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A BLOW AT THE ROOT

or

"Christ stabbed in the house of his friends"

By John Wesley

From
The Works of John Wesley
Volume 10 -- Chapter 25

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1. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," shall see the face of God in Glory. Nothing under heaven can be more sure than this; "for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. And though heaven and earth pass away, yet his word shall not pass away." As well therefore might God fall from heaven, as his word fall to the ground. No, it cannot be; none shall live with God but he that lives to God, none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven but he that bears the image of God on earth. None that is not saved from sin here, can be saved from hell hereafter. None can see the kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Who ever would reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth. He must have "that mind in him which was in Christ," enabling him to walk as Christ walked.

2. And yet as sure as this is, and as clearly as it is taught in every part of the Holy scripture, there is scarce one among all the truths of God, which is less received by men. It was indeed acknowledged in some degree, even among the wiser heathens. Some among them allowed, that nothing would please God, but the "*scanti recessus mentis et incotum generoso pedtus honesto*", "a virtuous, holy mind, and an heart deep-dyed with honesty," But though they could not deny, yet how easily and effectually did they evade this! They fancied something else would do as well, that some rites or ceremonies, some external forms, or glorious action, would supply the place of inward holiness. So the famous Roman entitles to future happiness, not only the good and virtuous, but all "*Ob patriam pugnando vulnere passos*," So, to fight for their country, to write good verses, or to invent useful arts was abundantly sufficient, in the judgement of the Heathens, to give men a place in heaven!

3. But this would not pass with modern Romans. They despised such gross imaginations. But though they did not allow these, they found out another way to get to heaven without holiness. In the room of them they substituted penances, pilgrimages, praying to saints and angels; and above all these masses for the dead, absolution by a Priest, and these satisfy the Romanists full well as lustrations did the Heathens. Thousands of them make no manner of doubt, but, by a diligent use of these, without any holiness at all, they shall see the Lord in Glory.

4. However, Protestants will not be satisfied thus; they know this hope is no better than a spider's web. They are convinced, that whoever leans on this, leans on the staff of a broken reed. What then can they do? How shall they hope to see God, without holiness? Why, by doing no harm, doing good, going to the church and sacrament. And many thousands sit down content with this, believing they are in the high road to heaven.

5. Yet many cannot rest here. They look upon this as the very Popery of Protestantism. They well know, that although none can be a real Christian, without carefully abstaining from all evil, using every means of grace at every opportunity, and doing all possible good to all men; yet a man may go this far, may do all this, and be but an heathen still. They know this religion is too superficial; it is as it were skin deep. Therefore, it is not Christianity; for that lies in the heart; it is worshipping God in spirit and in truth; it is no other than "the kingdom of God within us;" it is the mind which was in Christ Jesus; it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

6. Besides, they see that, be this religion shallower or deeper, it does not stand on the right foundation, since "other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, even Jesus Christ." And none can be justified, they are well assured, but by faith, even faith alone. Seeing "to him" only "that believeth on God who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness."

7. What evasion now? What way could satan take to make all this of none effect? What could be done when that grand truth, "By grace are ye saved through faith," was more and more generally received? What, indeed, but to persuade the very men who had received it, "to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness?" To this end Simon Magus appeared again, and taught, "that Christ had done, as well as suffered, all; that his righteousness being imputed to us, we need none of our own; that seeing there was so much righteousness and holiness in Him, there needs none in us; that to think we have any, or to desire or seek any, is to renounce Christ; that from the beginning to the end of salvation, all is Christ, nothing in Man; and that those who teach otherwise are legal Preachers and know nothing of the gospel."

8. This is indeed "a blow at the roots," the root of all holiness, all true religion. Hereby Christ is "stabbed in the house of his friends," of those who make the largest professions of loving and honouring him; the whole design of his death, namely, "to destroy the works of the devil," being overthrown at a stroke. For wherever this doctrine is cordially received, it leaves no place for holiness. It demolishes it from top to bottom; it destroys both root and branch. It effectually tears up all desire of it, all endeavors after it. It forbids all such exhortations as might excite those desires, or awaken those endeavors. Nay, it makes men afraid of personal holiness, afraid of cherishing any thought of it, lest they should deny the faith, and reject Christ and his righteousness: So that, instead of "being zealous of good works," they are a stink in their nostrils. And they are infinitely more afraid of "the works of God," than of "the works of the devil."

9. Here is wisdom! though not the wisdom of the saints, but wisdom from beneath. Here is the masterpiece of Satan: Farther than this he cannot go. Men are holy, without a grain of holiness in them! holy in Christ, however unholy in themselves; they are in Christ, without one jot of the mind that was in Christ; in Christ, though their nature is whole in them. They are "complete in him," though they are, in themselves, as proud, as vain, as covetous, as passionate as ever. It is enough: They may be unrighteous still, seeing Christ has "fulfilled all righteousness."

10. "O you simple ones, how long will you love simplicity?" How long will you "seek death in the error of your life?" Don't you know who teacheth you otherwise, "that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" "Be not deceived;" although there are many [who] lie in wait to deceive, and that under the fair pretence of exalting Christ; --a pretence which the more easily steals upon you, because "to you he is precious." But as the Lord liveth, "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." "Such indeed were some of you. But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified," as well as "justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." You are really changed; you are not only accounted, but actually "made righteous." "The law" - the inward power - "of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made" you "free" -really, actually free - "from the law" or power "of sin and death." This is liberty, true gospel liberty, experienced by every believer: Not freedom from the law of God, or the works of God, but from the law of sin and the works of the devil. See that ye "stand fast in" this real, not imaginary "liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free." And take heed ye "be not entangled again," by means of these vain boasters, "in the yoke of" that vile "bondage to sin," from which ye are now clean escaped. I testify unto you, that if you still continue in sin, Christ shall profit you nothing; that Christ is no Saviour to you, unless he saves you from your sins; and that unless it purify your heart, faith shall profit you nothing. O when will ye understand, that to oppose either inward or outward holiness, under colour of exalting Christ, is directly to act the part of Judas, to "betray the Son of man with a kiss?" Repent, repent! lest he cut you in sunder with the two-edged sword that cometh out of his mouth! It is you yourselves that, by opposing the very end of his coming into the world, are crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame. It is you that, by expecting to see the Lord without holiness, through the righteousness of Christ, "make the blood of the covenant an unholy thing," keeping those unholy that so trust in it. O beware! for evil is before you. If those who do not name the name of Christ, and die in their sins, shall be punished seven-fold, surely you who thus make Christ a minister of sin, shall be punished seventy-and-seven fold. What! Make Christ destroy his own kingdom? Make Christ a factor for Satan? Set Christ against holiness? Talk of Christ as saving his people in their sins? It is no better than to say, He saves them from the guilt, and not from the power, of sin. Will you make the righteousness of Christ such a cover for the unrightousness of man? So that by this means, "the unrighteous" of every kind "shall inherit the kingdom of God!" Stop! Consider! What are you doing? "You did run well: Who hath bewitched you? Who hath corrupted you from the simplicity of Christ, from the purity of the gospel?" You did know, "He that believeth is born of God: And whosoever is born of God sinneth not;" but while "he keepeth himself, that wicked one toucheth him not." O come back to the true, the pure, the old gospel! That which ye received in the beginning. Come back to Christ, who died to make you an holy people, "zealous of good works." "Remember from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works." Your "Father worketh hitherto:" Do ye work; else your faith is

vain. For "wilt thou know, O vain," O empty man, "that faith without works is dead?" Wilt thou know that "though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing?" Wilt thou know, that all the blood and righteousness of Christ, unless "that mind be in thee which was in Him," and thou likewise "walk as Christ walked," will only increase thy damnation? "If any man teach other wise, and consent not to wholesome words, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about strife of words, whereof come railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth." Be no longer afraid of the strongest exhortations either to inward or outward holiness. Hereby God the Father is glorified, and God the Son truly exalted. Do not stupidly and senselessly call this legal, -a silly, unmeaning word. Be not afraid of being "under the law of God," but of being under "the law of sin." Love the strictest preaching best; That which most searches the heart, and shows you wherein you are unlike Christ; and that which press you most to love him with all you heart, and serve him with all you strength.

11. Suffer me to warn you of another silly, unmeaning word: Do not say, "I can do nothing." If so, then you know nothing of Christ; then you have no faith: For if you have, if you believe, then you "can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you." You can love him and keep his commandments; and to you his "commandments are not grievous." Grievous to them that believe! Far from it. They are the joy of your heart. Show then your love to Christ by keeping his commandments, by walking in all his ordinances blameless. Honour Christ by obeying him with all your might, by serving him with all your strength. Glorify Christ by imitating Christ in all things, by walking as he walked. Keep to Christ by keeping in all his ways. Trust in Christ, to live and reign in your heart. Have confidence in Christ that he will fulfill in you all his great and precious promises, that he will work in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and all the work of faith with power. Cleave to Christ, till his blood have cleansed you from all pride, all anger, all evil desire. Let Christ do all. Let him that has done all for you, do all in you. Exalt Christ as a Prince to give repentance; a Saviour both to give remission of sins, and to create in you a new heart, to renew a right spirit within you. This is the gospel, the pure, genuine gospel; glad tidings of great salvation. Not the new, but the old, the everlasting gospel, the gospel not of Simon Magus, but of Jesus Christ. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ give you, "according to the riches of his glory", to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that, being rooted and grounded in love, ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height; and to know that love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God!"

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