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The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 59

God's Love To Fallen Man

"Not as the offence, so also is the free gift." Rom. 5:15.

1. How exceeding common, and how bitter, is the outcry against our first parent for the mischief which he not only brought upon himself, but entailed upon his latest posterity! It was by his wilful rebellion against God that "sin entered into the world." "By one man's disobedience," as the Apostle observes, the many, oi polloi, as many as were then in the loins of their forefather, "were made," or constituted, "sinners:" Not only deprived of the favour of God, but also of this image, of all virtue, righteousness, and true holiness; and sunk, partly into the image of the devil, -- in pride, malice, and all other diabolical tempers ; partly into the image of the brute, being fallen under the dominion of brutal passions and grovelling appetites. Hence also death entered into the world, with all his forerunners and attendants, -- pain, sickness, and a whole train of uneasy, as well as unholy passions and tempers.

2. "For all this we may thank Adam," has echoed down from generation to generation. The self-same charge has been repeated in every age and every nation, where the oracles of God are known; in which alone this grand and important event has been discovered to the children of men. Has not your heart, and probably your lips too, joined in the general charge How few are there of those who believe the scriptural relation of the fall of man that have not entertained the same thought concerning our first parent; severely condemning him that, through wilful disobedience to the sole command of his Creator,

Brought death into the world, and all our woe!

3. Nay it were well if the charge rested here : But it is certain it does not. It cannot be denied that it frequently glances from Adam to his Creator. Have not thousands even of those that are called Christians, taken the liberty to call his mercy, if not his justice also, into question on this very account Some, indeed, have done this a little more modestly, in an oblique and indirect manner; but others have thrown aside the mask, and asked, "Did not God foresee that Adam would abuse his liberty And did he not know the baneful consequences which this must naturally have on all his posterity And why, then, did he permit that disobedience Was it not easy for the Almighty to have prevented it" -- He certainly did foresee the whole. This cannot be denied: For "known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world;" rather, from all eternity, as the words ap aivnos properly signify. And it was undoubtedly in his power to prevent it; for he hath all power both in heaven and earth. But it was known to him, at the same time, that it was best, upon the whole, not to prevent it. He knew that "not as the transgression, so is the free gift;" that the evil resulting from the former was not as the good resulting from the latter, -- not worthy to be compared with it. He saw that to permit the fall of the first man was far best for mankind in general; that abundantly more good than evil would accrue to the posterity of Adam by his fall; that if "sin abounded" thereby over all the earth, yet grace "would much more abound;" yea, and that to every individual of the human race, unless it was his own choice.

4. It is exceeding strange that hardly anything has been written or at least published, on this subject; nay that it has been so little weighed or understood by the generality of Christians; especially considering that it is not a matter of mere curiosity, but a truth of the deepest importance; it being impossible, on any other principle,

To'assert a gracious Providence, And justify the ways of God with men;

and considering withal how plain this important truth is to all sensible and candid inquirers. May the Lover of men open the eyes of our understanding, to perceive clearly that, by the fall of Adam, mankind in general have gained a capacity,

First, of being more holy and more happy on earth, and,

Secondly, of being more happy in heaven, than otherwise they could have been!

1. And, First, mankind in general have gained, by the fall of Adam, a capacity of attaining more holiness and happiness on earth than it would have been possible for them to attain if Adam had not fallen. For if Adam had not fallen, Christ had not died. Nothing can be more clear than this; nothing more undeniable: The more thoroughly we consider the point the more deeply shall we be convinced of it. Unless all the partakers of human nature had received that deadly wound in Adam, it would not have been needful for the Son of God to take our nature upon him. Do you not see that this was the very ground of his coming into the world "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: And thus death passed upon all," through him in whom all men sinned. (Rom. 5:12.) Was it not to remedy this very thing that "the Word was made flesh," that "as in Adam all died, so in Christ all" might "be made alive" Unless, then, many had been made sinners by the disobedience of one, by the obedience of one many would not have been made righteous: (Rom. 5:19:) So there would have been no room for that amazing display of the Son of God's love to mankind: There would have been no occasion for his being "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." It could not then have been said, to the astonishment of all the hosts of heaven "God so loved the world," yea, the ungodly world, which had no thought or desire of returning to him, "that he gave his Son" out of his bosom, his only-begotten Son, "to the end that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Neither could we then have said, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself;" or, that he "made him to be sin," that is, a sin-offering, "for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him." There would have been no such occasion for such "an Advocate with the Father," as "Jesus Christ the righteous;" neither for his appearing "at the right hand of God, to make intercession for us."

2. What is the necessary consequence of this It is this: There could then have been no such thing as faith in God thus loving the world, giving his only Son for us men, and for our salvation. There could have been no such thing as faith in the Son of God, as "loving us and giving himself for us." There could have been no faith in the Spirit of God, as renewing the image of God in our hearts, as raising us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness. Indeed the whole privilege of justification by faith could have had no existence; there could have been no redemption in the blood of Christ; neither could Christ have been "made of God unto us," either "wisdom, righteousness. sanctification" or "redemption."

3. And the same grand blank which was in our faith must likewise have been in our love. We might have loved the Author of our being, the Father of angels and men as our Creator and Preserver: We might have said, "O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" -- But we could not have loved him under the nearest and dearest relation, -- as delivering up his Son for us all. We might have loved the Son of God, as being "the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person;" (although this ground seems to belong rather to the inhabitants of heaven than earth;) but we could not have loved him as "bearing our sins in his own body on the tree," and "by that one

oblation of himself once offered, making a full sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." We could not have been "made conformable to his death," nor have known "the power of his resurrection." We could not have loved the Holy Ghost, as revealing to us the Father and the Son; as opening the eyes of our understanding; bringing us out of darkness into his marvellous light; renewing the image of God in our soul, and sealing us unto the day of redemption. So that, in truth, what is now "in the sight of God, even the Father," not of fallible men, "pure religion and undefiled," would then have had no being; inasmuch as it wholly depends on those grand principles -- "By grace ye are saved through faith;" and, "Jesus Christ is of God made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption."

4. We see then, what unspeakable advantage we derive from the fall of our first parent with regard to faith; -- Faith both in God the Father, who spared not his own Son, his only Son, but "wounded him for our transgressions," and "bruised him for our iniquities;" and in God the Son, who poured out his soul for us transgressors, and washed us in his own blood. We see what advantage we derive therefrom with regard to the love of God; both of God the Father and God the Son. The chief ground of this love, as long as we remain in the body, is plainly declared by the Apostle: "We love Him, because He first loved us." But the greatest instance of his love had never been given, if Adam had not fallen.

5. And as our faith both in God the Father and the Son, receives an unspeakable increase, if not its very being. from this grand event, as does also our love both of the Father and the Son; so does the love of our neighbour also, our benevolence to all mankind, which cannot but increase in the same proportion with our faith and love of God. For who does not apprehend the force of that inference drawn by the loving Apostle: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" If God SO loved us, -- observe, the stress of the argument lies on this very point: SO loved us, as to deliver up his only Son to die a cursed death for our salvation. Beloved, what manner of love is this wherewith God hath loved us; so as to give his only Son, in glory equal with the Father, in Majesty co-eternal What manner of love is this wherewith the only-begotten Son of God hath loved us so as to empty himself, as far as possible, of his eternal Godhead; as to divest himself of that glory which he had with the Father before the world began; as to take upon him the form of a servant, being found in fashion as a man; and then, to humble himself still further, "being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!" If God SO loved us, how ought we to love one another! But this motive to brotherly love had been totally wanting if Adam had not fallen. Consequently, we could not then have loved one another in so high a degree as we may now. Nor could there have been that height and depth in the command of our blessed Lord, "As I have loved you, So love one another."

6. Such gainers may we be by Adam's fall, with regard both to the love of God and of our neighbour. But there is another grand point, which, though little adverted to, deserves our deepest consideration. By that one act of our first parent, not only "sin entered into the world," but pain also, and was alike the justice but the unspeakable goodness of God. For how much good does he continually bring out of this evil! How much holiness and happiness out of pain!

7. How innumerable are the benefits which God conveys to the children of men through the channel of sufferings! -- so that it might well be said, "What are termed afflictions in the language of men, are in the language of God styled blessings." Indeed, had there been no suffering in the world, a considerable part of religion, yea, and, in some respects, the most excellent part, could have had no place therein; since the very existence of it depends on our suffering; so that had there been no pain, it could have had no being. Upon this foundation, even our suffering, it is evident all our passive graces are built;

yea, the noblest of all Christian graces, -- love enduring all things. Here is the ground for resignation to God, enabling us to say from the heart in every trying hour, "It is the Lord: Let him do what seemeth him good:" "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil!" And what a glorious spectacle is this! Did it not constrain even a Heathen to cry out, Ecce spectaculum Deo dignum! "See a sight worthy of God;" a good man struggling with adversity, and superior to it. Here is the ground for confidence in God, both with regard to what we feel, and with regard to what we should fear, were it not that our soul is calmly stayed on Him. What room could there be for trust in God if there was no such thing as pain or danger Who might not say then, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it" It is by sufferings that our faith is tried, and, therefore, made more acceptable to God. It is in the day of trouble that we have occasion to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." And this is well pleasing to God, that we should own him in the face of danger: in defiance of sorrow, sickness, pain, or death.

8. Again: Had there been neither natural nor moral evil in the world, what must have become of patience, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering It is manifest they could have had no being; seeing all these have evil for their object. If, therefore, evil had never entered into the world, neither could these have had any place in it. For who could have returned good for evil, had there been no evil-doer in the universe How had it been possible, on that supposition, to "overcome evil with good" Will you say, "But all these graces might have been divinely infused into the hearts of men" Undoubtedly they might: But if they had, there would have been no use or exercise for them. Whereas in the present state of things we can never long want occasion to exercise them: And the more they are exercised, the more all our graces are strengthened and increased. And in the same proportion as our resignation, our confidence in God, our patience and fortitude, our meekness, gentleness, and longsuffering, together with our faith, and love of God and man, increase, must our happiness increase, even in the present world.

9. Yet again: As God's permission of Adam's fall gave all his posterity a thousand opportunities of suffering, and thereby of exercising all those passive graces which increase both their holiness and happiness; so it gives them opportunities of doing good in numberless instances; of exercising themselves in various good works, which otherwise could have had no being. And what exertions of benevolence, of compassion, of godlike mercy, had then been totally prevented! Who could then have said to the Lover of men, --

Thy Mind throughout my life be shown, While listening to the wretch's cry,
The orphan's groan, On mercy's wings I swiftly fly,
The poor and needy to relieve; Myself, my all for
them to give

It is the just observation of a benevolent man, --

All worldly joys are less Than that one joy of doing kindnesses.

Surely in "keeping this commandment," if to no other, "there is great reward." "As we have time, let us do good unto all men;" good of every kind, and in every degree. Accordingly, the more good we do, (other circumstances being equal,) the happier we shall be. The more we deal our bread to the hungry, and cover the naked with garments, -- the more we relieve the stranger and visit them that are sick or in prison, -- the more kind offices we do to those that groan under the various evils of human life, -- the more comfort we receive even in the present world, the greater the recompence we have in our own bosom.

10. To sum up what has been said under this head: As the more holy we are upon earth the more happy we must be; (seeing there is an inseparable connexion between holiness and happiness;) as the more good we do to others, the more of present reward redounds into our own bosom; even as our sufferings for God lead us to rejoice in him "with joy unspeakable and full of glory;" therefore, the fall of Adam, -- First, by giving us an opportunity of being far more holy, Secondly, by giving us the occasions of doing innumerable good works, which otherwise could not have been done, and, Thirdly, by putting it into our power to suffer for God, whereby "the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon us," -- may be of such advantage to the children of men, even in the present life, as they will not thoroughly comprehend till they attain life everlasting.

11. It is then we shall be enabled fully to comprehend, not only the advantages which accrue at the present time to the sons of men by the fall of their first parent, but the infinitely greater advantages which they may reap from it in eternity. In order to form some conception of this, we may remember the observation of the Apostle: As "one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead." The most glorious stars will undoubtedly be those who are the most holy, who bear most of that image of God wherein they were created; the next in glory to these will be those who have been most abundant in good works; and next to them, those that have suffered most, according to the will of God. But what advantages, in every one of these respects, will the children of God receive in heaven, by God's permitting the introduction of pain upon earth in consequence of sin! By occasion of this they attained many holy tempers, which otherwise could have had no being; -- resignation to God; confidence in him, in times of trouble and danger; patience, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, and the whole train of passive virtues: And on account of this superior holiness, they will then enjoy superior happiness. Again: Every one will then "receive his own reward, according to his own labour:" Every individual will be "rewarded according to his work." But the fall gave rise to innumerable good works, which could otherwise never have existed; such as ministering to the necessities of saints; yea, relieving the distressed in every kind: And hereby innumerable stars will be added to their eternal crown. Yet again: There will be an abundant reward in heaven for suffering as well as for doing the will of God: "These light affliction, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Therefore that event which occasioned the entrance of suffering into the world, has thereby occasioned to all the children of God an increase of glory to all eternity. For although the sufferings themselves will be at an end; although

The pain of life shall then be o'er, The anguish and distracting care;
There sighing grief shall weep no more; And sin shall never enter there; --

Yet the joys occasioned thereby shall never end, but flow at God's right hand for evermore.

12. There is one advantage more that we reap from Adam's fall, which is not unworthy our attention. Unless in Adam all had died, being in the loins of their first parent, every descendant of Adam, every child of man, must have personally answered for himself to God. It seems to be a necessary consequence of this, that if he had once fallen, once violated any command of God, there would have been no possibility of his rising again; there was no help, but he must have perished without remedy. For that covenant knew not to show mercy: The word was, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Now who would not rather be on the footing he is now, -- under a covenant of mercy Who would wish to hazard a whole eternity upon one stake Is it not infinitely more desirable to be in a state wherein, though encompassed with infirmities, yet we do not run such a desperate risk, but if we fall, we may rise again -- wherein we may say,

My trespass is grown up to heaven; But far above the skies, In Christ abundantly forgiven, I see thy mercies rise!

13. In Christ! Let me entreat every serious person once more to fix his attention here. All that has been said, all that can be said, on these subjects, centres in this point: The fall of Adam produced the death of Christ. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! Yea,

Let earth and heaven agree, Angels and men be join'd, To celebrate with me The Saviour of mankind;
To'adore the all-atoning Lamb, And bless the sound of Jesu's name!

If God had prevented the fall of man, "the Word" had never been "made flesh;" nor had we ever "seen his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." Those mysteries never had been displayed "which the" very "angels desire to look into." Methinks this consideration swallows up all the rest, and should never be out of our thoughts. Unless "by one man judgment had come upon all men to condemnation," neither angels nor men could ever have known "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

14. See, then, upon the whole, how little reason we have to repine at the fall of our first parent; since herefrom we may derive such unspeakable advantages, both in time and eternity. See how small pretence there is for questioning the mercy of God in permitting that event to take place; since therein mercy, by infinite degrees, rejoices over judgment. Where then is the man that presumes to blame God for not preventing Adam's sin Should we not rather bless him from the ground of the heart, for therein laying the grand scheme of man's redemption, and making way for that glorious manifestation of his wisdom, holiness, justice, and mercy If, indeed, God had decreed, before the foundation of the world, that millions of men should dwell in everlasting burnings, because Adam sinned hundreds or thousands of years before they had a being. I know not who could thank him for this, unless the devil and his angels: Seeing, on this supposition, all those millions of unhappy spirits would be plunged into hell by Adam's sin, without any possible advantage from it. But, blessed be God, this is not the case. Such a decree never existed. On the contrary, every one born of a woman may be an unspeakable gainer thereby: And none ever was or can be a loser but by his own choice.

15. We see here a full answer to that plausible account of the origin of evil, published to the world some years since, and supposed to be unanswerable: That it "necessarily resulted from the nature of matter, which God was not able to alter." It is very kind in this sweet-tongued orator to make an excuse for God! But there is really no occasion for it: God hath answered for himself. He made man in his own image; a spirit endued with understanding and liberty. Man, abusing that liberty, produced evil; brought sin and pain into the world. This God permitted, in order to a fuller manifestation of his wisdom, justice, and mercy, by bestowing on all who would receive it an infinitely greater happiness than they could possibly have attained if Adam had not fallen.

16. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Although a thousand particulars of "his judgments and of his ways are unsearchable" to us, and past our finding out; yet may we discern the general scheme running through time into eternity. "According to the counsel of his own will," the plan he had laid before the foundation of the world, he created the parent of all mankind in his own image; and he permitted all men to be made sinners, by the disobedience of that one man, that, by the obedience of one, all who receive the free gift may be infinitely holier and happier to all eternity.

Edited by Bob Westfall with corrections by Ryan Danker and George Lyons for the Wesley Center for

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