn, but to save the world'. He standeth in the midst! Sinner, doth he not now, even now, knock at the door of thy heart? O that thou mayst know, at least 'in this thy day', the things that belong unto thy peace! O that ye may now give yourselves to him who 'gave himself for you', in humble faith, in holy, active, patient love! So shall ye rejoice with exceeding joy in his day, when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

Sermon: “The New Creation” by John Wesley

Revelation 21:5

Behold, I make all things new.

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, ‘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’ (Rev. 21:5).

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.

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 (chapter one) 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 burnt 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 for,’ says the Apostle, ‘new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’ (2 Pet. 3:7, etc.).

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 destruction 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: ‘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’ (Gen. 2:5-6) 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, but only pleasing, healthful breezes, Shattering the graceful locks of yon fair trees; 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' (Rev. 21:1). We have 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' (Gen. 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 he 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. Neither 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, '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, chapter the fourth, verse the sixth: '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 globe,
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 unfaithful 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 flowers 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 any wise 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, pushed by the horned flood, With all its verdure spoiled, 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 out 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.' Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise. In how beautiful and affecting 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' (Rev. 21:3-4). 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!

NOW WHAT?

We have just spent the last six chapters just skimming the surface of the Biblical text. I do hope you have a better understanding of a core message spoken throughout the scripture. But now it is up to you to go and grow.

So, we end this journey with three challenges: Personal, Community, Life of Mission and Service.

Personal.

Begin with any book in the Bible and take time to slowly read and study through the particular text on your own. Use some of the suggested resources mentioned in the next section. Find a particular time of day that works for you to be consistent. If it is in keeping with your personality, use a liturgy to guide you through a process of prayer, examine and scripture reading each day. This is important to help shape your mind and to see how God is working in and through your life.

Community.

Now that you have gone through this study, with a group, it is time for you to lead a group of your own. As followers of Jesus, we are told to go into the world and “teach” (Matthew 28:19). This means what you have learned, you are now tasked with the authority to lead a group with what you have learned.

This doesn’t mean that you are on your own. You still need others to keep you in line with what was actually taught to you, but you can begin a small group which will help you grow as well as have a chance to help others see and experience the beauty of the scripture of our faith.

This is time you can be creative. For example, visit a war monument and read the story of Joshua. Eat at a barbeque restaurant and discuss the sacrificial system in Leviticus. Read Proverbs while in a library. Find a theater (not movie) and read the poetry in Psalms. Find ways to make the story, as told in scripture, to come alive and speak to you today.

Life of Mission and Service.

The Christian life is not just about learning and head knowledge. It is about living it out. Through the six chapters, we have been challenged to find ways to live out a mission. You may be able to continue doing all six missions that came to you that came through the group. If so, awesome! If not, that is completely fine. It takes all kinds of different people, doing different tasks to reach the world.

As the saying goes, “You can’t do everything; but you can do something.” So, pick one of the six mission opportunities and continue that practice throughout the year. You never know who you will impact or whose life will be changed because of something you did out of obedience to the movement of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Finally, know that you are being prayed for. You are loved and adored by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So I end this book with these words from the Apostle Paul:

“Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Hebrews 13:20-21 NIV

And from Jude:

“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”

Jude 1:24-25 NIV

FURTHER READING & STUDY

BOOKS

- *Jesus Is...* by Ryan Stratton (I can send you PDF version if you want to read it)
- *God Dwells Among Us* by G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim
- *(re)Aligning with God* by Brian D. Russell
- *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*
- a good Bible dictionary
- *Classic Christianity* by John Oden
- *The Oxford Handbook on Systematic Theology*
- *Epic of Eden* by Sandra Richter
- *Jesus the Stranger* by Kenneth Collins
- *King Jesus Gospel* by Scot McKnight
- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
- *The Greatest Life of All: Jesus* by Charles Swindoll
- *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church* by Mark deYmaz
- *Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce Shelley
- *Disruption* by Mark deYmaz
- *Fresh Expressions: A new Kind of Methodist Church for People Not in Church*
- *The Passionate Church* by Michael Slaughter
- *The Other Half of Church* by Jim Wilder & Michael Hendricks
- *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* by Alan Krieder
- *Breaking the Code* by Bruce Meltzer
- *Revelation and the End Times* by Ben Witherington
- *Leaving Behind Left Behind* by Omar Rikabi (free e-book from www.seedbed.com)
- *God and Evil* by Micheal Peterson
- *The Great Divorce* by CS Lewis
- *Revelation for the Rest of Us* by Scot McKnight

VIDEOS

- *Indescribable* by Louie Giglio
- *Star of Bethlehem* documentary

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ryan Stratton is an ordained elder in the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

For over twenty years, Ryan has been teaching children, teenagers, and adults. While he was a teenager, he practiced TaeKwonDo and continued practicing and teaching the art form for fifteen years. After receiving a call to Christian ministry and leadership, Ryan is now in full time vocational ministry beginning with youth ministry then becoming a pastor. Ryan's priority in life is to help people see and experience life beyond themselves and the purpose God has for them.

He has a Bachelor's of Business Administration Degree from Stephen F. Austin State University and earned his Masters of Divinity degree through Asbury Theological Seminary.

The most important relationships for Ryan are with his wife and his children. When not leading the church, studying the Scripture, speaking, writing (www.revryanstratton.com), or participating in community missions and outreach, Ryan is found spending time with his wife and four children.