

On the Fall of Man

By John Wesley

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Sermon Title On the Fall of Man

Sermon Footnote (text of the 1872 edition)

Sermon Scripture "Dust thou are, and unto dust shalt thou return."
Gen. 3:19.

Intro

1. Why is there pain in the world; seeing God is "loving to every man, and his mercy is over all his works?" Because there is sin: Had there been no sin, there would have been no pain. But pain (supposing God to be just) is the necessary effect of sin. But why is there sin in the world? Because man was created in the image of God: Because he is not mere matter, a clod of earth, a lump of clay, without sense or understanding; but a spirit like his Creator, a being endued not only with sense and understanding, but also with a will exerting itself in various affections. To crown all the rest, he was endued with liberty; a power of directing his own affections and actions; a capacity of determining himself, or of choosing good or evil. Indeed, had not man been endued with this, all the rest would have been of no use: Had he not been a free as well as an intelligent being, his understanding would have been as incapable of holiness, or any kind of virtue, as a tree or a block of marble. And having this power, a power of choosing good or evil, he chose the latter: He chose evil. Thus "sin entered into the world," and pain of every kind, preparatory to death.

2. But this plain, simple account of the origin of evil, whether natural or moral, all the wisdom of man could not discover till it pleased God to

reveal it to the world. Till then man was a mere enigma to himself; a riddle which none but God could solve. And in how full and satisfactory a manner has he solved it in this chapter! In such a manner, as does not indeed serve to gratify vain curiosity, but as is abundantly sufficient to answer a nobler end; to Justify the ways of God with men. To this great end I would, First, briefly consider the preceding part of this chapter; and then, Secondly, more particularly weigh the solemn words which have been already recited.

I

I. 1. In the First place let us briefly consider the preceding part of this chapter. "Now the serpent was more subtil," or intelligent, "than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made;" (Gen.3:1;) -- endued with more understanding than any other animal in the brute creation. Indeed, there is no improbability in the conjecture of an ingenious man, [The late Dr. Nicholas Robinson.] that the serpent was endued with reason, which is now the property of man. And this accounts for a circumstance which, on any other supposition, would be utterly unintelligible. How comes Eve not to be surprised, yea, startled and affrighted, at hearing the serpent speak and reason; unless she knew that reason, and speech in consequence of it, were the original properties of the serpent? Hence, without showing any surprise, she immediately enters into conversation with him. "And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" See how he, who was a liar from the beginning, mixes truth and falsehood together! Perhaps on purpose, that she might be the more inclined to speak, in order to clear God of the unjust charge. Accordingly, the woman said unto the serpent, (Gen. 3:2,) "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the tree in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Thus far she appears to have been clear of blame. But how long did she continue so? "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:4, 5.) Here sin began; namely, unbelief. "The woman was deceived," says the Apostle. She believed a lie: She gave more credit to the word of the devil, than to the word of God. And

unbelief brought forth actual sin: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit, and did eat;" and so completed her sin. But "the man," as the Apostle observes, "was not deceived." How then came he to join in the transgression? "She gave unto her husband, and he did eat." He sinned with his eyes open. He rebelled against his Creator, as is highly probable, Not by stronger reason moved, But fondly overcome with female charms. And if this was the case, there is no absurdity in the assertion of a great man, "That Adam sinned in his heart before he sinned outwardly; before he ate of the forbidden fruit;" namely, by inward idolatry, by loving the creature more than the Creator.

2. Immediately pain followed sin. When he lost his innocence he lost his happiness. He painfully feared that God, in the love of whom his supreme happiness before consisted. "He said," (Gen. 3:10,) "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid." He fled from Him who was, till then, his desire and glory and joy. He "hid himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden." Hid himself! What, from the all-seeing eye? the eye which, with one glance, pervades heaven and earth? See how his understanding likewise was impaired! What amazing folly was this! such as one would imagine very few, even of his posterity, could have fallen into. So dreadfully was his "foolish heart darkened" by sin, and guilt, and sorrow, and fear. His innocence was lost, and, at the same time, his happiness and his wisdom. Here is the clear, intelligible answer to that question, "How came evil into the world?"

3. One cannot but observe, throughout this whole narration, the inexpressible tenderness and lenity of the almighty Creator, from whom they had revolted, the Sovereign against whom they had rebelled. "And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" -- thus graciously calling him to return, who would otherwise have eternally fled from God. "And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked." Still here is no acknowledgment of his fault, no humiliation for it. But with what astonishing tenderness does God lead him to make that acknowledgment! "And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked?" How camest thou to make this

discovery? "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" "And the man said," still unhumbled, yea, indirectly throwing the blame upon G^Od himself, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." "And the Lord God," still in order to bring them to repentance, "said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done?" (Gen. 3:13.) "And the woman said," nakedly declaring the thing as it was, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." "And the Lord God said unto the serpent," to testify his utter abhorrence of sin, by a lasting monument of his displeasure, in punishing the creature that had been barely the instrument of it, "Thou art cursed above the cattle, and above every beast of the field. -- And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Thus, in the midst of judgment hath God remembered mercy, from the beginning of the world; connecting the grand promise of salvation with the very sentence of condemnation!

4. "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and," or in, "thy conception: In sorrow" or pain "thou shalt bring forth children;" -- yea, above any other creature under heaven; which original curse we see is entailed on her latest posterity. "And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." It seems, the latter part of this sentence is explanatory of the former. Was there, till now, any other inferiority of the woman to the man than that which we may conceive in one angel to another? "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake. -- Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee:" -- Useless, yea, and hurtful productions; whereas nothing calculated to hurt or give pain had at first any place in the creation. "And thou shalt eat the herb of the field:" -- Coarse and vile, compared to the delicious fruits of paradise! "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: For out of it wast thou taken: For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

II

II. 1. Let us now, in the Second place, weigh these solemn words in a

more particular manner. "Dust thou art:" But how fearfully and wonderfully wrought into innumerable fibres, nerves, membranes, muscles, arteries. veins, vessels of various kinds! And how amazingly is this dust connected with water, with inclosed, circulating fluids, diversified a thousand ways by a thousand tubes and strainers! Yea, and how wonderfully is air impacted into every part, solid, or fluid, of the animal machine; air not elastic, which would tear the machine in pieces, but as fixed as water under the pole! But all this would not avail, were not ethereal fire intimately mixed both with this earth, air, and water. And all these elements are mingled together in the most exact proportion; so that while the body is in health, no one of them predominates, in the least degree, over the others. II.

2. Such was man, with regard to his corporeal part, as he came out of the hands of his Maker. But since he sinned, he is not only dust, but mortal, corruptible dust. And by sad experience we find, that this "corruptible body presses down the soul." It very frequently hinders the soul in its operations; and, at best, serves it very imperfectly. Yet the soul cannot dispense with its service, imperfect as it is: For an embodied spirit cannot form one thought but by the mediation of its bodily organs. For thinking is not, as many suppose, the act of a pure spirit; but the act of a spirit connected with a body, and playing upon a set of material keys. It cannot possibly, therefore, make any better music than the nature and state of its instruments allow it. Hence every disorder of the body, especially of the parts more immediately subservient to thinking, lay an almost insuperable bar in the way of its thinking justly. Hence the maxim received in all ages, *Humanum est errare et nescire*, -- "Not ignorance alone," (that belongs, more or less, to every creature in heaven and earth; seeing none is omniscient, none knoweth all things, save the Creator,) "but error, is entailed on every child of man." Mistake, as well as ignorance, is, in our present state, inseparable from humanity. Every child of man is in a thousand mistakes, and is liable to fresh mistakes every moment. And a mistake in judgment may occasion a mistake in practice; yea, naturally leads thereto. I mistake, and possibly cannot avoid mistaking the character of this or that man. I suppose him to be what he is not; to be better or worse than he really is. Upon this wrong supposition I behave wrong to him; that is, more or less affectionately than he deserves. And by the mistake which is

occasioned by the defect of my bodily organs I am naturally led so to do. Such is the present condition of human nature; of a mind dependent on a mortal body. Such is the state entailed on all human spirits, while connected with flesh and blood!

3. "And unto dust thou shalt return." How admirably well has the wise Creator secured the execution of this sentence on all the offspring of Adam! It is true He was pleased to make one exception from this general rule, in a very early age of the world, in favour of an eminently righteous man. So we read, Gen. 5:23, 24, after Enoch had "walked with God" three hundred sixty and five years, "he was not; for God took him:" He exempted him from the sentence passed upon all flesh, and took him alive into heaven. Many ages after, he was pleased to make a second exception; ordering the Prophet Elijah to be taken up into heaven, in a chariot of fire, -- very probably by a convoy of angels, assuming that appearance. And it is not unlikely that he saw good to make a third exception in the person of the beloved disciple. There is transmitted to us a particular account of the Apostle John's old age; but we have not any account of his death, and not the least intimation concerning it. Hence we may reasonably suppose that he did not die, but that, after he had finished his course, and "walked with God" for about a hundred years, the Lord took him, as he did Enoch; not in so open and conspicuous a manner as he did the Prophet Elijah.

4. But setting these two or three instances aside, who has been able, in the course of near six thousand years, to evade the execution of this sentence, passed on Adam and all his posterity? Be men ever so great masters of the art of healing, can they prevent or heal the gradual decays of nature? Can all their boasted skill heal old age, or hinder dust from returning to dust? Nay, who among the greatest in masters of medicine has been able to add a century to his own years? yea, or to protract his own life any considerable space beyond the common period? The days of man, for above three thousand years, (from the time of Moses at least,) have been fixed, by a middling computation at threescore years and ten. How few are there that attain to fourscore years! Perhaps hardly one in five hundred. So little does the art of man avail against the appointment of God!

5. God has indeed provided for the execution of his own decree in the very principles of our nature. It is well known, the human body, when it comes into the world, consists of innumerable membranes exquisitely thin, that are filled with circulating fluid, to which the solid parts bear a very small proportion. Into the tubes composed of these membranes, nourishment must be continually infused; otherwise life cannot continue, but will come to an end almost as soon as it is begun. And suppose this nourishment to be liquid, which, as it flows through those fine canals, continually enlarges them in all their dimensions; yet it contains innumerable solid particles, which continually adhere to the inner surface of the vessels through which they flow; so that in the same proportion as any vessel is enlarged, it is stiffened also. Thus the body grows firmer as it grows larger, from infancy to manhood. In twenty, five-and-twenty, or thirty years, it attains its full measure of firmness. Every part of the body is then stiffened to its full degree; as much earth adhering to all the vessels, as gives the solidity they severally need to the nerves, arteries, veins, muscles, in order to exercise their functions in the most perfect manner. For twenty, or, it may be, thirty years following, although more and more particles of earth continually adhere to the inner surface of every vessel in the body, yet the stiffness caused thereby is hardly observable, and occasions little inconvenience. But after sixty years (more or less, according to the natural constitution, and a thousand accidental circumstances) the change is easily perceived, even at the surface of the body. Wrinkles show the proportion of the fluids to be lessened, as does also the dryness of the skin, through a diminution of the blood and juices, which before moistened and kept it smooth and soft. The extremities of the body grow cold, not only as they are remote from the centre of motion, but as the smaller vessels are filled up, and can no longer admit the circulating fluid. As age increases, fewer and fewer of the vessels are pervious, and capable of transmitting the vital stream; except the larger ones, most of which are lodged within the trunk of the body. In extreme old age, the arteries themselves, the grand instruments of circulation, by the continual apposition of earth, become hard, and, as it were, bony, till, having lost the power of contracting themselves, they can no longer propel the blood, even through the largest channels; in consequence of which, death naturally ensues. Thus are the seeds of death sown in our very nature! Thus from the very hour when we first appear on the stage of

life, we are travelling toward death: We are preparing, whether we will or no, to return to the dust from whence we came!

6. Let us now take a short review of the whole, as it is delivered with inimitable simplicity; what an unprejudiced person might, even from hence, infer to be the word of God. In that period of duration which He saw to be most proper, (of which He alone could be the judge, whose eye views the whole possibility of things from everlasting to everlasting,) the Almighty, rising in the greatness of his strength, went forth to create the universe. "In the beginning he created," made out of nothing, "the matter of the heavens and the earth:" (So, Mr. Hutchinson observes, the original words properly signify:) Then "the Spirit" or breath "from the Lord," that is, the air, "moved upon the face of the waters." Here were earth, water, air; three of the elements, or component parts of the lower world. "And God said, Let there be light: And there was light." By his omnific word, light, that is, fire, the fourth element, sprang into being. Out of these, variously modified and proportioned to each other, he composed the whole. "The earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed, and the tree yielding fruit after his kind;" and then the various tribes of animals, to inhabit the waters, the air, and the earth. But the very Heathen could observe, Sanctius his animal, mentisque capacius aluae Deerat adhuc! There was still wanting a creature of a higher rank, capable of wisdom and holiness. Natus homo est. So "God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him!" Mark the emphatical repetition. God did not make him mere matter, a piece of senseless, unintelligent clay; but a spirit, like himself, although clothed with a material vehicle. As such he was endued with understanding; with a will including various affections; and with liberty, a power of using them in a right or wrong manner, of choosing good or evil. Otherwise neither his understanding nor his will would have been to any purpose; for he must have been as incapable of virtue or holiness as the stock of a tree. Adam, in whom all mankind were then contained, freely preferred evil to good. He chose to do his own will, rather than the will of his Creator. He "was not deceived," but knowingly and deliberately rebelled against his Father and his King. In that moment he lost the moral image of God, and, in part, the natural: He commenced unholy, foolish, and unhappy. And "in Adam all died:" He entitled all his posterity to error, guilt, sorrow, fear, pain, diseases, and death.

7. How exactly does matter of fact, do all things round us, even the face of the whole world, agree with this account! Open your eyes! Look round you! See darkness that may be felt; see ignorance and error; see vice in ten thousand forms; see consciousness of guilt, fear, sorrow, shame, remorse, covering the face of the earth! See misery, the daughter of sin. See, on every side, sickness and pain, inhabitants of every nation under heaven; driving on the poor, helpless sons of men, in every age, to the gates of death! So they have done well nigh from the beginning of the world. So they will do, till the consummation of all things.

8. But can the Creator despise the work of his own hands? Surely that is impossible! Hath he not then, seeing he alone is able, provided a remedy for all these evils? Yea, verily he hath! And a sufficient remedy; every way adequate to the disease. He hath fulfilled his word: He hath given "the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent's head." -- "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is a remedy provided for all our guilt: He "bore all our sins in his body on the tree." And "if any one have sinned, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." And here is a remedy for all our disease, all the corruption of our nature. For God hath also, through the intercession of his Son, given us his Holy Spirit, to renew us both "in knowledge," in his natural image; -- opening the eyes of our understanding, and enlightening us with all such knowledge as is requisite to our pleasing God; -- and also in his moral image, namely, "righteousness and true holiness." And supposing this is done, we know that "all things" will "work together for our good." We know by happy experience, that all natural evils change their nature and turn to good; that sorrow, sickness, pain, will all prove medicines, to heal our spiritual sickness. They will all be to our profit; will all tend to our unspeakable advantage; making us more largely "partakers of his holiness," while we remain on earth; adding so many stars to that crown which is reserved in heaven for us.

9. Behold then both the justice and mercy of God! -- his justice in punishing sin, the sin of him in whose loins we were then all contained,

on Adam and his whole posterity; -- and his mercy in providing an universal remedy for an universal evil; in appointing the Second Adam to die for all who had died in the first; that, "as in Adam all died, so in Christ all" might "be made alive;" that, "as by one man"s offence, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so by the righteousness of one, the free gift" might "come upon all unto justification of life," -- "justification of life," as being connected with the new birth, the beginning of spiritual life, which leads us, through the life of holiness, to life eternal, to glory.

10. And it should be particularly observed, that "where sin abounded, grace does much more abound." For not as the condemnation, so is the free gift; but we may gain infinitely more than we have lost. We may now attain both higher degrees of holiness, and higher degrees of glory, than it would have been possible for us to attain. If Adam had not sinned, the Son of God had not died: Consequently that amazing instance of the love of God to man had never existed, which has, in all ages, excited the highest joy, and love, and gratitude from his children. We might have loved God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Governor; but there would have been no place for love to God the Redeemer. This could have had no being. The highest glory and joy of saints on earth, and saints in heaven, Christ crucified, had been wanting. We could not then have praised him that, thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, yet emptied himself, took upon him the form of a servant, and was obedient to death, even the death of the cross! This is now the noblest theme of all the children of God on earth; yea, we need not scruple to affirm, even of angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven. "Hallelujah," they cry, "To the King of the sky, To the great everlasting I AM; To the Lamb that was slain, And liveth again, Hallelujah to God and the Lamb!"

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