

**SELECTED SERMONS OF JOHN WESLEY
IN MODERN ENGLISH**

for

Small Group for a Stronger Life

January to February 2026

Monroe UMC

For use in conjunction with the resource, *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper,
published by Abingdon Press (2015).

Table of Contents

<i>The Marks of the New Birth</i>	3
<i>Summary</i>	3
<i>Outline</i>	3
<i>Sermon</i>	4
<i>The More Excellent Way</i>	11
<i>Summary</i>	11
<i>Outline</i>	11
<i>Sermon</i>	13
<i>God's Love to Fallen Humanity</i>	24
<i>Summary</i>	24
<i>Outline</i>	24
<i>Sermon</i>	26
<i>The Important Question</i>	36
<i>Summary</i>	36
<i>Outline</i>	36
<i>Sermon</i>	38
<i>On Love</i>	50
<i>Summary</i>	50
<i>Outline</i>	50
<i>Sermon</i>	52

The Marks of the New Birth

Summary

In *The Marks of the New Birth*, John Wesley explores what it means to be “born of the Spirit” — the spiritual transformation Jesus describes in John 3:8. Wesley explains that Scripture does not give a single formal definition of being born again, so he points instead to three clear marks that show when the new birth has happened in a person’s life:

1. Faith — a deep, life-changing trust in Jesus Christ that goes beyond merely agreeing with facts. This faith frees a person from the power of sin and brings peace with God. ([ResourceUMC](#))
2. Hope — a living, confident expectation of God’s promises that comes from the Holy Spirit confirming within the believer that they are truly God’s child. This hope produces joy even in suffering. ([ResourceUMC](#))
3. Love — the greatest mark of all. God’s love is poured into the believer’s heart, leading them to love God sincerely and to love others deeply, even their enemies. This love shows itself in obedience and good works. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Wesley emphasizes that the new birth is not about outward rituals or past baptism, but about the present reality of a life transformed by God’s Spirit. True children of God will increasingly show these marks in the way they live. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Outline

I. Introduction: What Is the “New Birth”?

- Jesus says only those born of the Spirit can see God’s kingdom (John 3:8).
- Wesley asks: *What does it mean to be born again or born of God?*
- Instead of a formal definition, Wesley highlights three biblical marks of the new birth. ([ResourceUMC](#))

II. First Mark: Faith

1. Faith is the foundation of the new birth.
2. This is not merely intellectual belief (which even evil spirits have).

3. True faith means trusting Jesus for forgiveness and new life.
4. Living faith produces real power over sin and obedience to God.
5. It brings peace with God that remains despite life's challenges. ([ResourceUMC](#))

III. Second Mark: Hope

1. Those born of God receive a living hope (1 Peter 1:3).
2. This hope grows from the Spirit confirming we are God's children.
3. Hope enables joy in trials and confidence in God's promises. ([ResourceUMC](#))

IV. Third (Greatest) Mark: Love

1. God pours His love into believers through the Spirit.
2. A child of God loves God with sincere devotion and delight.
3. This love naturally flows outward: we love others, including enemies.
4. True love leads to obedience and good works from the heart. ([ResourceUMC](#))

V. Conclusion: What It Means Today

- Being born of the Spirit shows itself in faith, hope, and love.
- These marks are not just feelings but deep, life-transforming realities.
- Wesley calls readers to examine their hearts: *Do these marks describe your life now?* ([ResourceUMC](#))

Sermon

A Modern Translation of John Wesley's Sermon 18

Based on John 3:8 - "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

(This modern English translation was created using Claude.AI. The 18th-century text of this message is found at <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/sermon-18-the-marks-of-the-new-birth>.)

The Three Core Marks

The first mark of the new birth, which is the foundation of all the others, is **faith**.

The second scriptural mark of those who are born of God is **hope**.

The third scriptural mark, and the greatest of all, is **love**.

PART I: FAITH

What does it mean to be "born again"?

Perhaps we don't need a precise definition, since Scripture doesn't give us one. But since this question matters deeply to every person—because Jesus said, "Unless someone is born again, born of the Spirit, they cannot see the kingdom of God"—I want to lay out the marks of the new birth as plainly as I find them in Scripture.

1. Faith is the Foundation

The first mark, which is the foundation of all the rest, is faith. Paul wrote, "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). John wrote that God gave the right to become children of God to those who believe in his name—who were born "not of natural descent, nor of human decision, but born of God" (John 1:12-13).

2. Not Just Mental Agreement

But this isn't just intellectual belief. It's not simply agreeing that "Jesus is the Christ" or accepting all the statements in the Creed or even the entire Bible as true. If that were enough, then even demons would be born of God—because they believe these things and tremble. They heard Jesus' words, saw his miracles, and knew he came from God. Yet despite this "faith," they remain in spiritual darkness.

3. Living Faith

True Christian faith—the kind that marks someone as born of God—is more than intellectual agreement. It's a disposition that God works in the heart: "a confident trust in God that, through Christ's merits, our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God."

This means a person must first give up trusting in themselves. To be accepted through Christ, they must completely reject any confidence in their own good works or righteousness. Having nothing to offer, no trust in their own merit, they come to God as lost, helpless sinners—people whose mouths are stopped and who stand guilty before God.

This deep awareness of sin (which some mistakenly call "despair"), combined with a complete conviction that salvation comes only through Christ and an earnest desire for that salvation—these must come before living faith. This faith is "not only belief in all the articles of our faith, but also true confidence in God's mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ."

4. Power Over Sin

An immediate and constant result of this faith is power over sin—both outward sins (wrong actions and words) and inward sins (unholy desires and attitudes). As Paul wrote in Romans 6, "How can we who died to sin continue to live in it?" Our old self was crucified with Christ so we would no longer be slaves to sin. "Sin shall not be your master... You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness."

5. Freedom from Sinning

John strongly affirms this same privilege. After marveling at God's love—"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"—he adds, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God" (1 John 3:9).

Some people want to add the word "habitually" to this verse—"doesn't sin habitually." But that word isn't there! God plainly says, "does not sin," and people add "habitually" to soften it. Who are you to modify God's words? This is a dangerous way of watering down God's precious promise.

6. Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

Let the apostle explain his own words. Earlier in the chapter he wrote, "You know that Christ appeared to take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning" (1 John 3:5-6). He warns, "Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you"—because many will try to convince you that you can keep sinning and still be God's child! "The one who does what is right is righteous... The one who does what is sinful is of the devil... No one who is born of God will continue to sin... This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are."

7. Peace

Another fruit of this living faith is peace. "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). Jesus himself promised this the night before his death: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27).

This is "the peace of God that transcends all understanding"—a serenity of soul that even spiritual people cannot fully express in words. It's a peace that all the powers of earth and hell cannot take away. It's built on a rock. It protects the hearts and minds of God's children at all times and in all places. Whether in ease or pain, sickness or health, plenty or want, they are content in God—thankful in every circumstance, confident that whatever happens is God's will for them.

PART II: HOPE

1. A Living Hope

A second scriptural mark of those born of God is hope. Peter wrote, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). He says "living hope" because there's also a dead hope—one that comes from pride and produces evil. But everyone who has this living hope "purifies themselves, just as he is pure."

2. The Witness of the Spirit

This hope includes two things: First, the testimony of our own conscience that we're living in godly sincerity. Second, God's Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are God's children, and therefore heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

3. God's Spirit Bearing Witness

Notice what God teaches us here: Who bears witness? Not just our spirit, but God's Spirit! What does he testify? That we are God's children and heirs with Christ. To whom does the Spirit give this witness? To all who are God's children.

Paul proves this in the verses before: "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

4. Universal Experience

Notice how Paul shifts between "you" and "we": "You have received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" All of you who are God's children have received this same Spirit—the same Spirit that we apostles, prophets, and teachers have received. We all have one Lord, one Spirit, one faith, one hope. The same Spirit bears witness with your spirit and with our spirit that we are God's children.

5. Sorrow Turned to Joy

This fulfills Jesus' promise: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Though sorrow may come before this witness—indeed must come while we feel God's wrath—as soon as someone experiences this witness, their sorrow turns to joy. Whatever pain they felt before, once this moment comes, they forget the anguish in the joy of being born of God.

Many of you may now have sorrow because you know you don't have this Spirit—you're "without hope and without God in the world." But when the Comforter comes, your heart will rejoice with a joy that no one can take from you. You'll be able to say, "We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Peter says those who are born again "greatly rejoice... with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:8).

This joy is beyond description—it's hidden manna that only those who receive it can know. But we know it not only remains but overflows even in deep suffering. When earthly comforts fail, God's comfort doesn't diminish—it increases. God's children can even "laugh at destruction," knowing that God will ultimately wipe away every tear, end all death, sorrow, and pain.

PART III: LOVE

1. The Greatest Mark

A third scriptural mark, and the greatest of all, is love—"God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5). Because they are sons and daughters, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying "Abba, Father!" (Galatians 4:6).

By this Spirit, continually looking to God as their loving Father, they pray to him for everything they need. They pour out their hearts before him. Their delight is in him. He is their joy, their shield, their great reward. Their deepest desire is toward him; doing his will is their food and drink; they are satisfied while praising him.

2. Love for Jesus

"Everyone who loves the father loves his child as well" (1 John 5:1). Their spirit rejoices in God their Savior. They love the Lord Jesus Christ sincerely. They are so united with him that they are one spirit. They know and feel the meaning of "My beloved is mine and I am his."

3. Love for Others

The necessary fruit of loving God is loving our neighbor—every person God has made, including our enemies and those persecuting us. We love them as we love ourselves. Jesus put it even

more strongly: "Love one another as I have loved you." The commandment written in the hearts of all who love God is: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

John writes, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters" (1 John 3:16). If we're ready to do this, then we truly love our neighbor. Then we know we've "passed from death to life."

4. Love Means Obedience

Someone might ask, "Doesn't the apostle say, 'This is love for God: to keep his commands'?" (1 John 5:3). Yes, and this is also love for our neighbor in the same sense. But what does this mean? That keeping external rules is all that's involved in loving God with all your heart? That love is just outward service, not an affection of the soul? Obviously not!

The plain meaning is: This is the sign or proof of God's love—keeping his commandments. True love, once poured into our hearts, compels us to obey, since whoever loves God with all their heart cannot help but serve him with all their strength.

5. Universal Obedience

Another fruit of loving God is universal obedience and conformity to his will—obeying all God's commands, both internal and external, in every attitude and action. This includes being zealous for good works, hungering and thirsting to do good to everyone in every possible way, rejoicing to spend ourselves for others without looking for any reward in this world.

PART IV: CONCLUSION

1. Summary

I've plainly laid out the marks of the new birth as found in Scripture. This is what it means to be born of God: To believe in God through Christ so as not to continue in sin, and to enjoy at all times God's peace. To hope in God so as to have both a clear conscience and God's Spirit witnessing that you are his child—which naturally produces rejoicing. To love God as you've never loved anyone, so that you're compelled to love everyone with a love that burns in your heart and shows itself in all your actions, making your whole life one continual act of love and obedience.

2. A Question for You

Who among you is born of God? You who are know it. You know you are God's children. Everyone who has heard these words can feel and know in their heart whether at this moment they are a child of God or not.

The question isn't what happened when you were baptized. The question is: What are you now? Is the Spirit of adoption in your heart right now? Does the Spirit of Christ rest upon you?

3. Don't Rely on Past Baptism

Don't say, "I was baptized, therefore I am now a child of God." That doesn't follow. How many baptized people are gluttons, drunkards, liars, slanderers, thieves? Are these the children of God? If any of these descriptions fit you, then you are following the devil, not God.

4. You Must Be Born Again

How can you escape? Only by being born again! You are now dead in your sins. To say you cannot be born again, that there's no new birth except baptism, is to leave you without hope.

"You must be born again." Don't lean on the broken idea that you were born again in baptism. You may have been made a child of God then, but if you're now a child of the devil, you must be born again. If you've heard the marks of God's children and don't have them, whether you were baptized or not, you must receive them or you will perish eternally.

If you were baptized, your only hope is this: Those who were made children of God by baptism but are now children of the devil may yet again receive power to become God's children. They may receive again what they've lost—the Spirit of adoption crying in their hearts, "Abba, Father!"

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus! May everyone who prepares their heart to seek your face receive again that Spirit of adoption and cry out, "Abba, Father!" Let them now have power to believe in your name and become a child of God—to know they have redemption through your blood and forgiveness of sins, and that they cannot continue sinning because they are born of God. Let them be born again into a living hope, so they may purify themselves as you are pure. And because they are your children, let the Spirit of love and glory rest upon them, cleansing them and teaching them to live in holiness!

The More Excellent Way

Summary

In *The More Excellent Way*, John Wesley reflects on 1 Corinthians 12:31 where Paul urges believers to seek not just spiritual gifts, but *the best way of life*. Wesley observes that many Christians follow ordinary patterns of living that are morally acceptable but offer little spiritual depth or transformation. Using Paul's phrase "a more excellent way," Wesley encourages believers to pursue a higher, more Christlike way of living in every part of daily life — from how we *order our devotions, conduct our work, eat and converse, enjoy rest and recreation, and use our money*. The core of the sermon is that true Christianity is not a low-cost morality but a life shaped by love, intentional devotion, self-denial, and generous service. Wesley calls Christians to go beyond the ordinary and choose practices that cultivate holiness and love — the more excellent way that honors God and advances Christ's kingdom. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Outline

I. Opening: What Is the "More Excellent Way"?

- Wesley begins with Paul's command to desire the best gifts but then shows an even *better way* — one that brings true spiritual life and purpose. ([ResourceUMC](#))

II. Ordinary Christian Life vs. the More Excellent Way

Wesley compares common Christian habits with a higher pattern of life:

1. Morning and Sleep

- Most Christians sleep long and rise late because of custom.
- The more excellent way is sensible regulation of sleep (enough but not excessive) that promotes health and spiritual alertness. ([ResourceUMC](#))

2. Private Devotion

- Many Christians pray from rote or fixed forms without variation.

- The more excellent way is responsive prayer — shaped by our situation and honest inner needs (praise when joyful; confession and supplication in distress). ([ResourceUMC](#))

3. Work and Daily Labor

- Christians often work simply to provide for themselves and their families — the same motive as a non-Christian might have.
- The more excellent way is to work *with prayer, for God's glory, and as an offering to God*, not just for earthly needs. ([ResourceUMC](#))

4. Meals and Conversation

- Eating is a natural necessity, but many approach it unthinkingly or make it a time of casual talk.
- The more excellent way:
 - Begins meals with *serious prayer and thanksgiving*
 - Uses conversation that builds up others rather than merely entertains. ([ResourceUMC](#))

5. Recreation and Diversion

- Christians engage in various amusements (sports, games, sociable activities).
- The more excellent way is recreation that enriches the mind and spirit, serves others, or deepens appreciation for God's goodness, rather than distractions that detach believers from spiritual focus. ([ResourceUMC](#))

6. Use of Money

Wesley treats money as a key test of Christian devotion:

- Many Christians give charity in expected, customary ways.
- The more excellent way is to view our resources as entrusted by God for the care of others:

- Provide for personal and family needs, then give generously
- Do not seek to accumulate wealth for its own sake
- Give in ways that benefit others spiritually and materially
- Understand that money invested in God's kingdom bears eternal value.
([ResourceUMC](#))

Closing Challenge

Wesley's central conviction is that Christians can walk this *more excellent way* by the grace of God. It is not merely a set of rules, but a *transformed life*, shaped by love, intentional devotion, and a heart set on Christ's will. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Key Verse

"Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet I show you a more excellent way."
— 1 Corinthians 12:31 (Wesley's text) ([ResourceUMC](#))

Sermon

A Modern Translation of John Wesley's Sermon 89

Based on 1 Corinthians 12:31 - "Eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way."

(This modern English translation was created using Claude.AI. The 18th-century text of this message is found at <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/sermon-89-the-more-excellent-way>.)

Introduction

1. The Context of Paul's Words

In the verses before this, Paul has been talking about the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit—gifts like healing the sick, prophesying (foretelling the future), speaking in languages never learned, and miraculously interpreting those languages. The apostle acknowledges these gifts are desirable. He even encourages the Corinthians, especially the teachers among them, to

eagerly desire these gifts so they could be more useful to both Christians and non-Christians. "And yet," he says, "I will show you the most excellent way"—a way far more desirable than all these gifts combined, because it will certainly lead you to happiness both in this world and the next. You could have all those gifts to the highest degree and still be miserable both now and eternally.

2. Why the Extraordinary Gifts Ceased

These extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit don't appear to have been common in the church for more than two or three centuries. We rarely hear of them after that tragic period when Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian and, with the misguided idea of promoting Christianity, piled riches, power, and honor on Christians in general—particularly on Christian clergy. From that time on, these gifts almost completely ceased.

The cause wasn't (as people commonly suppose) "because there was no more need for them" or "because everyone had become Christian." That's a terrible mistake—not even a twentieth of the world was Christian then. The real cause was that "the love of many"—almost all so-called Christians—"grew cold." These Christians had no more of Christ's Spirit than the pagans. When the Son of Man came to examine his Church, he could hardly "find faith on earth." This was the real reason the extraordinary gifts disappeared from the Christian Church—because Christians had become pagans again, keeping only an empty shell of religion.

3. Desiring the Ordinary Gifts

However, I don't want to talk about those extraordinary gifts right now, but about the ordinary ones. We can legitimately desire these to be more useful in our generation. With this goal in mind, we can desire the gift of convincing speech to reach unbelieving hearts, and the gift of persuasion to move people's emotions while enlightening their understanding. We can desire knowledge of both God's word and his works—whether in providence or grace. We can desire faith that, in particular situations where God's glory or human happiness is at stake, goes far beyond natural ability. We can desire clear communication, a pleasant manner, and resignation to our Lord's will—whatever would enable us to be useful wherever we are. We can innocently desire these gifts. But there is a more excellent way.

4. The Way of Love

The way of love—loving all people for God's sake with humble, gentle, patient love—is what the apostle so wonderfully describes in the next chapter. Without this love, he assures us, all eloquence, knowledge, faith, works, and sufferings are worth no more to God than clanging cymbals, and don't help at all toward our eternal salvation. Without love, everything we know, believe, do, or suffer will profit us nothing on the great day of judgment.

5. Two Orders of Christians

But I want to take a different view of this text and point out "a more excellent way" in another sense. An ancient writer observed that from the beginning there have been two types of Christians:

One group lived innocent lives, conforming in all non-sinful things to the customs and fashions of the world. They did many good works, avoided gross evils, and participated in religious services. They generally tried to maintain a clear conscience in their outward behavior, but didn't aim for any particular strictness—in most ways they were like their neighbors.

The other group not only avoided all appearance of evil and were zealous for good works of every kind and faithful in worship, but also worked diligently to develop the whole mind of Christ and to walk in every way as their beloved Master walked. To accomplish this, they practiced constant universal self-denial, giving up every pleasure that didn't prepare them to find pleasure in God. They took up their cross daily. They struggled continuously to enter through the narrow gate. This was their singular focus: they spared no effort to reach the summit of Christian holiness, moving beyond the basics of Christian doctrine toward perfection—to know God's love that surpasses knowledge and be filled with all the fullness of God.

6. The Choice After Justification

From long experience and observation, I'm inclined to think that whoever finds redemption through Jesus' blood—whoever is justified—has the choice at that moment to walk the higher or lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time shows them "the more excellent way" and urges them to walk in it, to choose the narrowest path within the narrow way, to aspire to the heights and depths of holiness—to the complete image of God. But if they don't accept this offer, they gradually slip into the lower order of Christians. They still continue in what may be called a good way, serving God to some degree, and find mercy at life's end through Christ's blood.

7. Not Condemning, But Encouraging

I would never discourage those who serve God at a lower level. But I wouldn't want them to stop there. I want to encourage them to come up higher—without threatening them with hellfire, without condemning their current path and saying it leads to destruction. Instead, I'll try to point out what is in every respect "a more excellent way."

8. The Stakes

Let me be clear: I'm not saying that everyone who doesn't walk this way is headed straight to hell. But I must say this: they won't have as high a place in heaven as they would have had if

they'd chosen the better part. Is this a small loss—having fewer stars in your crown of glory? Will it be a minor thing to have a lower place in your Father's kingdom than you could have had? Certainly there will be no sorrow in heaven; all tears will be wiped away. But if grief could enter there, we would grieve at that irreparable loss. Irreparable then—but not now. Now, by God's grace, we can choose the "more excellent way." Let's now compare this way, in a few specific areas, with the way most Christians live.

I. THE BEGINNING OF THE DAY

Most Christians, if they don't have to work for a living, get up—particularly in winter—at eight or nine in the morning, after lying in bed eight, nine, or more hours. I won't say (as I would have fifty years ago) that everyone who indulges themselves this way is headed to hell. But neither can I say they're on the path to heaven, denying themselves and taking up their cross daily.

I'm certain there is "a more excellent way" to promote both physical and mental health. From over sixty years of observation, I've learned that healthy men require, on average, six to seven hours of sleep, and healthy women a little more—seven to eight hours—in a twenty-four-hour period. I know this amount of sleep to be most beneficial for both body and soul. It's better than any medicine I've known for both preventing and treating nervous disorders.

Therefore, it's undoubtedly the most excellent way, regardless of fashion and custom, to get exactly as much sleep as experience proves our bodies need—since this is clearly most conducive to both physical and spiritual health. Why shouldn't you live this way? Because it's difficult? With human effort alone, it's impossible. But everything is possible with God, and by his grace everything will become possible for you. Just keep praying consistently, and you'll find this not only possible but easy. In fact, it will be much easier to rise early consistently than to do it occasionally. But you must start at the right end: if you rise early, you must go to bed early. Commit to going to bed at a fixed time unless something extraordinary happens. The difficulty will soon pass, but the benefit will last forever.

II. PRIVATE PRAYER

Most Christians, as soon as they get up, use some kind of prayer—probably the same form they learned when they were eight or ten years old. Now I don't condemn those who do this (though many do) as mocking God, even though they've used the same form without any variation for twenty or thirty years. But surely there is "a more excellent way" to conduct our private devotions.

What if you followed the advice given by that great and good man, William Law, on this subject? Consider both your outward and inward circumstances, and vary your prayers accordingly.

For your outward circumstances: If you're prospering—in good health, comfortable, financially secure, surrounded by kind family, good neighbors, and loving friends—then your situation clearly calls for praise and thanksgiving to God. On the other hand, if you're facing adversity—if God has allowed trouble in your life, if you're in poverty, want, or distress, in imminent danger, in pain or sickness—then you're clearly called to pour out your soul before God in prayer suited to your circumstances.

For your inward state: Is your soul heavy, either from awareness of sin or through many temptations? Then let your prayer consist of confessions, petitions, and appeals that match your distressed state of mind. On the contrary, is your soul at peace? Are you rejoicing in God? Is his comfort abundant with you? Then say with the Psalmist: "You are my God, and I will love you; you are my God, and I will praise you."

When you have time, you can add to your other prayers some reading and meditation, and perhaps a psalm of praise—the natural expression of a thankful heart. You must certainly see that this is "a more excellent way" than the poor, dry formula you used before.

III. WORK AND BUSINESS

1. Your Purpose in Working

Most Christians, after prayer, apply themselves to their work. Every person with any claim to being a Christian will certainly do this, since it's impossible for a lazy person to be a good person—laziness is incompatible with religion. But with what goal? For what purpose do you undertake and pursue your work?

"To provide necessities for myself and my family." That's a good answer as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. A Muslim or a pagan has the same goal—works for the very same reasons. But a Christian can go much further: Their purpose in all their work is to please God; to do not their own will but the will of the one who sent them into the world—for this very purpose, to do God's will on earth as angels do in heaven. They work for eternity. They don't labor merely for material things that perish (though that's part of it), but for what lasts forever. Isn't this "a more excellent way"?

2. Your Manner of Working

In what manner do you conduct your business? I trust with diligence—whatever you do, doing it with all your might; with justice—giving everyone their due in every circumstance; and with

mercy—doing to everyone what you would want them to do for you. This is good. But a Christian is called to go further—to add piety to justice, to mix prayer (especially heartfelt prayer) with all their work. Without this, all your diligence and justice only show you to be an honest pagan. Many who profess Christianity go no further than honest paganism.

3. Your Spirit in Working

In what spirit do you do your work? In the spirit of the world, or the Spirit of Christ? I'm afraid thousands of so-called good Christians don't even understand the question.

If you act in Christ's Spirit, you carry your original purpose through all your work from start to finish. You do everything in the spirit of sacrifice, surrendering your will to God's will, constantly aiming not at ease, pleasure, or wealth—not at anything this temporary world can give—but solely at God's glory. Now can anyone deny that this is the most excellent way of doing everyday work?

IV. MEALS

1. Asking Blessing and Giving Thanks

These bodies we carry around require constant maintenance, or they'll return to the earth sooner than necessary. We need daily food to repair the constant wear and tear on our bodies. In the pagan world, before eating or drinking, people would pour out a little to honor their god (though the gods of pagans were really demons, as the apostle rightly observes).

"It seems," says a recent writer, "there was once a similar custom in our own country. We still frequently see a gentleman before sitting down to dinner in his own house holding his hat before his face, perhaps seeming to say something—though he usually does it in such a manner that no one can tell what he says."

Now what if, instead of this, every head of household before sitting down to eat and drink—morning, noon, or night (the principle is the same at any hour)—seriously asked God's blessing on what they were about to receive? And afterward, seriously gave thanks to the Giver of all blessings? Wouldn't this be "a more excellent way" than using that dull charade which is worse than nothing—being really just mockery of both God and man?

2. The Quality and Quantity of Food

As to quantity, decent people don't usually eat to excess—at least not to the point of making themselves sick with food or drunk with alcohol. And as to the manner of eating, it's usually innocent, mixed with a little humor, which is said to help digestion. So far, so good. And

provided they eat only plain, inexpensive, wholesome food in amounts that best promote health of both body and mind, there's no cause for blame.

I can't require you to take the advice of George Herbert, though he was a good man, who said:

"Take your food; think it's dust; then eat a bit And say with all, 'Earth to earth I commit.'"

This is too melancholy; it doesn't suit the cheerfulness that's highly appropriate at a Christian meal.

Let me illustrate with a story. The King of France one day, while hunting, rode ahead of all his companions. When they finally found him, he was sitting in a cottage eating bread and cheese. Seeing them, he cried out: "Where have I lived all my life? I've never tasted such good food before!" "Your Majesty," said one of them, "you never had such good seasoning before—you were never hungry."

Now it's true, hunger is good seasoning. But there's an even better one: thankfulness. Surely food seasoned with thankfulness is the most satisfying. Why shouldn't yours be at every meal? You don't need to think about death—instead, receive every bite as a pledge of eternal life. The Author of your being gives you in this food not only a reprieve from death but a guarantee that soon "death will be swallowed up in victory."

3. Conversation at Meals

Mealtime is usually a time for conversation as well, since it's natural to refresh our minds while we refresh our bodies. Let's consider how most Christians usually converse with each other. What are the ordinary topics of their conversation?

If it's harmless (as we would hope)—if there's nothing profane, immodest, untrue, or unkind; if there's no gossip, slander, or evil speaking—they have reason to thank God for his restraining grace. But there's more to "ordering our conversation rightly" than just avoiding harm.

For conversation to be truly excellent, it needs three things:

First, your conversation should be "good"—good in substance, on good subjects. Don't just chatter about whatever comes up. What business do you have discussing courts and kings? It's not your responsibility to "fight over wars or reform the state," unless some remarkable event calls for acknowledging God's justice or mercy. We must sometimes talk about worldly things—otherwise we might as well leave the world—but only as necessary. Then we should return to better subjects.

Second, let your conversation be "useful for building others up"—designed to build up either the speaker or the hearers (or both) in whatever they particularly need, whether faith, love, or holiness.

Third, see that it not only entertains but also "imparts grace to those who hear" in one way or another.

Now, isn't this "a more excellent way" of conversing than the merely harmless conversation mentioned above?

V. RECREATION AND LEISURE

1. The Need for Relaxation

We've seen the "more excellent way" of conducting our conversation and our work. But we can't always focus on business—both our bodies and minds need relaxation. We need breaks from work. I need to be very clear on this point, as it's been much misunderstood.

2. Types of Entertainment

Entertainment comes in various forms. Some are almost exclusively for men, like outdoor sports—hunting, shooting, fishing (not many women, I should say ladies, participate in these). Others are used by both sexes: some are more public, like races, masquerades, plays, assemblies, and balls. Others are mainly in private homes, like cards, dancing, and music. We might add reading plays, novels, romances, newspapers, and trendy poetry.

3. Outdated Entertainments

Some entertainments that were once popular have now fallen out of favor. The nobility and gentry (in England at least) seem to completely disregard the once-fashionable sport of hawking. Common people are no longer entertained by men hacking each other to pieces with broadswords. The "noble game" of quarterstaff is now practiced by very few. Even cudgeling has lost its appeal, even in Wales itself. Bear-baiting is now very rarely seen, and bull-baiting not very often. And cockfighting would completely cease in England if not for two or three aristocratic patrons.

4. Barbaric Sports

I don't need to say more about these foul remnants of medieval barbarity than that they're a disgrace not only to all religion but to human nature itself. I wouldn't pass such harsh judgment on hunting and similar field sports. Let those who have nothing better to do continue chasing foxes and hares. I don't need to say much about horse races either, until someone sensible will try to defend them.

Much more might be said in defense of watching a serious tragedy. I couldn't do it with a clear conscience—at least not in an English theater, which is a cesspool of profanity and debauchery—but perhaps others can.

I can't say as much for balls or assemblies, which are more respectable than masquerades but must be acknowledged by all impartial people to have exactly the same tendency. Public dancing certainly has the same effect, unless we adopt the precaution observed by ancient pagans: men and women never danced together but always in separate rooms. This was always observed in ancient Greece and for several centuries in Rome, where a woman dancing with men would immediately be considered a prostitute.

About playing cards, I say the same as about watching plays: I couldn't do it with a clear conscience. But I'm not obliged to judge those who think differently. I leave them to their own Master; they'll stand or fall before him.

5. Better Ways to Relax

But suppose all these things—along with reading plays, novels, newspapers, and the like—are completely innocent forms of entertainment. Aren't there still more excellent ways to relax for those who love or fear God?

For those who want outdoor recreation: You can cultivate and improve your land, plant your grounds, and work on developing your gardens and orchards. At other times you can visit and converse with the most serious and sensible of your neighbors, or visit the sick, the poor, widows, and orphans in their distress.

For those who want indoor recreation: You can read useful history, inspiring poetry, or various branches of natural science. If you have time, you might enjoy music or scientific experiments.

But above all, once you've learned the practice of prayer, you'll find that like the air that fills all space and surrounds this earth, prayer will permeate every moment of life, mixing with all your activities. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, it will surround you on every side. Then you'll be able to say boldly:

"With me there's no empty moment, No time wasted or unimproved; My weariness of life is gone— I live to serve my God alone, And know only Jesus."

VI. THE USE OF MONEY

One final point remains: the use of money. How do most Christians use their money? And isn't there "a more excellent way"?

1. Typical Christian Giving

Most Christians set aside something yearly—perhaps a tenth or even an eighth of their income, whether from investments or business—for charitable purposes. I've known few who said like Zacchaeus, "Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor." Oh, that God would multiply these friends of humanity, these generous benefactors!

2. Responding to Needs

Besides those who give by a set rule, thousands give large sums to the poor, especially when a striking case of distress is presented to them vividly.

3. A Better Way

I thank God for all of you who act this way. May you never grow weary of doing good! May God restore what you give many times over! But still I show you a more excellent way.

4. Stewardship Principles

Consider yourself as someone in whose hands the Owner of heaven and earth has placed a portion of his resources, to be distributed according to his instructions. His instruction is that you should see yourself as one of a certain number of needy people who are to be provided for from that portion of his resources entrusted to you.

You have two advantages over the others: First, "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Second, you should provide for yourself first, then others afterward. This is how you should see yourself and them.

To be more specific:

If you're single: After you've provided for yourself, give away everything that remains, so that each year your accounts balance out and you start fresh. This was the practice of all the young men at Oxford who were called Methodists. For example: One of them had an income of thirty pounds a year. He lived on twenty-eight pounds and gave away two pounds. The next year, receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight and gave away thirty-two. The third year he received ninety pounds and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received one hundred twenty pounds. He still lived on twenty-eight as before and gave to the poor ninety-two pounds. Wasn't this a more excellent way?

If you have a family: Seriously consider before God how much each family member needs for life and godliness. In general, don't give them less or much more than you allow yourself.

Once this is done: Resolve to "gain no more." I charge you in God's name: don't increase your wealth! As money comes in daily or yearly, let it go out. Otherwise you're "storing up treasures

on earth." And our Lord forbids this just as clearly as he forbids murder and adultery. By doing it, therefore, you would be "storing up wrath for yourself for the day of God's wrath and righteous judgment."

5. Heavenly Investment

But suppose it weren't forbidden—how can you, based on reason alone, spend your money in a way God may possibly forgive, instead of spending it in a way he will certainly reward? You'll have no reward in heaven for what you save; you will for what you give away. Every dollar you put into an earthly bank is lost—it brings no interest in heaven. But every dollar you give to the poor is deposited in heaven's bank. And it will bring glorious interest that will keep accumulating for all eternity.

6. The Challenge

Who then is wise and understanding among you? Let them decide today—this hour, this moment, with the Lord's help—to choose the "more excellent way" in all these areas we've discussed. Let them keep to it steadily regarding sleep, prayer, work, food, conversation, and entertainment—particularly regarding the use of that important resource: money.

Let your heart respond to God's call: "From this moment, with God as my helper, I will no longer store up treasure on earth. This one thing I will do: I will store up treasure in heaven. I will give to God what belongs to God: I will give him all my possessions and all my heart."

God's Love to Fallen Humanity

Summary

In *God's Love to Fallen Man*, John Wesley wrestles with a common human question: **Why would a loving and all-knowing God allow Adam to fall into sin?** Wesley insists that, although Adam's rebellion brought sin and suffering into the world, God **wisely permitted the fall** because it *ultimately brought far greater good into human experience than would have been possible otherwise.* ([ResourceUMC](#))

Wesley bases his argument on **Romans 5:15** — “*Not as the offence, so also is the free gift*” — explaining that the *grace that came through Christ* overwhelmingly outweighs the damage done by sin. He shows that **God's love and mercy toward fallen humanity are revealed most fully through the death and resurrection of Jesus**, and that if Adam had not fallen, none of this redemptive love would have been given or known. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Wesley then unfolds **two broad benefits of the fall**:

- On earth, humanity now has the chance to become **holier and happier** through Christ — experiencing forgiveness, spiritual growth, good works, suffering for God, and deeper love for God and others. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- In eternity, believers will enjoy **greater rewards** — there will be more growth in holiness, more good works done, and more honor given to God because of what Christ accomplished for us. ([ResourceUMC](#))

In the end, Wesley argues that the **fall of Adam is not a reason to question God's goodness or justice**. Rather, it is the context in which **God's infinite love and mercy are revealed and offered to every human being**, giving all the opportunity for salvation through Christ. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Outline

I. Introduction: The Problem of the Fall

- Humanity has long blamed Adam for all the hurt and evil in the world. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Some people even go so far as to blame God for allowing the fall, since God knew it would happen and could have prevented it. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Wesley insists that God did *not* make a mistake — He allowed the fall because **greater good would come from it.** ([ResourceUMC](#))

II. The Central Truth

- Wesley emphasizes Paul's teaching in **Romans 5:15**: the gift of grace through Christ far outweighs the offense of Adam's sin. ([ResourceUMC](#))

III. Earthly Benefits from the Fall

Wesley argues that **the fall made possible deep spiritual blessings that could never have existed otherwise**:

A. Holiness and Relationship with God

- If Adam had not fallen, Christ would not have needed to come. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, people can know *God's love in a personal and saving way*. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Faith, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God depend on Christ's atoning work. ([ResourceUMC](#))

B. Love for God and Neighbor

- Because God loved us enough to send His Son, we can love Him in return — and we can love others as Christ commanded. ([ResourceUMC](#))

C. Suffering and Character Formation

- Pain and suffering — now part of human life — are opportunities for spiritual growth: patience, trust, endurance, and deeper dependence on God. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Without suffering there would be no occasion for such spiritual virtues to be exercised. ([ResourceUMC](#))

D. Opportunities for Good Works

- Because the world is affected by sin and need, believers have countless chances to do good works and show Christ's love to others. ([ResourceUMC](#))

IV. Eternal Benefits from the Fall

Wesley then shows that the blessings continue beyond this life:

A. Greater Glory in Heaven

- In the resurrection, those who have grown in holiness, served others, and suffered for Christ will experience greater reward and joy. ([ResourceUMC](#))

B. Hope of Mercy for All

- If Adam had not fallen, each person would have to respond to God's law without mercy — and would have no assurance of forgiveness. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Instead, we live under a covenant of mercy: we can fall and rise again through Christ. ([ResourceUMC](#))

V. Conclusion: God's Wisdom and Love

- Wesley concludes that the fall of Adam is part of God's larger plan to reveal **His wisdom, justice, holiness, and mercy**. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- God's love is not diminished by human failure; rather, it is *most gloriously displayed through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ*. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Therefore, we should bless God for His goodness rather than question Him, knowing that **God's mercy rejoices over judgment** and offers salvation to all. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Sermon

A Modern Translation of John Wesley's Sermon 59

Based on Romans 5:15 - "But the gift is not like the trespass."

(This modern English translation was created using Claude.AI. The 18th-century text of this message is found at <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/sermon-59-gods-love-to-fallen-man>.)

Introduction

1. The Common Complaint Against Adam

How extremely common—and how bitter—is the outcry against our first parent for the disaster he brought not only upon himself but passed down to all his descendants! It was through his willful rebellion against God that "sin entered into the world." Through one man's disobedience,

as the apostle observes, the many—as many as were then unborn in their forefather—were made sinners. They were not only deprived of God's favor but also lost his image—all virtue, righteousness, and true holiness. Humanity sank partly into the devil's image (in pride, malice, and all other demonic attitudes) and partly into the image of animals (falling under the control of base passions and degrading appetites). From this also came death, with all its forerunners and companions—pain, sickness, and a whole train of uncomfortable and unholy passions and attitudes.

2. The Blame Game Across Generations

"For all this we may thank Adam"—this has echoed down through every generation. The same charge has been repeated in every age and every nation where the Scriptures are known, since only there has this crucial event been revealed to humanity. Hasn't your heart—and probably your lips too—joined in this general accusation? How few are there among those who believe the biblical account of the fall who haven't thought the same about our first parent, severely condemning him for willfully disobeying his Creator's single command and bringing "death into the world, and all our woe"?

3. The Charge Against God Himself

But it would be better if the charge stopped there. Certainly it doesn't. It can't be denied that it frequently bounces from Adam to his Creator. Haven't thousands—even among those called Christians—taken the liberty of questioning God's mercy, if not his justice, on this very issue? Some have done this somewhat modestly, in an indirect way. But others have thrown aside all pretense and asked: "Didn't God foresee that Adam would abuse his freedom? Didn't he know the terrible consequences this would have for all Adam's descendants? Why then did he permit that disobedience? Wasn't it easy for the Almighty to have prevented it?"

He certainly did foresee everything. This can't be denied, for "all God's works have been known to him from eternity," as the words properly mean. And it was undoubtedly in his power to prevent it, for he has all power in heaven and earth. But he knew at the same time that it was best, on the whole, not to prevent it. He knew that "the gift is not like the trespass"—that the evil resulting from the sin was not comparable to the good resulting from the gift. He saw that permitting the fall of the first man was far best for humanity in general; that abundantly more good than evil would come to Adam's descendants through his fall; that if sin abounded throughout the earth, grace would abound even more—and that this would be true for every individual human being, unless they chose otherwise.

4. A Neglected Truth of Deep Importance

It's extremely strange that hardly anything has been written—or at least published—on this subject. Even stranger that it's been so little understood by most Christians, especially

considering it's not just a matter of curiosity but a truth of the deepest importance. Without understanding this, it's impossible to "justify God's ways to humanity." And yet this important truth is quite plain to all reasonable and honest inquirers.

May the Lover of humanity open our eyes to perceive clearly that through Adam's fall, humanity in general has gained the capacity:

First, to be more holy and happy on earth, and

Second, to be more happy in heaven than would otherwise have been possible!

PART I: GREATER HOLINESS AND HAPPINESS ON EARTH

1. If Adam Had Not Fallen, Christ Would Not Have Died

First, humanity in general has gained, through Adam's fall, the capacity to attain more holiness and happiness on earth than would have been possible if Adam had not fallen. For if Adam had not fallen, Christ would not have died. Nothing can be clearer than this; nothing more undeniable. The more thoroughly we consider this point, the more deeply we'll be convinced of it.

Unless all who share human nature had received that deadly wound in Adam, there would have been no need for the Son of God to take on our nature. Don't you see that this was the very reason for his coming into the world? "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people" (Romans 5:12). Wasn't it to remedy this very thing that "the Word became flesh," so that "as in Adam all died, so in Christ all might be made alive"?

Unless many had been made sinners by one man's disobedience, many would not have been made righteous by one man's obedience (Romans 5:19). So there would have been no opportunity for that amazing display of the Son of God's love for humanity. There would have been no occasion for him to be "obedient to death—even death on a cross." It could not have been said, to the astonishment of all the hosts of heaven, "God so loved the world"—yes, the ungodly world that had no thought or desire to return to him—"that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Neither could we have said, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ," or that he "made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." There would have been no need for "an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One," or for him appearing "at God's right hand to intercede for us."

2. No Faith in God's Redeeming Love

What's the necessary consequence of this? Simply this: There could have been no such thing as faith in God loving the world this way, giving his only Son for humanity's salvation. There could have been no faith in the Son of God loving us and giving himself for us. There could have been no faith in the Spirit of God renewing God's image in our hearts, raising us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. Indeed, the whole privilege of justification by faith could not have existed. There could have been no redemption through Christ's blood. Christ could not have been made for us "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

3. No Love for God as Redeemer

The same huge gap that would have been in our faith would also have been in our love. We might have loved the Author of our existence, the Father of angels and humanity, as our Creator and Preserver. We might have said, "Lord our Governor, how excellent is your name in all the earth!" But we could not have loved him in the nearest and dearest relationship—as the one who gave up his Son for us all.

We might have loved the Son of God as "the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being" (though this seems more appropriate for heaven's inhabitants than earth's). But we could not have loved him as the one "bearing our sins in his own body on the tree," who "by that one sacrifice made perfect forever those who are being made holy." We could not have been "conformed to his death" or known "the power of his resurrection."

We could not have loved the Holy Spirit as the one revealing the Father and Son to us, opening our eyes to understanding, bringing us out of darkness into his marvelous light, renewing God's image in our souls, and sealing us for the day of redemption. So in truth, what is now "pure and faultless religion in the sight of God" would not have existed, since it completely depends on these fundamental principles: "By grace you are saved through faith," and "Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

4. Unspeakable Advantage for Faith and Love

We see then what unspeakable advantage we gain from our first parent's fall regarding faith—faith in God the Father, who didn't spare his own Son but "crushed him for our transgressions" and "pierced 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 gain regarding love for God—both God the Father and God the Son. The chief basis for this love, as long as we remain in these bodies, is clearly declared by the apostle: "We love because he first loved us." But the greatest demonstration of his love would never have been given if Adam had not fallen.

5. Increased Love for Our Neighbor

Just as our faith in both God the Father and the Son receives an unspeakable increase (if not its very existence) from this great event, and our love for both the Father and the Son does as well, so does our love for our neighbor—our goodwill toward all humanity. This must increase in the same proportion as our faith and love of God.

Who doesn't understand the force of that conclusion drawn by the loving apostle: "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"? If God SO loved us—notice, the emphasis of the argument lies on this very point: SO loved us, as to give up his only Son to die a cursed death for our salvation. Beloved, what manner of love is this that God has shown us—to give his only Son, equal with the Father in glory, co-eternal in majesty? What manner of love is this that the only-begotten Son of God has shown us—to empty himself as far as possible of his eternal divinity, to give up the glory he had with the Father before the world began, to take on the form of a servant, being found in appearance as a man, and then to humble himself further, "becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross"!

If God SO loved us, how ought we to love one another! But this motive for brotherly love would have been completely missing if Adam had not fallen. Consequently, we could not have loved one another to the degree we can now. Nor could there have been such depth in our Lord's command: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

6. Pain as a Channel for Good

We can be such gainers through Adam's fall, both in love for God and for our neighbor. But there's another crucial point that, though little noticed, deserves our deepest consideration. Through that one act of our first parent, not only did sin enter the world, but pain also—and this was both the justice and 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. The Value of Suffering

How innumerable are the benefits God brings to humanity through the channel of suffering! So much so that it could well be said, "What are called afflictions in human language are called blessings in God's language."

Indeed, if there had been no suffering in the world, a considerable part of religion—and in some ways the most excellent part—could not have existed, since its very existence depends on our suffering. If there had been no pain, it could not have existed. On this foundation—our suffering—all our passive virtues are built. Yes, the noblest of all Christian graces: love that endures all things.

Here's the basis for resignation to God, enabling us to say from the heart in every difficult hour: "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him." "Should we accept good from God, and not

trouble?" What a glorious sight this is! It even made a pagan cry out, "Behold, a sight worthy of God—a good person struggling with adversity and overcoming it!"

Here's the basis for confidence in God, both regarding what we're experiencing and what we would fear if our souls weren't calmly resting on him. What room would there be for trust in God if there were no pain or danger? Who couldn't say then, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" It's through suffering that our faith is tested and therefore made more acceptable to God. It's in the day of trouble that we have occasion to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." And this pleases God—that we acknowledge him in the face of danger, in defiance of sorrow, sickness, pain, or death.

8. The Birth of Patience and Related Virtues

Again: If there had been neither natural nor moral evil in the world, what would have become of patience, meekness, gentleness, and longsuffering? Obviously they could not have existed, since all these qualities respond to evil. If evil had never entered the world, these virtues could have had no place in it. Who could have returned good for evil if there were no evildoers in the universe? How would it have been possible to "overcome evil with good"?

You might say, "But all these qualities could have been divinely placed in people's hearts." Certainly they could have been. But if they had, there would have been no use or practice for them. Whereas in the present state of things, we never lack long for opportunities to exercise them. The more they're exercised, the more all our virtues are strengthened and increased. And as our resignation, confidence in God, patience, fortitude, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering—together with our faith and love of God and humanity—increase, so must our happiness increase, even in this present world.

9. Opportunities for Doing Good

Yet again: Just as God's permission of Adam's fall gave all his descendants a thousand opportunities for suffering and thereby exercising all those passive virtues which increase both their holiness and happiness, it also gives them opportunities to do good in countless ways—to practice various good works that otherwise could never have existed. What expressions of kindness, compassion, and God-like mercy would have been completely prevented!

Who could then have said to the Lover of humanity:

"Show your heart throughout my life, While I listen to the wretch's cry, The widow's or orphan's groan, On mercy's wings I swiftly fly, To relieve the poor and needy; Giving myself and all I have for them."

As a benevolent person rightly observed: "All worldly joys are less than that one joy of doing kindness." Surely in "keeping this commandment," if no other, "there is great reward." "As we

have opportunity, let us do good to all people"—good of every kind and in every degree. Accordingly, the more good we do (other circumstances being equal), the happier we'll be. The more we feed the hungry and clothe the naked, the more we help the stranger and visit those who are sick or in prison, the more kind services we do for those who suffer under life's various evils, the more comfort we receive even in this present world—the greater the reward we have in our own hearts.

10. Summary of Earthly Benefits

To sum up what's been said: Since the more holy we are on earth, the happier we must be (seeing there's an inseparable connection between holiness and happiness); since the more good we do to others, the more present reward flows back into our own hearts; and since our sufferings for God lead us to "rejoice in him with inexpressible and glorious joy"—therefore, Adam's fall may be of such advantage to humanity, even in this present life, in three ways:

First, by giving us the opportunity to be far more holy;

Second, by giving us occasions to do innumerable good works that otherwise couldn't have been done; and

Third, by putting it in our power to suffer for God, whereby "the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us."

These advantages are so great that we won't fully comprehend them until we attain eternal life.

PART II: INFINITELY GREATER HAPPINESS IN HEAVEN

1. Different Degrees of Glory

Then we'll be able to fully comprehend not only the advantages that come to humanity at present through their first parent's fall, but the infinitely greater advantages they may gain from it in eternity.

To form some understanding of this, we can remember the apostle's observation: "As one star differs from another in brightness, so also will it be with the resurrection of the dead." The most glorious will undoubtedly be those who are most holy, who bear most of God's image in which they were created. Next in glory will be those who have been most abundant in good works. And next to them, those who have suffered most according to God's will.

But what advantages in every one of these respects will God's children receive in heaven through God's permission of pain on earth as a consequence of sin! Because of this, they attained many holy qualities that otherwise could not have existed—resignation to God,

confidence in him during trouble and danger, patience, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, and the whole range of passive virtues. Because of this superior holiness, they will then enjoy superior happiness.

Again: Everyone will then "receive their own reward according to their own labor." Every individual will be "rewarded according to their work." But the fall gave rise to innumerable good works that could never otherwise have existed—such as helping believers in need and relieving the distressed in every way. And through this, countless 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 God's will. "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Therefore, that event which allowed suffering to enter the world has thereby brought to all God's children an increase in glory for all eternity. For although the sufferings themselves will end—

"The pain of life will then be over, The anguish and distressing care; Sighing grief will weep no more, And sin will never enter there"—

Yet the joys resulting from them will never end but flow at God's right hand forevermore.

2. A Better Covenant

There's one more advantage we gain from Adam's fall that's worth our attention. Unless all had died in Adam, being in their first parent, every descendant of Adam—every human being—would have had to personally answer to God for themselves. A necessary consequence of this seems to be that if they had once fallen, once violated any command of God, there would have been no possibility of rising again. There would be no help; they would have perished without remedy. For that covenant showed no mercy. The word was: "The soul who sins must die."

Now who wouldn't rather be on the footing we're now on—under a covenant of mercy? Who would want to risk their entire eternity on one throw of the dice? Isn't it infinitely more desirable to be in a state where, though we're surrounded by weaknesses, we don't run such a desperate risk—where if we fall, we can rise again? Where we can say:

"My sin has reached to heaven, But far above the skies, In Christ abundantly forgiven, I see your mercies rise!"

3. Everything Centers on Christ

In Christ! Let me urge every serious person once more to focus here. Everything that's been said, everything that can be said on these subjects, centers on this point: Adam's fall produced Christ's death.

Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth! Yes,

"Let earth and heaven agree, Angels and people be joined, To celebrate with me The Savior of humanity; To worship the all-atoning Lamb, And bless the sound of Jesus' name!"

If God had prevented humanity's fall, "the Word" would never have "become flesh," nor would we ever have "seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father." Those mysteries would never have been displayed "into which even angels long to look." This consideration, I think, swallows up all the rest and should never be out of our thoughts. Unless "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all people," neither angels nor humans could ever have known "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

CONCLUSION

1. Little Reason to Complain

See then, on the whole, how little reason we have to complain about our first parent's fall, since we can derive such unspeakable advantages from it, both in time and eternity. See how little basis there is for questioning God's mercy in permitting that event to happen, since in it mercy, by infinite degrees, triumphs over judgment.

Where then is the person who presumes to blame God for not preventing Adam's sin? Shouldn't we rather bless him from the bottom of our hearts for thereby laying out the grand plan of humanity's redemption and making way for that glorious display of his wisdom, holiness, justice, and mercy?

If indeed God had decreed before the foundation of the world that millions of people should live in everlasting fire because Adam sinned hundreds or thousands of years before they were born, I don't know who could thank him for this, except the devil and his angels. On that assumption, all those millions of unhappy souls would be plunged into hell by Adam's sin without any possible benefit from it.

But, blessed be God, this is not the case. No such decree ever existed. On the contrary, everyone born can be an unspeakable gainer from it. And no one ever was or can be a loser except by their own choice.

2. A Full Answer to the Problem of Evil

We see here a complete answer to that plausible explanation of the origin of evil published some years ago and supposedly unanswerable: that evil "necessarily resulted from the nature of matter, which God was unable to change." How kind of this eloquent speaker to make excuses for God! But there's really no need for it. God has answered for himself.

He made humanity in his own image—as spirits endowed with understanding and freedom. Humanity, abusing that freedom, produced evil and brought sin and pain into the world. God permitted this in order to more fully display his wisdom, justice, and mercy by giving to all who would receive it an infinitely greater happiness than they could possibly have attained if Adam had not fallen.

3. The Depth of God's Wisdom

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Although a thousand details of "his judgments and his ways" are beyond our understanding and past our discovery, we can still perceive the general plan running from time into eternity.

"According to his own will's purpose"—the plan he laid before the foundation of the world—he created the parent of all humanity in his own image. He permitted all people to be made sinners by that one man's disobedience, so that by one man's obedience, all who receive the free gift may be infinitely holier and happier for all eternity.

The Important Question

Summary

In *The Important Question*, Wesley focuses on Jesus' challenging question in **Matthew 16:26**: *What benefit is there for anyone to gain all the world's riches, pleasures, honor, and reputation if it costs them their own soul?* ([ResourceUMC](#))

Wesley explains that many people chase earthly gains—wealth, pleasure, admiration, and comfort—thinking these will make life meaningful and happy. But Jesus' question forces us to consider the **eternal cost of that pursuit**. To gain everything the world can offer and yet lose one's soul is the worst possible tragedy. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Wesley then carefully examines:

1. What it means to *gain the world*—including pleasure, reputation, beauty, and wealth.
2. What it means to *lose one's soul*—the loss of spiritual life, peace with God, eternal hope, and everlasting joy.
3. The surprising fact that choosing worldly gain over spiritual health is both **wise in appearance but foolish in reality**, and only makes sense if a person wrongly believes that religion brings misery, that wicked life brings happiness, or that life on earth is certain and long. ([ResourceUMC](#))

He concludes that true religion is not misery but **true life and happiness**, rooted in love for God and neighbor. Wesley urges listeners to make decisions today with eternity in view, because each person's soul is infinitely more valuable than all the world's fleeting treasures. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Outline

I. Introduction: The Important Question

- Wesley introduces Jesus' question: **"What will it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose their soul?"** (Matt 16:26). ([ResourceUMC](#))
- He compares human speech about spiritual realities with Jesus' own words—simple yet deep. ([ResourceUMC](#))

II. What Does It Mean to "Gain the Whole World"?

Wesley explains that Jesus' phrase does not mean military conquest or literal ownership, but **gaining everything the world can offer**, such as:

1. **Sensory pleasures** — food, drink, comfort, and physical enjoyment. ([ResourceUMC](#))
2. **Aesthetic delights** — beauty, novelty, grandeur. ([ResourceUMC](#))
3. **Honor and reputation** — applause, praise, and renown among others. ([ResourceUMC](#))
4. **Wealth and treasure** — limitless money or possessions. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Together, these represent all that worldly success or pleasure can offer—but still fall short of true human fulfillment. ([ResourceUMC](#))

III. What Does It Mean to “Lose One’s Soul”?

Wesley then explores the deeper and eternal consequences of losing one’s soul:

1. **Loss of present spiritual joy** — missing out on peace, love, and joy that religion brings, even now. ([ResourceUMC](#))
2. **Loss in eternity** — no comfort, no peace, no hope after death; only judgment and separation from God. ([ResourceUMC](#))
3. **Contrast with the saved soul** — those who keep their soul gain eternal joy, fellowship with God and the saints, and everlasting life. ([ResourceUMC](#))

The difference is not small — it is an **eternal difference**. ([ResourceUMC](#))

IV. Why People Still Choose the World Over Their Soul

Wesley considers how someone might still choose worldly gain at the cost of their soul:

1. They imagine **religion is misery**. Wesley refutes this: true religion is love of God and neighbor, which brings deep happiness. ([ResourceUMC](#))
2. They think **sinful living brings happiness**. Wesley shows that wickedness is actually unhappy and unstable. ([ResourceUMC](#))
3. They assume they have **plenty of time** to turn to God later. Wesley warns that life is uncertain and could end at any moment. ([ResourceUMC](#))

V. Conclusion: The Soul Is Worth More Than the World

- The heart of the sermon: **No amount of worldly gain can compare with the value of the soul and eternal life.** ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Wesley urges people to choose what lasts forever — a life lived in love and obedience to God — rather than what perishes. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Key Insight

Jesus' question invites us to examine our priorities: **Are we investing in what lasts forever, or in what passes away?** The real profit of life is not measured by worldly success but by the health and destiny of the soul. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Sermon

A Modern Translation of John Wesley's Sermon 84

Based on Matthew 16:26 - "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

(This modern English translation was created using Claude.AI. The 18th-century text of this message is found at <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/sermon-84-the-important-question>.)

Introduction

1. Speaking of Royal Things

There's a celebrated observation (I think in the works of Blaise Pascal) that if a person of low status tries to speak about high matters—things relating to kings or kingdoms—it's not easy for them to find suitable words, since they're so unfamiliar with such things. But if someone of royal birth speaks about royal matters, about their own or their father's kingdom, their language flows freely and easily, since these things are familiar to their thoughts. In the same way, if a mere inhabitant of this earthly world speaks about the great things of God's kingdom, they can hardly find expressions suitable to the greatness of the subject. But when the Son of God speaks of the highest things concerning his heavenly kingdom, all his language is easy and natural, since all these things have been known to him from all eternity.

2. Simple Words, Profound Meaning

How powerfully this observation applies to the passage before us! The Son of God, the great King of heaven and earth, uses the plainest and simplest words here. But how high and deep are the things he expresses! None of us can fully grasp them until, emerging from the darkness of this present world, we become inhabitants of eternity.

3. Our Outline

But we can understand a little of these deep things if we consider:

First, what's implied in "gaining the whole world"

Second, what's implied in losing your own soul

Third, we'll then see, in the strongest light, what profit there is in gaining the whole world and losing your soul

PART I: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD?

1. Not About Conquering the World

First, we need to consider what's implied in gaining the whole world. Perhaps at first hearing, this might seem equivalent to conquering the whole world. But it has no relation to that at all. Indeed, that interpretation involves an obvious absurdity, since it's impossible for anyone to conquer the whole world—if only because human life is too short for such an undertaking. Accordingly, no one has ever conquered even half the world, or even a tenth of it.

But whatever others might do, there was no danger that any of our Lord's hearers would think of this. Among all the sins of the Jewish nation, the desire for universal empire was not one of them. Even in their most prosperous times, they never sought to extend their conquests beyond the Euphrates River. And in our Lord's time, all their ambition was over—Judea was governed by a Roman governor as part of the Roman Empire.

2. All the Pleasures the World Can Give

Leaving that aside, we can find a much easier and more natural meaning of the expression. To gain the whole world may properly mean to gain all the pleasures the world can give. The person we're speaking of may be assumed to have gained everything that gratifies the senses—in particular, everything that can enhance the pleasure of taste: all the finest foods and drinks. Likewise, whatever can please the sense of smell or touch—all that humans can enjoy in common with animals. They may have all the abundance and variety of these things that the world can provide.

3. What Gratifies the Eyes and Imagination

We may further suppose they've gained everything that satisfies "the desire of the eyes"—whatever (mainly through sight) brings pleasure to the imagination. The pleasures of imagination come from three sources: grandeur, beauty, and novelty. Accordingly, we find by experience that our imagination is gratified by observing things that are either grand, beautiful, or unusual. Let this person be surrounded, then, by the most magnificent, the most beautiful, and the newest things that can be found anywhere. For all this is clearly implied in gaining the whole world.

4. Honor and Fame

But there's also something else implied here, which people of the most elevated spirits have valued above all the pleasures of sense and imagination combined: honor, glory, renown. The desire to "have one's name on everyone's lips."

It seems hardly any force in the human mind is stronger than this. It triumphs over the strongest natural impulses, over all our appetites and affections. If Brutus shed the blood of his own children; if we see another Brutus, despite every obligation and in defiance of all justice and gratitude, "cringing while he stabs his friend"; if a far greater man than either of these, Pasquale Paoli, gave up ease, pleasure, everything, for a life of constant toil, pain, and danger—what principle could sustain them? They might talk of love of country, but that alone would never have carried them through. There had to be also "the immense thirst for praise."

Now, the person we're speaking of has gained abundance of this. They're praised, if not admired, by everyone around them. Indeed, their name has spread to distant lands, as it were to the ends of the earth.

5. Abundant Wealth

Add to this that they've gained abundant wealth—there's no end to their treasures. They've "piled up silver like dust and gold like the sand of the sea." Now, when someone has obtained all these pleasures—everything that gratifies either the senses or the imagination—when they've gained an honorable reputation and also accumulated great wealth for many years, then they may be said, in an easy, natural sense, to have "gained the whole world."

PART II: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOSE YOUR SOUL?

1. A Deeper Scene

The next point to consider is what's implied in losing your own soul. But here we enter a darker scene and need more careful attention. For it's easy to sum up all that's implied in "gaining the

whole world," but it's not easy to understand all that's implied in "losing your soul." Indeed, no one can fully conceive this until they've passed from time into eternity.

2. Losing All Present Religious Joy

The first thing it undeniably implies is losing all the present pleasures of religion—all those that religion provides to truly religious people even in this present life. If there's any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love (in the love of God and of all humanity), any "joy in the Holy Spirit"; if there's God's peace—a peace that surpasses all understanding; if there's any rejoicing in the testimony of a good conscience toward God—clearly all this is totally lost by the person who loses their soul.

3. The Moment of Death

But the present life will soon end. We know it passes away like a shadow. The hour is at hand when the spirit will be summoned to return to God who gave it. In that solemn moment,

"Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view, Who stand upon the threshold of the new."

Whether they look backward or forward, how pleasing is the view to those who save their soul! If they look back, they have "the calm remembrance of a life well spent." If they look forward, there's "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade," and they see the escort of angels ready to carry them to Abraham's side.

But what about that hour for those who lose their soul? Do they look back? What comfort is there? They see nothing but scenes of horror, grounds for shame, remorse, and self-condemnation—a foretaste of "the worm that never dies." If they look forward, what do they see? No joy, no peace! No glimmer of hope from any direction!

Some years ago, someone who had turned back like a dog to its vomit was struck down in the middle of their sinful life. A friend visiting them prayed, "Lord, have mercy on those who are just stepping out of the body and don't know which will meet them at their entrance into the other world—an angel or a demon!" The sick person shrieked out with a piercing cry, "A demon! A demon!" and died. Just such an end may any person expect who loses their soul—unless they die unconscious like an animal.

4. Paradise for the Saved

But in what condition is the spirit of a good person at their entrance into eternity? See,

"The escort attends, The ministering host of invisible friends."

They receive the newborn spirit and safely conduct them to Abraham's side, into the delights of Paradise—the garden of God where the light of his presence perpetually shines. It's only one of

a thousand blessings of this antechamber of heaven that "there the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." For there they have countless sources of happiness they couldn't have on earth. There they meet "the glorious dead of ancient days." They converse with Adam, first of humanity; with Noah, first of the new world; with Abraham, the friend of God; with Moses and the Prophets; with the Apostles; with the saints of all ages. And above all, they are with Christ.

5. Torment for the Lost

How different, alas, is the case for those who lose their souls! The moment they step into eternity, they meet the devil and his angels. What a terrible escort into the world of spirits! What a dreadful preview of what's to come! Either they're bound with chains of darkness and reserved for the judgment of the great day, or at best, they wander around seeking rest but finding none. Perhaps they seek it (like the unclean spirit cast out of a person) in dry, dreary, desolate places—

"Where nature all in ruins lies, And owns her sovereign, death!"

Little comfort can they find here, since everything contributes to increase, not remove, the fearful expectation of fiery judgment that will consume the ungodly.

6. The Final Judgment

For even this is just the beginning of sorrows. Soon they'll see "the great white throne coming down from heaven, and him who sits on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens flee away." And "the dead, great and small, will stand before God and be judged, each according to their works."

"Then the King will say to those on his right" (God grant he may say this to you!), "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." And the angels will tune their harps and sing, "Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the heirs of glory may come in." And then they "will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and like the stars forever and ever."

7. The Eternal Sentence

How different will be the fate of those who lose their souls! No joyful sentence will be pronounced on them, but one that will pierce them with unutterable horror (God forbid it should ever be pronounced on any of you!): "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels!"

And who can doubt that those infernal spirits will immediately execute the sentence—will instantly drag those forsaken by God into their own place of torment! Into those

"Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace And rest can never dwell! Hope never comes,
That comes to all"—

all people who are still on this side of eternity. But not to them. The gulf is now fixed that they cannot cross. From the moment they're plunged into the lake of fire burning with sulfur, their torments are not only without break but also without end. For "they have no rest day or night, and the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever!"

PART III: WHAT PROFIT IS THERE IN THIS CHOICE?

Upon even a quick look at these things, wouldn't anyone be astonished that a person—a creature endowed with reason—should voluntarily choose (I say choose, for God forces no one into inevitable damnation; he never "consigned one unborn soul to hell, or damned them from their mother's womb")—should choose to lose their own soul, even if it meant gaining the whole world! For what profit is there in this choice when all is said and done?

But to reduce our astonishment somewhat, let's observe the assumptions a person generally makes before they can reconcile themselves to this fatal choice.

1. First False Assumption: Religion Is Misery

They assume, first, that "a life of religion is a life of misery." That religion is misery! How is it possible anyone should entertain such a strange thought? Do any of you think this? If you do, the reason is plain: you don't know what religion is.

"No! But I do, as well as you."

What is it then?

"Why, doing no harm."

Not so. Many birds and animals do no harm, yet they're not capable of religion.

"Then it's going to church and taking communion."

Indeed it's not. These may be excellent helps to religion, and everyone who wants to save their soul should participate in them at every opportunity. Yet it's possible you may attend them all your life and still have no religion at all. Religion is something higher and deeper than any outward ritual.

2. What Religion Really Is

What is religion then? It's easy to answer if we consult Scripture. According to the Bible, it lies in one single point: it's neither more nor less than love. It's love that "fulfills the law, the goal of

the commandment." Religion is the love of God and our neighbor—that is, every person under heaven. This love ruling the whole life, animating all our attitudes and passions, directing all our thoughts, words, and actions, is "pure and faultless religion."

3. Is Love Misery?

Now, will anyone be so bold as to say that love is misery? Is it misery to love God? To give him my heart, who alone is worthy of it? No, it's the truest happiness—indeed, the only true happiness to be found under the sun. Experience proves the truth of that ancient reflection: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart cannot rest until it rests in you."

Or does anyone imagine that loving our neighbor is misery—loving every person as our own soul? Far from it! Next to the love of God, this provides the greatest happiness we're capable of. Therefore,

"Let not the Stoic boast his unmoved mind, The brute-philosopher who never has found The joy of loving or of being loved."

4. But What About Doing and Suffering?

"There's more than this involved in religion. It implies not only love of God and humanity (against which I have no objection) but also a great deal of doing and suffering. How can this be consistent with happiness?"

There's certainly some truth in this objection. Religion does involve both doing and suffering. Let's calmly consider whether this reduces or enhances our happiness.

Religion involves, first, doing many things. For the love of God will naturally lead us, at every opportunity, to converse with the one we love—to speak to him in public or private prayer and to hear his words, which "are more precious to us than thousands of pieces of silver and gold." It will incline us to lose no opportunity of receiving communion, to continue in thanksgiving, and at morning, evening, and noon to praise him.

But suppose we do all this—will it lessen our happiness? Just the reverse. It's plain that all these fruits of love are means of increasing the love from which they spring, and consequently they increase our happiness in the same proportion. Who then wouldn't join in that wish:

"Rising to sing my Savior's praise, I may proclaim you all day long, And let your precious word of grace Flow from my heart and fill my tongue; Fill all my life with purest love, And join me to your church above!"

5. Works of Mercy

It must also be acknowledged that just as love of God naturally leads to works of worship, love of our neighbor naturally leads all who feel it to works of mercy. It inclines us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those who are sick or in prison, to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, a guardian to the widow, a father to the fatherless.

But can you suppose that doing this will prevent or lessen your happiness? Even if you did so much as to be like a guardian angel to everyone around you? On the contrary, it's an infallible truth that

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

A pleasure-seeking man was asked some years ago, "Captain, what was the greatest pleasure you ever had?" After a pause, he replied, "When we were marching in Ireland on a very hot day, I called at a cabin on the road and asked for some water. The woman brought me a cup of milk. I gave her a piece of silver, and the joy that poor woman expressed gave me the greatest pleasure I ever had in my life."

Now, if doing good gave so much pleasure to someone acting merely from natural generosity, how much more must it give to someone who does it on a nobler principle—the combined love of God and neighbor! It follows that doing everything religion requires will not lessen but immensely increase our happiness.

6. But What About Suffering?

"Perhaps this may be allowed. But religion, according to Christianity, involves not only doing but suffering. How can suffering be consistent with happiness?"

Perfectly well. Many centuries ago, St. John Chrysostom remarked, "The Christian has sorrows as well as joys, but their sorrow is sweeter than joy." They may accidentally suffer loss, poverty, pain, but in all these things they're more than conquerors. They can testify,

"Labor is rest, and pain is sweet, While you, my God, are here."

They can say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised!" They must suffer, more or less, reproach, for "the servant is not above their master." But so much the more does "the Spirit of glory and of God rest upon them."

Yes, love itself will, on various occasions, be the source of suffering. The love of God will frequently produce "the pleasing ache, the melting of a broken heart." And love of our neighbor will give rise to sympathetic sorrow. It will lead us to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, to be tenderly concerned for the distressed, and to "mix our pitying tears with those who weep."

But may we not well say these are "tears that delight and sighs that rise to heaven"? So far are all these sufferings from either preventing or lessening our happiness that they greatly contribute to it and indeed constitute no small part of it. So on the whole, there cannot be a more false assumption than that a life of religion is a life of misery, since true religion, whether considered in its nature or its fruits, is true and solid happiness.

7. Second False Assumption: Wickedness Is Happiness

The person who chooses to gain the world at the cost of their soul assumes, second, that "a life of wickedness is a life of happiness!" That wickedness is happiness! Even an ancient pagan poet could have taught them better. Even Juvenal discovered, "No wicked person is happy." And how clearly does God himself declare, "There is no peace for the wicked!" No peace of mind—and without this, there can be no happiness.

But not to rely on authority, let's weigh this in the balance of reason. I ask: What can make a wicked person happy? You answer, "They've gained the whole world." We'll grant it. And what does this include? They've gained everything that gratifies the senses—in particular, everything that can please the taste: all the delicacies of food and drink.

True, but can eating and drinking make a person happy? They never did yet, and they never will. This is too coarse food for an immortal spirit. But suppose it did give them a poor kind of happiness during those moments when they were consuming it—what will they do with the rest of their time? Won't it hang heavy on their hands? Won't they groan under many tedious hours and think time flies too slowly? If they're not fully occupied, won't they frequently complain of "low spirits"?

A meaningless expression that the miserable physician usually understands no better than the miserable patient. We know there are nervous disorders. But we also know that what's commonly called nervous depression is a secret reproof from God—a kind of awareness that we're not where we should be, that we're not as God would have us be. We're disconnected from our proper center.

8. The Pleasures of Imagination Wear Off

To remove, or at least soothe, this strange uneasiness, let them add the pleasures of imagination. Let them adorn themselves with silver and gold and dress in all the colors of the rainbow. Let them build splendid palaces and furnish them in the most elegant and costly manner. Let them design beautiful walks and gardens, enhanced with all that nature and art can provide.

And how long will these give pleasure? Only as long as they're new. As soon as the novelty is gone, the pleasure is gone too. After surveying them a few months or years, they give no more satisfaction.

The person who is saving their soul has the advantage even in this respect, for they can say,

"In the pleasures the rich person's possessions display, Without envy I claim my part; While every beautiful object my eye can survey Contributes to gladden my heart."

9. The Pain of Seeking Applause

"However, they still have another resource: applause, glory. Won't this make them happy?"

It won't. For they cannot be applauded by everyone—no one ever was. Some will praise, perhaps many, but not all. Certainly some will criticize. And someone who's fond of applause will feel more pain from one person's censure than pleasure from many people's praise. So whoever seeks happiness in applause will certainly be disappointed and will find, on the whole, far more pain than pleasure.

10. Haman's Example

But to bring the matter to a quick conclusion, let's take an example of someone who had gained more of this world than probably any person now alive, unless they're a ruling prince. But did all they'd gained make them happy? Answer for yourself!

Then Haman said, "Yet all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." Poor Haman! One unholy attitude—whether pride, envy, jealousy, or revenge—gave him more pain, more mental anguish, than all the world could give pleasure. And so it must be in the nature of things, for all unholy attitudes are unhappy attitudes. Ambition, greed, vanity, excessive attachment, malice, vindictiveness—they carry their own punishment with them and take revenge on the soul where they live.

Indeed, what are these, especially when combined with an awakened conscience, but the hounds of hell already gnawing at the soul, preventing happiness from approaching? Didn't even the pagans see this? What else does their fable mean—of Tityus, chained to a rock with a vulture continually tearing at his chest and feeding on his liver? "Why do you smile?" says the poet. "Change the name, and the story is about you!" Lust, foolish desire, envy, malice, or anger is now tearing at your chest. Love of money or praise, hatred or revenge, is now feeding on your poor spirit. Such is the happiness in vice! So empty is the assumption that a life of wickedness is a life of happiness!

11. Third False Assumption: You'll Live Long

But they make a third assumption: that they'll certainly live forty, fifty, or sixty years. Do you depend on this? On living sixty years? Who told you that you would? It's none other than the enemy of God and humanity—the murderer of souls. Don't believe him. He was a liar from the beginning, from the start of his rebellion against God. He's especially a liar in this, for he wouldn't give you life if he could. If God permitted, he would make sure of it and immediately drag you to his own place. And he cannot give you life even if he would—human life is not in his hands. He's not the one who controls life and death; that power belongs to the Most High.

Though Satan may sometimes inflict death, I don't know that he could ever give life. It was one of his most faithful servants who shrieked out some years ago, "A week's life! A week's life! Thirty thousand pounds for a week's life!" But he couldn't purchase a day's life. That night God required his soul! And how soon may he require yours? Are you sure of living sixty years? Are you sure of living one year, one month, one week, one day? Oh, make haste to truly live! Surely the person who may die tonight should live today.

12. Even If Wickedness Were Happiness...

So absurd are all the assumptions made by those who gain the world and lose their souls. But let's imagine for a moment that wickedness is happiness and that they'll certainly live sixty years. Still I would ask: What profit is there in gaining the whole world for sixty years and then losing your soul eternally?

Can such a choice be made by anyone who considers what eternity is? Philip Melanchthon, the most learned of all the German Reformers, gives the following account (I pass no judgment on it but record it nearly in his own words): "When I was at Wittenberg, walking out one summer evening with several fellow students, we heard an unusual singing. Following the sound, we saw a bird of unusual appearance. One of us stepped up and asked, 'In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, what are you?' It answered, 'I am a damned spirit,' and, vanishing away, pronounced these words: 'O Eternity, Eternity! Who can tell the length of Eternity?'"

And how soon will this be the language of those who sold their soul for sixty years of pleasure! How soon will they cry out, "O Eternity, Eternity! Who can tell the length of Eternity?"

13. A Striking Illustration

In how striking a manner is this illustrated by one of the ancient church fathers! "Suppose there were a ball of sand as big as the whole earth. Suppose one grain of this were removed every thousand years. Which would be preferable: to be happy while this ball was being removed at the rate of one grain per thousand years, and miserable forever after? Or to be miserable while it was being removed at that rate, and happy forever after?"

A wise person certainly couldn't pause for a moment on this choice, since all the time this ball would take to disappear bears infinitely less proportion to eternity than a drop of water to the whole ocean, or a grain of sand to the whole mass. So even allowing that a life of religion were a life of misery, that a life of wickedness were a life of happiness, and that someone were assured of enjoying that happiness for sixty years—what would they profit if they were then to be miserable for all eternity?

14. The Real Choice

But it's been proven that the case is quite otherwise—that religion is happiness, that wickedness is misery, and that no one is assured of living sixty days. And if so, is there any fool, any madman under heaven who can be compared to those who throw away their own soul, even if it were to gain the whole world?

For what's the real state of affairs? What's the choice God proposes to his creatures? It's not: "Will you be happy sixty years and then miserable forever, or will you be miserable sixty years and then happy forever?" It's not: "Will you have a temporary heaven first and then eternal hell, or will you have a temporary hell first and then eternal heaven?" But it's simply this: "Will you be miserable sixty years and miserable forever after, or will you be happy sixty years and happy forever after? Will you have a foretaste of heaven now and then heaven forever, or will you have a foretaste of hell now and then hell forever? Will you have two hells or two heavens?"

15. Choose Life!

One would think no great wisdom is needed to answer this question. And this is the very question I now propose to you in God's name. Will you be happy here and hereafter, in the world that now is and in the world to come? Or will you be miserable here and hereafter, in time and in eternity?

What's your choice? Let there be no delay! Choose now, one or the other! I call heaven and earth as witnesses this day that I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Oh, choose life! The life of peace and love now; the life of glory forever! By God's grace, choose now that better part that will never be taken from you!

And having once made your choice, never draw back. Stick to it no matter what. Go on in the name of the Lord whom you've chosen, and in the power of his might! Despite all opposition—from your sinful nature, from the world, from all the powers of darkness—keep fighting the good fight of faith and take hold of eternal life! And then there's laid up for you a crown that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give you on that day!

On Love

Summary

In *On Love*, John Wesley preaches on Paul's famous statement that **without love, even the greatest sacrifices are worthless**. [ResourceUMC](#) Wesley warns that many people hear Scripture but fail to let it change their hearts and lives, especially in the way they *love others*. He explains what true Christian love **is**, how it **behaves**, and why **everything else — even extreme acts of self-sacrifice — profits nothing without it**. [ResourceUMC](#)

Wesley draws from Jesus' teaching and Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 13 to show that Christian love is not just emotion but a **God-given disposition** that *delights in others' good, endures suffering, avoids envy and pride, and seeks the well-being of every person*.

[ResourceUMC](#) He goes on to say that without this love:

- **Life cannot be genuinely happy**, and
- **Death cannot be truly peaceful or comforting** — even if a person suffers greatly or does great works. [ResourceUMC](#)

The sermon calls believers to examine themselves: do they love God and neighbor as Christ commanded? Without that love, all other spiritual achievements are empty. [ResourceUMC](#)

Outline

I. Introduction: The Danger of Hearing Scripture and Not Living It

- Wesley warns that many will hear Paul's words but fail to let them take root. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Some will not take Scripture seriously, some will resist it, and others will let worldly cares choke its power. ([ResourceUMC](#))

II. The Commission to Preach and Obey God's Word

- Wesley explains that he must preach the Gospel regardless — and urges us to obey Jesus' commands: believe, pray, gather with believers, study Scripture, live sacrificially, do good, and take up our cross daily. ([ResourceUMC](#))

III. Three Main Questions to Understand Paul's Point

1. What does Paul mean by "giving all I have and suffering greatly"?

– It means willingly giving all earthly goods, using them deliberately and obediently, and even giving one's body to suffer and die for obedience's sake — *all from choice, not impulse*. ([ResourceUMC](#))

2. What is true Christian love?

– Love of God and love of neighbor for God's sake:

- Loving God means delighting in Him, seeking to please Him, and knowing our happiness is in Him. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Loving neighbor means earnestly desiring their good, pursuing their happiness, and acting for their benefit. ([ResourceUMC](#))

– Paul's list from 1 Corinthians 13 describes what this love *looks like*:

- **Love is patient and longsuffering** — bearing with others gently. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- **Love is kind** — actively desiring others' happiness. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- **Love does not envy** — rejoicing in others' good instead of resenting it. (wesley.nnu.edu)
- **Love is not boastful or proud** — it doesn't boast, jump to conclusions, or think less of others. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Love melts pride and self-importance, making the lover humble and compassionate. ([ResourceUMC](#))

IV. Why Everything Else Profits Nothing Without Love

Wesley explains that without this love:

1. Life cannot be truly happy.

– Real happiness is not a fleeting pleasure but *lasting well-being* of the soul. ([ResourceUMC](#))

– A heart lacking love experiences pain, misery, anger, envy, and discontent — even if outwardly religious. ([ResourceUMC](#))

2. Death cannot be comfortable or peaceful.

– A truly peaceful death is not stupefaction or indifference but *a calm, joyful surrender to God*. (allaboutheaven.org)

– Wesley shares examples of believers whose love for God brought peace and joy even in suffering and dying; and contrasts this with the misery felt when love is lacking.
([ResourceUMC](#))

V. Conclusion: Love Is the Heart of Christian Life

- Without love — *the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit* — nothing we do guarantees eternal life or true spiritual profit. ([ResourceUMC](#))
- Wesley's central challenge: do we love others as Christ loves us — not for our own sake but for *God's glory and others' good*? If not, all our religious effort falls short.
([ResourceUMC](#))

Key Theme

Nothing in the Christian life — not giving, not suffering, not religious activity — truly profits unless it flows from God-centered love that patiently seeks the good of others and the glory of God. ([ResourceUMC](#))

Sermon

A Modern Translation of John Wesley's Sermon 139

Preached at Savannah, February 20, 1736

Based on 1 Corinthians 13:3 - "If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

(This modern English translation was created using Claude.AI. The 18th-century text of this message is found at <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/sermon-139-on-love>.)

Introduction

1. A Sobering Reality

There's great reason to fear that it will later be said of most of you here present that this Scripture, like all those you've heard before, profited you nothing. Some, perhaps, aren't serious enough to pay attention to it. Some who do pay attention won't believe it. Some who do believe it will think it's too hard and forget it as soon as they can. And of those few who receive it gladly

for a time, some—having no root of humility or self-denial—when persecution arises because of the word, will fall away rather than suffer for it. In fact, even of those who pay attention, who believe, remember, and receive it so deeply into their hearts that it takes root there, endures the heat of temptation, and begins to bear fruit—still not all will bring forth fruit to completion. The cares or pleasures of the world and the desire for other things (perhaps not felt until then) will grow up with the word and choke it.

2. I'm Not Immune Either

Nor am I, who speak God's word, any more secure from these dangers than you who hear it. I too must lament "an evil heart of unbelief." And whenever God allows persecution to arise—even just the slight persecution of criticism—I may be the first to fall away. Or if I'm enabled to withstand this, yet should he let loose the cares of the world upon me, or should he stop guarding me against those pleasures that don't lead to him and the desire for other things (besides knowing and loving him), I would surely be overwhelmed. Having preached to others, I would myself be disqualified.

3. Why Preach At All?

Why then do I speak this word at all? Because the responsibility to preach the gospel has been entrusted to me. And though I don't know what I'll do tomorrow, today I will preach the gospel. And regarding you, my commission goes like this: "Son of man, I'm sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says'—whether they will listen or whether they will refuse."

4. The Call to Obedience

This is what the Lord God says: "Whoever you are who wants to enter into life, keep the commandments." (To do this, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.") "Don't give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." In private also, "pray to your Father who sees in secret," and "pour out your heart before him." Make my word "a lamp for your feet, a light on your path." Keep it "in your heart and on your lips when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." "Turn to me with fasting" as well as prayer. And in obedience to your dying Redeemer, by eating that bread and drinking that cup, "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Through the power you receive from on high through these means, do all the things commanded in the Law and avoid all the things forbidden in it, knowing that "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." "Don't forget to do good and to share with others"—yes, while you have time, do all the good you can to all people. Then "deny yourself, take up your cross daily," and if called to do so, "resist to the point of shedding blood." And when each of you can say, "All this I have done," then let them say to themselves further (words at which not only

someone like Felix alone, but the holiest soul on earth might tremble): "Though I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

It concerns us all, therefore, in the highest degree, to know:

First, the full meaning of those words, "Though I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship"

Second, the true meaning of the word love

Third, in what sense it can be said that without love all this profits us nothing

PART I: THE FULL MEANING OF TOTAL SACRIFICE

The Words Explained

First, we must observe that the word used by Paul properly means to divide into small pieces and then to distribute what has been divided. Consequently, it implies not only giving away at once all our worldly possessions—whether from disgust with the world or a sudden burst of devotion—but an act of choice, a choice calmly and steadily carried out. It may also imply that this is done not out of vanity but partly from a right principle: namely, from a desire to obey God's command and obtain his kingdom.

We must further observe that the word "give" means to actually deliver something according to agreement. Accordingly, it implies, like the preceding word, not a hasty, thoughtless action, but one performed with open eyes and a determined heart, following a resolution previously made.

The Complete Picture

The full meaning of these words, therefore, is this—whoever has ears to hear, let them hear: "Though I should give all I own to feed the poor; though I should do so after careful choice and deliberation; though I should spend my life distributing it to them with my own hands, and that from a principle of obedience; though I should suffer, from the same motive, not only criticism and shame, not only imprisonment and chains—and all this by my own continued choice, not accepting release—but moreover death itself, even death inflicted in the most terrible manner; yet all this, if I don't have love (the love of God and the love of all humanity 'poured into my heart by the Holy Spirit who has been given to me'), profits me nothing."

PART II: WHAT IS LOVE?

Defining Love

Let's inquire what this love is—what is the true meaning of the word? We can consider it either as to its nature or its effects. And so that we can't possibly be mistaken, we won't rely at all on human opinions but will go to our Lord himself for an account of the nature of love, and to his inspired apostle for its effects.

Love of God and Neighbor

The love that our Lord requires in all his followers is the love of God and humanity—of God for his own sake, and of humanity for God's sake. Now, what does it mean to love God except to delight in him, to rejoice in his will, to desire continually to please him, to seek and find our happiness in him, and to thirst day and night for a fuller experience of him?

The Measure of Love

As to the extent of this love, our Lord has clearly told us: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart." Not that we're to love or delight in him alone, for he has commanded us not only to love our neighbor—that is, all people—as ourselves (to desire and pursue their happiness as sincerely and steadily as our own), but also to love many of his creatures in the fullest sense: to delight in them, to enjoy them. Only in such a manner and measure as we know and feel prepares us for, rather than hinders us from, enjoying him. This, then, is how we're called to love God with all our heart.

The Properties of Love

The effects or characteristics of this love the apostle describes in the chapter before us. And all these are infallible signs by which anyone can judge whether they have this love or not. They deserve our deepest consideration.

1. Love Is Patient

"Love is patient," or longsuffering. If you love your neighbor for God's sake, you'll bear long with their weaknesses. If they lack wisdom, you'll pity rather than despise them. If they're in error, you'll gently try to restore them without harshness or criticism. If they're caught in a sin, you'll work to restore them in a spirit of gentleness. And if that can't be done quickly, you'll be patient with them, hoping that God may eventually bring them to know and love the truth. In all provocations, whether from people's weakness or malice, you'll show yourself a model of gentleness and meekness. And no matter how often these provocations are repeated, you won't be overcome by evil but will overcome evil with good. Let no one deceive you with empty words: whoever is not patient like this does not have love.

2. Love Is Kind

Again: "Love is kind." Whoever feels the love of God and humanity poured into their heart feels an intense and constant thirst for the happiness of all their fellow human beings. Their soul melts away with the fervent desire they continually have to promote it, and out of the overflow of the heart their mouth speaks. The law of kindness is on their tongue. The same is stamped on all their actions. The flame within is continually expressing itself and spreading abroad more and more in every instance of goodwill to everyone they encounter. So that whether they think, speak, or whatever they do, it all points to the same goal—advancing by every possible means the happiness of all their fellow human beings. Don't deceive yourselves, therefore: whoever is not kind like this does not have love.

3. Love Does Not Envy

Further: "Love does not envy." This is actually implied when it says "love is kind," for kindness and envy are incompatible. They can no more exist together than light and darkness. If we earnestly desire all happiness for everyone, we cannot be grieved at anyone's happiness. The fulfillment of our desire will be sweet to our soul—we'll be far from being pained by it. If we're always doing what good we can for our neighbor and wishing we could do more, it's impossible that we should resent any good they receive. Indeed, it will be the very joy of our heart. However, then, we may flatter ourselves or one another, whoever envies does not have love.

4. Love Is Not Quick to Judge

It follows: "Love does not boast;" or rather, is not hasty in judging—for this is indeed the true meaning of the word. Those who love their neighbor for God's sake won't easily believe something bad about anyone to whom they wish all good, both spiritual and temporal. They cannot condemn someone even in their heart without evidence, nor based on slight evidence, nor indeed on any evidence without first, if possible, bringing them face to face with their accuser, or at least informing them of the accusation and letting them speak for themselves. Each of you knows you can't help but act this way toward someone you tenderly love. Why, then, whoever doesn't act this way does not have love.

5. Love Is Not Proud

I'll mention just one more property of this love: "Love is not proud." You cannot wrong someone you love. Therefore, if you love God with all your heart, you cannot wrong him by robbing him of his glory by claiming for yourself what belongs to him alone. You'll acknowledge that all you are and all you have is his; that without him you can do nothing; that he is your light and your life, your strength and your all; and that you are nothing—less than nothing—before him.

And if you love your neighbor as yourself, you won't be able to put yourself above them. In fact, you won't be able to despise anyone, any more than to hate them. (Indeed, you'll think everyone is better than yourself.) As wax melts before fire, so pride melts before love. All

arrogance, whether of heart, speech, or behavior, vanishes where love prevails. It brings down the proud looks of those who boasted in their strength and makes them like little children—lacking confidence in themselves, willing to hear, glad to learn, easily convinced, easily persuaded. And whoever is otherwise minded should give up all false hope: they are proud and therefore do not have love.

PART III: WHY LOVE IS ESSENTIAL

The Central Truth

It remains to inquire in what sense it can be said that "though I give all I possess to the poor, and even give over my body to hardship, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

The main meaning of these words is undoubtedly this: Whatever we do and whatever we suffer, if we're not renewed in our minds by "the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us," we cannot enter into eternal life. No one can enter there except through the covenant that God has given to humanity in his beloved Son.

Two Specific Applications

But because general truths are less likely to affect us, let's consider one or two specific ways in which all we can do or suffer, if we don't have love, profits us nothing. First, without love nothing can make our lives happy. Second, without love nothing can make our deaths comfortable.

1. Love Is Essential for a Happy Life

First, without love nothing can make our lives happy. By happiness I don't mean a slight, trivial pleasure that perhaps begins and ends in the same hour, but such a state of well-being as satisfies the soul and gives it steady, lasting contentment.

That nothing without love can profit us regarding our present happiness is clear from this single consideration: You cannot lack it in any single instance without pain, and the more you depart from it, the greater the pain. Are you lacking in patience? Then, to the extent you fall short of this, you fall short of happiness. The more opposite attitudes—anger, irritability, revenge—prevail, the more unhappy you are. You know it; you feel it. Nor can the storm be calmed or peace ever return to your soul unless meekness, gentleness, patience—or in one word, love—takes possession of it.

Does anyone find in themselves ill will, malice, envy, or any other attitude opposite to kindness? Then misery is there, and the stronger the attitude, the more miserable they are. If the lazy person can be said to eat their own flesh, how much more the malicious or envious person!

Their soul is the very image of hell—full of torment as well as wickedness. They already have "the worm that never dies," and they're hurrying toward "the fire that is never quenched." Only for now the great chasm is not yet fixed between them and heaven. For now there's still a Spirit ready to help in their weakness, who is still willing—if they stretch out their hands to heaven and bewail their ignorance and misery—to purify their heart from vile passions and renew it in the love of God, and so lead them from present happiness to eternal happiness.

2. Love Is Essential for a Comfortable Death

Second, without love nothing can make death comfortable.

By comfortable I don't mean unconscious or senseless. I wouldn't say someone died comfortably who died from a stroke or from a cannonball, any more than someone who, having their conscience seared, died as unconcerned as animals. Neither do I think you'd envy anyone the comfort of dying while raving mad. But by a comfortable death, I mean a calm passage out of life, full of steady, rational peace and joy. And such a death all the actions and all the suffering in the world cannot give without love.

Two Examples from Experience

To make this even clearer, I cannot appeal to your own experience, but I can appeal to what we've seen and to the experience of others. I myself have seen two people leaving this life in what I call a comfortable manner, though not with equal comfort. One had evidently more comfort than the other because he had more love.

The First Death

I attended the first during a great part of his final trial, as well as when he gave up his soul to God. He cried out, "God is disciplining me with strong pain, but I thank him for all; I bless him for all; I love him for all!" When asked, not long before his release, "Are God's comforts small to you?" he replied aloud, "No, no, no!" Calling all those near him by their names, he said, "Think of heaven, talk of heaven. All time is wasted when we're not thinking of heaven."

Now, this was the voice of love, and to the extent that love prevailed, all was comfort, peace, and joy. But as his love was not perfect, neither was his comfort. He had intervals of anger or irritability, and in those moments, misery—proving by both that love can sweeten both life and death. So when love is either absent from or obscured in the soul, there is no peace or comfort there.

The Second Death

It was in this place that I saw the other good soldier of Jesus Christ wrestling with his last enemy, death. And it was indeed a spectacle worthy to be seen by God, angels, and people.

Some of his last breath was spent in a psalm of praise to the one who was then giving him victory. In assurance of this, he began to triumph even in the heat of battle. When he was asked, "Do you have the love of God in your heart?" he lifted up his eyes and hands and answered, "Yes, yes!" with all the strength he had left. To someone who asked if he was afraid of the devil, whom he had just mentioned as making his final attack on him, he replied, "No, no. My loving Savior has conquered every enemy. He is with me. I fear nothing." Soon after, he said, "The way to our loving Savior is sharp, but it is short." And it wasn't long before he fell into a kind of sleep, in which his soul sweetly returned to God who gave it.

The Lesson

Here we can observe there was no mixture of any passion or attitude contrary to love; therefore, there was no misery. Perfect love cast out whatever might have caused torment. And whoever you are who has the same measure of love, your last end will be like his.