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The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 56

God's Approbation Of His Works

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

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

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

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

2. "And God saw that" every one of these "was good;" was perfect in its kind. The earth was good. The whole surface of it was beautiful in a high degree. To make it more agreeable, He clothed The universal face with pleasant green.

He adorned it with flowers of every hue, and with shrubs and trees of every kind. And every part was fertile as well as beautiful; it was no way deformed by rough or ragged rocks; it did not shock the view with horrid precipices, huge chasms, or dreary caverns; with deep, impassable morasses, or deserts of barren sand. But we have not any authority to say, with some learned and ingenious authors, that there were no mountains on the original earth, no unevenness on its surface. It is not easy to reconcile this hypothesis with those words of Moses: "The waters prevailed; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward" above the highest "did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered." (Gen. 7:19, 20.) We have no reason to believe that these mountains were produced by the deluge itself: Not the least intimation of this is given: Therefore, we cannot doubt but

they existed before it. -- Indeed, they answered many excellent purposes, besides greatly increasing the beauty of the creation, by a variety of prospects, which had been totally lost had the earth been one extended plain. Yet we need not suppose their sides were abrupt, or difficult of ascent. It is highly probable that they rose and fell by almost insensible degrees.

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

4. The element of water, it is probable, was then mostly confined within the great abyss. In the new earth, (as we are informed by the Apostle, Rev. 21:1,) there will be "no more sea;" none covering as now the face of the earth, and rendering so large a part of it uninhabitable by man. Hence it is probable, there was no external sea in the paradisiacal earth; none, until the great deep burst the barriers which were originally appointed for it. -- Indeed there was not then that need of the ocean for navigation which there is now: For either, as the poet supposes,

Omnis tuli omnia tellus;

every country produced whatever was requisite either for the necessity or comfort of its inhabitants; or man, being then (as he will be again at the resurrection) equal to angels, was able to convey himself, at his pleasure, to any given distance; over and above that, those flaming messengers were always ready to minister to the heirs of salvation. But whether there was sea or not, there were rivers sufficient to water the earth, and make it very plenteous. These answered all the purposes of convenience and pleasure by

Liquid lapse of murmuring stream;

to which were added gentle, genial showers, with salutary mists and exhalations. But there were no putrid lakes, no turbid or stagnating waters; but only such as Bore imprest Fair nature's image on their placid breast.

5. The element of air was then always serene, and always friendly to man. It contained no frightful meteor, no unwholesome vapours, no poisonous exhalations. There were no tempests, but only cool and gentle breezes,--

genitabilis aura Favoni, --

fanning both man and beast, and wafting the fragrant odours on their silent wings.

6. The sun, the fountain of fire, Of this great world both eye and soul, was situated at the most exact distance from the earth, so as to yield a sufficient quantity of heat (neither too little nor too much) to

every part of it. God had not yet Bid his angels turn askance This oblique globe. There was, therefore, then no country that groaned under The rage of Arctos, and eternal frost.

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

7. To the same purpose served the grateful vicissitude of light and darkness, -- day and night. For as the human body, though not liable to death or pain, yet needed continual sustenance by food; so, although it was not liable to weariness, yet it needed continual reparation by sleep. By this the springs of the animal machine were wound up from time to time, and kept always fit for the pleasing labour for which man was designed by his Creator. Accordingly, "the evening and the morning were the first day," before sin or pain was in the world. The first natural day had one part dark for a season of repose; one part light for a season of labour. And even in paradise "Adam slept," (Gen. 2:21,) before he sinned: Sleep, therefore, belonged to innocent human nature. Yet I do not apprehend it can be inferred from hence, that there is either darkness or sleep in heaven. Surely there is no darkness in that city of God. Is it not expressly said, (Rev. 22:5,) "There shall be no night there" Indeed they have no light from the sun; but "the Lord giveth them light." So it is all day in heaven, as it is all night in hell! On earth we have a mixture of both. Day and night succeed each other, till earth shall be turned to heaven. Neither can we at all credit the account given by the ancient poet, concerning sleep in heaven; although he allows "cloud-compelling Jove" to remain awake while the inferior gods were sleeping. It is pity, therefore, that our great poet should copy so servilely after the old Heathen, as to tell us, Sleep had seal'd All but the unsleeping eyes of God himself. Not so: They are "before the throne of God serve him day and night," speaking after the manner of men, "in his temple;" (Rev. 7:15;) that is, without any interval. As wicked spirits are tormented day and night without any intermission of their misery; so holy spirits enjoy God day and night without any intermission of their happiness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14. Such was the state of the creation, according to the scanty ideas which we can now form concerning it, when its great Author, surveying the whole system at one view, pronounced it "very good." It was good in the highest degree whereof it was capable, and without any mixture of evil. Every part was exactly suited to the others, and conducive to the good of the whole. There was "a golden chain" (to use the expression of Plato) "let down from the throne of God;" an exactly connected series of beings, from the highest to the lowest; from dead earth, through fossils, vegetables, animals, to man, created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and enjoy his Creator to all eternity.

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

-- that is, in plain English, -- after man, in utter defiance of his Maker, had eaten of the tree of knowledge, that -- Macies, et nova febrium Terris incubuit cohors; --

that a whole army of evils, totally new, totally unknown till then, broke in upon rebel man, and all other creatures, and overspread the face of the earth."

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

3. Upon this ground, then, that "God made man upright," and every creature perfect in its kind, but that man "found out to himself many inventions" of happiness, independent on God; and that, by his apostasy from God, he threw not only himself, but likewise the whole creation, which was intimately

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