

Sermon on the Mount, 3

By John Wesley

Text from the 1872 edition - Thomas Jackson, editor
from www.wordsofwesley.com

Proper Cite: John Wesley. Sermon 23 "Sermon on the Mount, 3" in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson via WordsOfWesley.com (Accessed Apr 18,2024)

Sermon Number Sermon 23

Sermon Title Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount Discourse 3

Sermon Footnote (text of the 1872 edition)

Sermon Scripture "Blessed are the peacemakers: For they shall be called the children of God. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness" sake: For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: For great is your reward in heaven: For so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you." Matt. 5:8-12.

I I. 1. How excellent things are spoken of the love of our neighbour! It is "the fulfilling of the law," "the end of the commandment." Without this, all we have, all we do, all we suffer, is of no value in the sight of God. But it is that love of our neighbour which springs from the love of God: Otherwise itself is nothing worth. It behoves us, therefore, to examine well upon what foundation our love of our neighbour stands; whether it is really built upon the love of God; whether we do "love him because he first loved us;" whether we are pure in heart: For this is the foundation which shall never be moved. "Blessed are the pure in heart: For they shall see God."

2. "The pure in heart" are they whose hearts God hath "purified even as he is pure;" who are purified, through faith in the blood of Jesus, from every unholy affection; who, being "cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfect holiness in the" loving "fear of God." They are, through the power of his grace, purified from pride, by the deepest poverty of spirit; from anger, from every unkind or turbulent passion, by meekness and gentleness; from every desire but to please and enjoy God, to know and love him more and more, by that hunger and thirst

after righteousness which now engrosses their whole soul: So that now they love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and mind, and strength.

3. But how little has this purity of heart been regarded by the false teachers of all ages! They have taught men barely to abstain from such outward impurities as God hath forbidden by name; but they did not strike at the heart; and by not guarding against, they in effect countenanced, inward corruptions. A remarkable instance of this, our Lord has given us in the following words: "Ye have heard, that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery;" (Matt. 5:27;) and, in explaining this, those blind leaders of the blind only insist on men's abstaining from the outward act. "But I say unto you, whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart;" (Matt. 5:28;) for God requireth truth in the inward parts: He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins; and if thou incline unto iniquity with thy heart, the Lord will not hear thee.

4. And God admits no excuse for retaining anything which is an occasion of impurity. Therefore, "if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell:" (Matt. 5:29:) If persons as dear to thee as thy right eye be an occasion of thy thus offending God, a means of exciting unholy desire in thy soul, delay not, forcibly separate from them. "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell:" (Matt. 5:30:) If any who seem as necessary to thee as thy right hand be an occasion of sin, of impure desire; even though it were never to go beyond the heart, never to break out in word or action; constrain thyself to an entire and final parting: cut them off at a stroke: Give them up to God. Any loss, whether of pleasure, or substance, or friends, is preferable to the loss of thy soul. Two steps only it may not be improper to take before such an absolute and final separation. First, try whether the unclean spirit may not be driven out by fasting and prayer, and by carefully abstaining from every action, and word, and look, which thou hast found to be an occasion of evil. Secondly, if thou art not by this means delivered, ask counsel of him

that watcheth over thy soul, or, at least, of some who have experience in the ways of God, touching the time and manner of that separation; but confer not with flesh and blood, lest thou be "given up to a strong delusion to believe a lie."

5. Nor may marriage itself, holy and honourable as it is, be used as a pretence for giving a loose to our desires. Indeed, "it hath been said, Whosoever will put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:" And then all was well; though he alleged no cause, but that he did not like her, or liked another better. "But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the case of fornication," (that is, adultery; the word *porneia* signifying unchastity in general, either in the married or unmarried state,) causeth her to commit adultery, if she marry again: And whosoever shall marry her that is put away committeth adultery. (Matt 5:31, 32.) All polygamy is clearly forbidden in these words, wherein our Lord expressly declares, that for any woman who has a husband alive, to marry again is adultery. By parity of reason, it is adultery for any man to marry again, so long as he has a wife alive, yea, although they were divorced; unless that divorce had been for the cause of adultery: In that only case there is no scripture which forbids to marry again.

6. Such is the purity of heart which God requires, and works in those who believe on the Son of his love. And blessed are they who are thus "pure in heart; for they shall see God." he will "manifest himself unto them," not only "as he doth not unto the world," but as he doth not always to his own children. he will bless them with the clearest communications of his Spirit, the most intimate "fellowship with the Father and with the Son." he will cause his presence to go continually before them, and the light of his countenance to shine upon them. It is the ceaseless prayer of their heart, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory;" and they have the petition they ask of him. They now see Him by faith, (the veil of the flesh being made as it were transparent,) even in these his lowest works, in all that surrounds them, in all that God has created and made. They see Him in the height above, and in the depth beneath; they see Him filling all in all. The pure in heart see all things full of God. They see Him in the firmament of heaven; in the moon, walking in brightness; in the sun, when he rejoiceth as a giant to run his

course. They see Him "making the clouds his chariots, and walking upon the wings of the wind." They see Him "preparing rain for the earth, and blessing the increase of it; giving grass for the cattle, and green herb for the use of man." They see the Creator of all, wisely governing all, and "upholding all things by the word of his power." "o Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the world!"

7. In all his providences relating to themselves, to their souls or bodies, the pure in heart do more particularly see God. They see his hand ever over them for good; giving them all things in weight and measure, numbering the hairs of their head, making a hedge round about them and all that they have, and disposing all the circumstances of their life according to the depth both of his wisdom and mercy.

8. But in a more especial manner they see God in his ordinances. Whether they appear in the great congregation, to "pay him the honour due unto his name," "and worship him in the beauty of holiness;" or "enter into their closets," and there pour out their souls before their "Father which is in secret;" whether they search the oracles of God, or hear the ambassadors of Christ proclaiming glad tidings of salvation; or, by eating of that bread, and drinking of that cup, "show forth his death till he come" in the clouds of heaven; in all these his appointed ways, they find such a near approach as cannot be expressed. They see him, as it were, face to face, and "talk with him, as a man talking with his friend;" a fit preparation for those mansions above, wherein they shall see him as he is.

9. But how far were they from seeing God, who, having heard "that it had been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths," (Matt. 5:33,) interpreted it thus, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, when thou swearest by the Lord Jehovah. Thou "shalt perform unto the Lord" these thine oaths;" but as to other oaths, he regardeth them not. So the Pharisees taught. They not only allowed all manner of swearing in common conversation; but accounted even forswearing a little thing, so they had not sworn by the peculiar name of God. But our Lord here absolutely forbids all common swearing, as well as all false swearing; and shows the heinousness of both, by the same awful consideration, that every creature is Gods, and

he is everywhere present, in all, and over all. "I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is Gods throne;" (Matt. 5:34;) and, therefore, this is the same as to swear by Him who sitteth upon the circle of the heavens: "Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool;" (Matt. 5:35;) and he is as intimately present in earth as heaven: "Neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King;" and God is well known in her palaces. "Neither shalt thou swear by thy head; because thou canst not make one hair white or black;" (Matt. 5:36;) because even this, it is plain, is not thine, but Gods, the sole disposer of all in heaven and earth. "But let your communication," (Matt. 5:37,) your conversation, your discourse with each other "be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay;" a bare, serious affirming or denying; "for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil:" ek tou ponerou estin, is of the evil one; proceedeth from the devil, and is a mark of his children.

10. That our Lord does not here forbid the "swearing in judgment and truth," when we are required so to do by a Magistrate, may appear, (1.) From the occasion of this part of his discourse, -- the abuse he was here reproving, -- which was false swearing and common swearing; the swearing before a Magistrate being quite out of the question. -- (2.) From the very words wherein he forms the general conclusion: "Let your communication," or discourse, "be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay." -- (3.) From his own example; for he answered himself upon oath, when required by a Magistrate. When the High Priest said unto him, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God;" Jesus immediately answered in the affirmative, "Thou hast said;" (that is, the truth;) "nevertheless," (or rather, moreover,) "I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matt. 26:63, 64.) -- (4.) From the example of God, even the Father, who, "willing the more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath." (Heb. 6:17.) -- (5.) From the example of St. Paul, who we think had the Spirit of God, and well understood the mind of his Master. "God is my witness," saith he, to the Romans, "that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers:" (Rom. 1:9:) To the Corinthians, "I call God to record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth:" (2 Cor. 1:23:) And to the Philippians, "God is my record, how greatly I long after you in the

bowels of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:8.) Hence it undeniably appears that, if the Apostle knew the meaning of his Lord's words, they do not forbid swearing on weighty occasions, even to one another: How much less before a Magistrate! -- And, Lastly, from that assertion of the great Apostle, concerning solemn swearing in general: (Which it is impossible he could have mentioned without any touch of blame, if his Lord had totally forbidden it:) "Men verily swear by the greater;" by one greater than themselves; "and an oath for confirmation is to them the end of all strife." (Heb. 6:16.)

11. But the great lesson which our blessed Lord inculcates here, and which he illustrates by this example, is, that God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical atheism; but, with a true magnificence of thought, survey heaven and earth, and all that is therein, as contained by God in the hollow of his hand, who by his intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of universe.

II II. 1. Thus far our Lord has been more directly employed in teaching the religion of the heart. He has shown what Christians are to be. He proceeds to show, what they are to do also; -- how inward holiness is to exert itself in our outward conversation. "Blessed," saith he, "are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God."

2. "The peace-makers:" The word in the original is *hoi eirenopoioi*. It is well known that *eirene*, in the sacred writings, implies all manner of good; every blessing that relates either to the soul or the body, to time or eternity. Accordingly, when St. Paul, in the titles of his epistles, wishes grace and peace to the Romans or the Corinthians, it is as if he had said, "As a fruit of the free, undeserved love and favour of God, may you enjoy all blessings, spiritual and temporal; all the good things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

3. Hence we may easily learn, in how wide a sense the term peace-makers is to be understood. In its literal meaning it implies those lovers of God and man who utterly detest and abhor all strife and debate, all variance and contention; and accordingly labour with all their

might, either to prevent this fire of hell from being kindled, or, when it is kindled, from breaking out, or, when it is broke out, from spreading any farther. They endeavour to calm the stormy spirits of men, to quiet their turbulent passions, to soften the minds of contending parties, and, if possible, reconcile them to each other. They use all innocent arts, and employ all their strength, all the talents which God has given them, as well to preserve peace where it is, as to restore it where it is not. It is the joy of their heart to promote, to confirm, to increase, mutual good-will among men, but more especially among the children of God, however distinguished by things of smaller importance; that as they have all "one Lord, one faith," as they are all "called in one hope of their calling," so they may all "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called; with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

4. But in the full extent of the word, a peace-maker is one that, as he hath opportunity, "doth good unto all men;" one that, being filled with the love of God and of all mankind, cannot confine the expressions of it to his own family, or friends, or acquaintance, or party, or to those of his own opinions; -- no, nor those who are partakers of like precious faith; but steps over all these narrow bounds, that he may do good to every man, that he may, some way or other, manifest his love to neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. He doth good to them all, as he hath opportunity, that is, on every possible occasion; "redeeming the time," in order thereto; "buying up every opportunity, improving every hour, losing no moment wherein he may profit another. He does good, not of one particular kind, but good in general, in every possible way; employing herein all his talents of every kind, all his powers and faculties of body and soul, all his fortune, his interest, his reputation; desiring only, that when his Lord cometh He may say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

5. He doth good, to the uttermost of his power, even to the bodies of all men. He rejoices to "deal his bread to the hungry," and to "cover the naked with a garment." Is any a stranger? He takes him in, and relieves him according to his necessities. Are any sick or in prison? He visits them, and administers such help as they stand most in need of. And all

this he does, not as unto man; but remembering him that hath said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

6. How much more does he rejoice, if he can do any good to the soul of any man! This power, indeed, belongeth unto God. It is He only that changes the heart, without which every other change is lighter than vanity. Nevertheless, it pleases Him who worketh all in all, to help man chiefly by man; to convey his own power, and blessing, and love, through one man to another. Therefore, although it be certain that "the help which is done upon earth, God doth it himself;" yet has no man need, on this account to stand idle in his vineyard. The peace-maker cannot: He is ever labouring therein, and, as an instrument in God's hand, preparing the ground for his Master's use, or sowing the seed of the kingdom, or watering what is already sown, if haply God may give the increase. According to the measure of grace which he has received, he uses all diligence, either to reprove the gross sinner, to reclaim those who run on headlong in the broad way of destruction; or "to give light to them that sit in darkness," and are ready to "perish for lack of knowledge;" or to "support the weak, to lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees;" or to bring back and heal that which was lame and turned out of the way. Nor is he less zealous to confirm those who are already striving to enter in at the strait gate; to strengthen those that stand, that they may "run with patience the race which is set before them;" to build up in their most holy faith those that know in whom they have believed; to exhort them to stir up the gift of God which is in them, that daily growing in grace, "an entrance may be ministered unto them abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

7. "Blessed" are they who are thus continually employed in the work of faith and the labour of love; "for they shall be called," that is, shall be, (a common Hebraism,) "the children of God." God shall continue unto them the Spirit of adoption, yea, shall pour it more abundantly into their hearts. He shall bless them with all the blessings of his children. He shall acknowledge them as sons before angels and men; "and, if sons, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

III III. 1. One would imagine such a person as has been above

described, so full of genuine humility, so unaffectedly serious, so mild and gentle, so free from all selfish design, so devoted to God, and such an active lover of men, should be the darling of mankind. But our Lord was better acquainted with human nature in its present state. He therefore closes the character of this man of God with showing him the treatment he is to expect in the world. "Blessed," saith he, "are they which are persecuted for righteousness" sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

2. In order to understand this thoroughly, let us, First, inquire, Who are they that are persecuted? And this we may easily learn from St. Paul: "As of old, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." (Gal. 4:29.) "Yea," saith the Apostle, "and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12.) The same we are taught by St. John: "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:13-14.) As if he had said, The brethren, the Christians, cannot be loved, but by them who have passed from death unto life. And most expressly by our Lord: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:18.) By all these Scriptures it manifestly appears who they are that are persecuted; namely, the righteous: He "that is born of the Spirit;" "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus;" they that are "passed from death unto life;" those who are "not of the world;" all those who are meek and lowly in heart, that mourn for God, that hunger after his likeness; all that love God and their neighbour, and therefore, as they have opportunity, do good unto all men.

3. If it be, secondly, inquired, why they are persecuted, the answer is equally plain and obvious. It is "for righteousness" sake;" because they are righteous; because they are born after the Spirit; because they "will live godly in Christ Jesus;" because they "are not of the world." Whatever may be pretended, this is the real cause: Be their infirmities more or less, still, if it were not for this, they would be borne with, and

the world would love its own. They are persecuted, because they are poor in spirit; that is, say the world, "poor-spirited, mean, dastardly souls, good for nothing, not fit to live in the world:" -- because they mourn: "They are such dull, heavy, lumpish creatures, enough to sink anyone's spirits that sees them! They are mere death-heads; they kill innocent mirth, and spoil company wherever they come:" -- Because they are meek: "Tame, passive fools, just fit to be trampled upon:" -- Because they hunger and thirst after righteousness: "A parcel of hot-brained enthusiasts, gaping after they know not what, not content with rational religion, but running mad after raptures and inward feelings:" -- Because they are merciful, lovers of all, lovers of the evil and unthankful: "Encouraging all manner of wickedness; nay, tempting people to do mischief by impunity: and men who, it is to be feared, have their own religion still to seek; very loose in their principles:" -- Because they are pure in heart: "Uncharitable creatures, that damn all the world, but those that are of their own sort! Blasphemous wretches, that pretend to make God a liar, to live without sin!" -- Above all, because they are peace-makers; because they take all opportunities of doing good to all men. This is the grand reason why they have been persecuted in all ages, and will be till the restitution of all things: "If they would but keep their religion to themselves, it would be tolerable: But it is this spreading their errors, this infecting so many others, which is not to be endured. They do so much mischief in the world, that they ought to be tolerated no longer. It is true, the men do some things well enough; they relieve some of the poor: But this, too, is only done to gain the more to their party; and so, in effect, to do the more mischief!" Thus the men of the world sincerely think and speak. And the more the kingdom of God prevails, the more the peace-makers are enabled to propagate lowliness, meekness, and all other divine tempers, the more mischief is done, in their account: Consequently, the more are they enraged against the authors of this, and the more vehemently will they persecute them.

4. Let us, Thirdly, inquire, Who are they that persecute them? St. Paul answers, "He that is born after the flesh:" Everyone who is not "born of the Spirit," or, at least, desirous so to be; all that do not at least labour to "live godly in Christ Jesus;" all that are not "passed from death unto life," and, consequently, cannot "love the brethren;" "the world," that is,

according to our Saviour's account, they who "know not him that sent me; they who know not God, even the loving, pardoning God, by the teaching of his own Spirit. The reason is plain: The spirit which is in the world is directly opposite to the Spirit which is of God. It must therefore needs be, that those who are of the world will be opposite to those who are of God. There is the utmost contrariety between them, in all their opinions, their desires, designs, and tempers. And hitherto the leopard and the kid cannot lie down in peace together. The proud, because he is proud, cannot but persecute the lowly; the light and airy, those that mourn: And so in every other kind; the unlikeness of disposition (were there no other) being a perpetual ground of enmity. Therefore, were it only on this account, all the servants of the devil will persecute the children of God.

5. Should it be inquired, Fourthly, how they will persecute them, it may be answered in general, Just in that manner and measure which the wise Disposer of all sees will be most for his glory, -- will tend most to his children's growth in grace, and the enlargement of his own kingdom. There is no one branch of God's government of the world which is more to be admired than this. His ear is never heavy to the threatenings of the persecutor, or the cry of the persecuted. His eye is ever open, and his hand stretched out to direct every the minutest circumstance. When the storm shall begin, how high it shall rise, which way it shall point its course, when and how it shall end, are all determined by his unerring wisdom. The ungodly are only a sword of his; an instrument which he uses as it pleaseth him, and which itself, when the gracious ends of his providence are answered, is cast into the fire. At some rare times, as when Christianity was planted first, and while it was taking root in the earth; as also when the pure doctrine of Christ began to be planted again in our nation; God permitted the storm to rise high, and his children were called to resist unto blood. There was a peculiar reason why he suffered this with regard to the Apostles, that their evidence might be the more unexceptionable. But from the annals of the church we learn another, and a far different reason, why he suffered the heavy persecutions which rose in the second and third centuries; namely, because "the mystery of iniquity" did so strongly "work;" because of the monstrous corruptions which even then reigned in the church: These God chastised, and at the same time strove to

heal, by those severe but necessary visitations. Perhaps the same observation may be made, with regard to the grand persecution in our own land. God had dealt very graciously with our nation. He had poured out various blessings upon us: He had given us peace abroad and at home; and a King, wise and good beyond his years: And, above all, he had caused the pure light of his gospel to arise and shine amongst us. But what return did he find? "He looked for righteousness; but behold a cry!" -- a cry of oppression and wrong, of ambition and injustice, of malice, and fraud, and covetousness. Yea, the cry of those who even then expired in the flames entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. It was then God arose to maintain his own cause against those that held the truth in unrighteousness. Then he sold them into the hands of their persecutors, by a judgment mixed with mercy; an affliction to punish, and yet a medicine to heal, the grievous backslidings of his people.

6. But it is seldom God suffers the storm to rise so high as torture, or death, or bonds, or imprisonment. Whereas his children are frequently called to endure those lighter kinds of persecution; they frequently suffer the estrangement of kinsfolk, -- the loss of the friends that were as their own soul. They find the truth of their Lord's word (concerning the event, though not the design of his coming,) "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division." (Luke 12:51.) And hence will naturally follow loss of business or employment, and consequently of substance. But all these circumstances likewise are under the wise direction of God, who allots to everyone what is most expedient for him.

7. But the persecution which attends all the children of God is that our Lord describes in the following words: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you," -- shall persecute by reviling you, -- "and say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake." This cannot fail; it is the very badge of our discipleship; it is one of the seals of our calling; it is a sure portion entailed on all the children of God: If we have it not, we are bastards and not sons. Straight through evil report, as well as good report, lies the only way to the kingdom. The meek, serious, humble, zealous lovers of God and man are of good report among their brethren; but of evil report with the world, who count and treat them "as the filth and offscouring of all things."

8. Indeed some have supposed that before the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in the scandal of the cross will cease; that God will cause Christians to be esteemed and loved, even by those who are as yet in their sins. Yea, and sure it is, that even now he at some times suspends the contempt as well as the fierceness of men; "he makes a man's enemies to be at peace with him for a season, and gives him favour with his bitterest persecutors. But setting aside this exempt case, the scandal of the cross is not yet ceased; but a man may say still, "If I please men, I am not the servant of Christ. Let no man therefore regard that pleasing suggestion (pleasing doubtless to flesh and blood,) that bad men only pretend to hate and despise them that are good, but do indeed love and esteem them in their hearts." Not so: They may employ them sometimes; but it is for their own profit. They may put confidence in them; for they know their ways are not like other men's. But still they love them not; unless so far as the Spirit of God may be striving with them. Our Saviour's words are express: "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Yea, (setting aside what exceptions may be made by the preventing grace or the peculiar providence, of God,) it hateth them as cordially and sincerely as ever it did their Master.

9. It remains only to inquire, How are the children of God to behave with regard to persecution? And, First, they ought not knowingly or designedly to bring it upon themselves. This is contrary, both to the example and advice of our Lord and all his Apostles; who teach us not only not to seek, but to avoid it, as far as we can, without injuring our conscience; without giving up any part of that righteousness which we are to prefer before life itself. So our Lord expressly, "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another," which is indeed, when it can be taken, the most unexceptionable way of avoiding persecution.

10. Yet think not that you can always avoid it, either by this or any other means. If ever that idle imagination steals into your heart, put it to flight by that earnest caution, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." But will this screen you from persecution? Not unless you

have more wisdom than your Master, or more innocence than the Lamb of God. Neither desire to avoid it, to escape it wholly; for if you do, you are none of his. If you escape the persecution, you escape the blessing; the blessing of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. If you are not persecuted for righteousness' sake, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him, he will also deny us."

11. Nay, rather, "rejoice and be exceeding glad," when men persecute you for his sake; when they persecute you by reviling you, and by "saying all manner of evil against you falsely;" which they will not fail to mix with every kind of persecution: They must blacken you to excuse themselves: "For so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you!" -- those who were most eminently holy in heart and life; yea, and all the righteous which ever have been from the beginning of the world. Rejoice, because by his mark also ye know unto whom ye belong. And, because great is your reward in heaven," -- the reward purchased by the blood of the covenant, and freely bestowed in proportion to your sufferings, as well as to your holiness of heart and life. Be exceeding glad;" knowing that "these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

12. Meantime, let no persecution turn you out of the way of lowliness and meekness, of love and beneficence. "Ye have heard" indeed "that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;" (Matt. 5:38;) and your miserable teachers have hence allowed you to avenge yourselves, to return evil for evil: "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil:" -- Not thus; not by returning it in kind. "But, rather than do this, "whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." So invincible let thy meekness be. And be thy love suitable thereto. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Only give not away that which is another man's, that which is not thine own. Therefore, (1.) Take care to owe no man anything: For what thou owest is not thy own, but another man's. (2.) Provide for those of thine own household: This also God hath required of thee; and what is necessary to sustain them in life and

godliness is also not thine own. Then, (3.) Give or lend all that remains, from day to day, or from year to year: Only, first, seeing thou canst not give or lend to all, remember the household of faith.

13. The meekness and love we are to feel, the kindness we are to show to them which persecute us for righteousness' sake, our blessed Lord describes farther in the following verses: O that they were graven upon our hearts! "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy:" (Matt. 5:43.) God indeed had said only the former part, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour;" the children of the devil had added the latter, "and hate thy enemy:" "But I say unto you," (1.) "Love your enemies:" See that you bear a tender good-will to those who are most bitter of spirit against you; who wish you all manner of evil. (2.) "Bless them that curse you." Are there any whose bitterness of spirit breaks forth in bitter words? who are continually cursing and reproaching you when you are present, and "saying all evil against you" when absent? So much the rather do you bless: In conversing with them use all mildness and softness of language. Reprove them, by repeating a better lesson before them; by showing them how they ought to have spoken. And, in speaking of them, say all the good you can, without violating the rules of truth and justice. (3.) "Do good to them that hate you:" Let your actions show, that you are as real in love as they in hatred. Return good for evil. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (4.) If you can do nothing more, at least "pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." You can never be disabled from doing this; nor can all their malice or violence hinder you. Pour out your souls to God, not only for those who did this once, but now repent: -- This is a little thing: "If thy brother, seven times a day, turn and say unto thee, I repent;" (Luke 17:4) that is, if, after ever so many relapses, he give thee reason to believe that he is really and thoroughly changed; then thou shalt forgive him, so as to trust him, to put him in thy bosom, as if he had never sinned against thee at all: -- But pray for, wrestle with God for, those that do not repent, that now despitefully use thee and persecute thee. Thus far forgive them, "not until seven times only, but until seventy times seven." (Matt. 18:22.) Whether they repent or no, yea, though they appear farther and farther from it, yet show them this instance of kindness: "That ye may be the children," that ye may approve yourselves the genuine children, "of your Father which is

in heaven;" who shows his goodness by giving such blessings as they are capable of, even to his stubbornest enemies; "who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the Publicans the same?" (Matt. 5:46;) -- who pretend to no religion; whom ye yourselves acknowledge to be without God in the world. "And if ye salute," show kindness in word or deed to "your brethren," your friends or kinsfolk, "only; what do ye more than others?" -- than those who have no religion at all? "Do not even the publicans so?" (Matt. 5:47.) Nay, but follow ye a better pattern than them. In patience, in longsuffering, in mercy, in beneficence of every kind, to all, even to your bitterest persecutors; "be ye," Christians, "perfect," in kind, though not in degree, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48.)

IV IV. Behold Christianity in its native form, as delivered by its great Author! This is the genuine religion of Jesus Christ! Such he presents it to him whose eyes are opened. See a picture of God, so far as he is imitable by man! A picture drawn by God's own hand: "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!" Or rather, wonder and adore! Rather cry out, "Is this the religion of Jesus of Nazareth? the religion which I persecuted! Let me no more be found even to fight against God. Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" What beauty appears in the whole! How just a symmetry! What exact proportion in every part! How desirable is the happiness here described! How venerable, how lovely the holiness! This is the spirit of religion; the quintessence of it. These are indeed the fundamentals of Christianity. O that we may not be hearers of it only! -- "like a man beholding his own face in a glass, who goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Nay, but let us steadily "look into this perfect law of liberty, and continue therein." Let us not rest, until every line thereof is transcribed into our own hearts. Let us watch, and pray, and believe, and love, and "strive for the mastery," till every part of it shall appear in our soul, graven there by the finger of God; till we are "holy as He which hath called us is holy, perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect!"

Copyright © 2011-2014 WordsOfWesley.com. All rights reserved.

Proper Cite: John Wesley. Sermon 23 "Sermon on the Mount, 3" in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson via WordsOfWesley.com (Accessed Apr 18,2024)