



*“Let no man persuade you, by vain words,  
to rest short of this prize of your high calling.”*



*From*

A L M O S T

*to*

ALTOGETHER

*Sermons on Christian Discipleship*



JOHN WESLEY



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JOHN WESLEY

The John Wesley Collection  
Andrew C. Thompson  
Executive Editor

 seedbed

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## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

John Wesley's profound legacy and impact on world Christianity in his lifetime and since can be viewed through several lenses. The revival that arose under his leadership changed the social and political structure of eighteenth-century England as the poor and lost found hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than in revolution against the crown. The influence of Wesley's Spirit-inspired teaching continued unabated as the Methodist movement spread scriptural holiness across the American continent and lands far beyond.

Wesley's influence as a publisher represents an astonishing record in its own right. Wesley lived in a time when Gutenberg's invention of movable type, which had immediately preceded Luther's reformation, had coalesced into specialized printing trades in London. Typefounders and printeries offered exciting new pathways for the spread of the gospel through inexpensive printed text.

Perhaps more than any other figure of his day, Wesley embraced this new technology and issued sermons, tracts, commentaries, abridgments, biographies, and a host of other items that he considered relevant to the spiritual growth of maturing Christians.

Wesley was vitally driven by the reality of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. His teaching on entire sanctification,

or Christian perfection, is the capstone of his legacy. He worked tirelessly to abridge and republish seminal works by historical figures of previous generations, reaching as far back as the apostolic fathers of the first-century church. He constantly curated voices that communicated the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing believers into the fullness of salvation and lives of holy love.

These writings resourced the early Methodists in their quest to spread the gospel by providing the intellectual and spiritual moorings for the messengers of the movement. Seedbed believes these writings are as relevant today as they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

With great joy we present The John Wesley Collection. In the years ahead, Seedbed will reissue selections from this vast collection, which includes his fifty-volume Christian Library, some 150 sermons, countless items from his journals and letters, as well as innumerable tracts, hymns, poems, and other publications, most of which have been out of circulation for decades, if not centuries. We encourage you to enter these texts with determination. Readers who persevere will soon find themselves accustomed to the winsome tenor and tempo of Wesley's voice and vernacular.

Seedbed's editors are constantly examining the more than 250 years of vital spiritual writing by Wesley and successive generations to find the most relevant and helpful messages that will speak to today's body of believers. We commend this old-new publishing work to you as one ready to be transformed by the latent power of these ancient truths. It is our prayer that these timeless words will add fuel to the fire of an awakening ready to ignite once again across the world.

*Sola sancta caritas! Amen.*

Andrew Miller  
Seedbed Publishing

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The text for each of John Wesley's sermons included in this compilation originally came from the online Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

The sermons in Chapters 2–4 were edited anonymously at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. The sermons in Chapters 1 and 5–7 were initially edited by students at Northwest Nazarene College: Dave Giles, Jennifer Vail, Angel Miller, Anita Maendl. The sermon in Chapter 8 came from [umcmmission.org](http://umcmmission.org). The sermon in Chapter 9 was initially edited by Pastor Edward Purkey.

George Lyons of Northwest Nazarene College (Nampa, Idaho) made additional corrections to the sermons in Chapters 1–7 and 9 for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.

## INTRODUCTION

John Wesley wanted more than anything that those under his care would experience the joy of true holiness. He believed that present salvation is a gift God offers to all people, and he referred to this gift as *holiness of heart and life*. He even believed that holiness was the reason God called his brother Charles and him into the leadership of a movement for which, in many ways, they were ill suited. Looking back on the beginning of the Methodist revival in the late 1730s, Wesley once sketched an image of two young men who were more interested in academic pursuits and the salvation of their own souls than anything else. To their surprise, God had other ideas. First they were shown the relationship between faith as a divine gift and the development of holiness in practical life. And then, they received their mission: “God then thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise a holy people,” Wesley wrote. To fully understand the nuances of the Methodist movement over the subsequent fifty years of Wesley’s life, we would have to go into a lot more detail. It’s clear, though, that the message of holiness as a motivation underlay it all.

## Holiness and Discipleship

We tend to use the word “discipleship” much more than we use “holiness” today. This is somewhat understandable. Holiness can have some negative connotations in our own context. No one wants to be accused of being holier-than-thou, and everyone wants to avoid getting cornered by a holy roller! On the other hand, discipleship seems like a much more positive term. When we read about the life of Jesus, we find that his followers are called disciples. In the Great Commission at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus telling us to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. So discipleship is a thoroughgoing concept in the New Testament. What is interesting is that the term is practically missing in Wesley. If you consult the most authoritative index on Wesley’s sermon corpus, you’ll find exactly zero entries for “disciple” and “discipleship.”

Why the disparity? Why would Wesley favor the language of holiness so thoroughly while ignoring terms related to discipleship? And why would we embrace discipleship language while allowing words related to holiness to ring negatively in our ears? The answers to those questions aren’t entirely clear. It may help us to realize that holiness terms and discipleship terms tend to show up in different parts of the New Testament. It’s in the Gospels that we find the disciples being described. These are—along with the Acts of the Apostles—the most narrative parts of the New Testament. Descriptions of holiness, on the other hand, are much more prominent in the letters of Paul, the letters of Peter, and the book of Hebrews. These books have much less of a narrative quality and much more a combination of theological description and moral counsel.

When it comes to Wesley, the prominence of terms related to *holiness* and *sanctification* ironically tells us something about how he understands *discipleship* (in concept if not in the word itself). Holiness isn't just a conformity to an outward standard of life. Such behavior might be nothing more than a kind of hollow moralism. Instead, holiness is about what it means to be transformed *inwardly* by God's grace so that the *outward* life is changed as a result. It isn't that Wesley ignores the narratives of the Gospels and the early church in Acts. Far from it. But it is perhaps accurate to say that, when he wants to describe what the life of true faith looks like, he often accentuates portions of the New Testament that favor holiness language exactly because they point to the necessity of the inward change. So if we want to understand the Wesleyan vision of discipleship, we have to see it as a dynamic and transformative kind of life whereby we live differently because we are becoming different persons through the power of God's grace.

## The Sermon Content of this Volume

This volume contains a set of nine sermons written at different times in John Wesley's life that all seek to describe what we would call true discipleship. His abiding concern in practically all his published sermons is to encourage his audience to learn what it means to be an "altogether Christian" (to use his phrase from *The Almost Christian*). In Wesley's understanding, this isn't something that any of us can do alone. In one sense, we can't do it by ourselves because the only true holiness is social holiness—by which he means the holiness that can develop within us when we are deeply rooted in a community of fellow believers. Even more

importantly, Wesley doesn't think we could become altogether Christians without the distinct witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives enabling us to have true faith in Christ and to live our lives in response to that faith.

Living as an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ, in other words, requires the ongoing gift of God's grace. In *The Good Steward*, Wesley describes what that looks like with reference to our stewardship of all that God has entrusted us with:

It is no small thing to lay out for God all which you have received from God. It requires all your wisdom, all your resolution, all your patience, and constancy;—far more than ever you had by nature; but not more than you may have by grace. For his grace is sufficient for you; and “all things,” you know, “are possible to him that believeth.” By faith, then, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ;” “put on the whole armour of God”; and you shall be enabled to glorify him in all your words and works; yea, to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!

Wesley would say that the one who is living such a life is living a holy life. We might say that such a person is an authentic disciple of Jesus Christ. Regardless of the term preferred, it's clear that grace and a grace-enabled faith are the prerequisites.

A few notes are in order to help the reader understand why the sermons in this volume have been chosen and how the collection has been arranged. Over half a century separates the sermon written earliest (*Circumcision of the Heart*, 1733) from the one written latest (*The More Excellent Way*, 1787). While the sermons have been arranged chronologically from earliest to latest in this volume, that decision was not made for chronological reasons alone. Rather, this

arrangement of the sermons also communicates something important about the character of present salvation in John Wesley's view. *Circumcision of the Heart*, our first entry, offers an expansive vision of the Christian life as encompassing humility, faith, hope, and love. Then the four sermons that follow build upon this theme, though with a level of evangelical zeal and expectation that can almost take one's breath away. These include *The Almost Christian*, *The First-Fruits of the Spirit*, *The Way to the Kingdom*, and *Marks of the New Birth*. (Wesley's tutelage to the Moravians and experience at Aldersgate occurred between his writing of *Circumcision of the Heart* and the writing of these next four, which is significant for the tone of the latter.)

The next three sermons tend to moderate those that precede them just a bit. They offer a pastoral perspective on Christian discipleship that emphasizes the need for grace to continue the sanctifying work begun when a believer is justified and experiences new birth. *On Sin in Believers* and *The Repentance of Believers* deal with the reality of sin's presence in the lives of Christian believers. Yet these two sermons also make a case that the lingering presence of sin can be utterly defeated by grace. *The Good Steward* looks at the issue of stewardship on multiple levels: from the stewardship of material goods, to the stewardship of one's time and activities, to the stewardship of both body and soul, and finally to the stewardship of God's grace. It offers the reader a compelling argument for the life that is possible when God's grace becomes the driving force in it. There is a pastoral quality to these three sermons that makes them an important component of the Wesleyan vision of discipleship.

Finally, we conclude with *The More Excellent Way*. This is a sermon written very late in Wesley's life. In it he seems to have come to the conclusion that there will always be "two

orders” of Christians: those who settle for a faith that is barely sufficient, and those who desire to fully embrace the more excellent way of holy love. The sermon is a fitting capstone to the collection; it is pastorally generous to disciples who are at many points along their journey, but in true Wesleyan fashion it also contains the evangelical encouragement to pursue the holy life every day and so aim for the “summit of Christian holiness.” Taken together, all nine sermons offer a broad view of John Wesley’s understanding of discipleship. They present a view of the Christian life relevant for any age.

## Notes on Format and Editorial Considerations

The Wesley sermon material used in the John Wesley Collection is drawn from the nineteenth-century edition of Wesley’s works prepared by Thomas Jackson. Where necessary, the Jackson edition sermon texts have been compared to eighteenth-century first editions either from the relevant volume of Wesley’s *Sermons on Several Occasions* or from sermons published singly. By collecting small groups of sermons together under particular topics (such as discipleship), our hope is that the vital Wesleyan theology contained in these sermons will reach a broad audience. Since we have made some editorial decisions regarding the form and presentation of the sermons that mark a departure from the Jackson edition, a few notes on those changes are in order here.

The most immediately noticeable editorial change made in this volume is the insertion of section headings throughout each of Wesley’s sermons. Our decision to insert these headings (and subheadings) has been made for the same reason that publishers of study Bibles insert section headings within the books of the Bible. The headings serve as an aid to the

reader, so that the particular topic being dealt with in that part of the text is clear.

Another less noticeable editorial change has been to make slight modifications to the language of the sermons at certain points to make them more easily readable for a contemporary audience. These changes are few in number and represent a highly selective practice of changing only the most difficult to understand words or phrases. Sometimes that comes in the form of Scripture quotations, and in those instances our practice has been to “blend” the Authorized (or King James) Version that Wesley used with the New King James Version (which keeps the rhythms of the original KJV but includes some modernized language). At other times, we have changed words that come from Wesley’s own pen—whether his original words or his own paraphrase of Scripture—again, in a way that preserves meaning but increases readability. Since our addition is not intended to be for scholarly use but rather for spiritual reading by a broad audience, we have not emphasized these changes with copious footnotes. We have, however, followed a two-fold set of criteria that can be summarized as: 1) Changes in language made as sparingly as possible and always to those passages in Wesley that seem to be the most obscure to the contemporary reader; 2) Substitutions in a word or a phrase always made with a concern for hewing as close to Wesley’s meaning as possible.

A final note can be offered to explain the system of numbered paragraphs that are a feature of all Wesley’s sermons. With only a few exceptions, Wesley’s practice is to arrange his sermons so that each major section of the sermon is given a Roman numeral (I, II, III) while the paragraphs within each major section are given Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3). That system is retained in the Jackson edition of

Wesley's works, and we have kept it here as well. Our insertion of descriptive section headings typically corresponds to Wesley's Roman numeral divisions—in other words, we are simply elaborating on a system that he himself originally put in place. In addition, we have included subheadings within major sections at appropriate points as an aide to the reader. The one exception to how we've handled Wesley's numbering system has to do with the sermon *The Almost Christian*. In the original edition of that sermon, Wesley employs a paragraph numbering system more complicated than his norm which involves a second set of Roman numerals alongside his typical first set that denote different sections of the sermon. Arabic numerals are also used. When reading the sermon, this means that there is a third set of numbers to deal with, and the effect is more confusing than clarifying for the reader. We made the decision to remove the third set of numbers, which we believe both brings the sermon into greater conformity with Wesley's general practice and serves to benefit the general reader.

Andrew C. Thompson  
Executive Editor

*From*

A L M O S T

*to*

ALTOGETHER

ONE

# THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

1733

*Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.*

—Romans 2:29

## Introduction

I. It is the melancholy remark of an excellent man, that he who now preaches the most essential duties of Christianity, runs the hazard of being esteemed, by a great part of his hearers, “a setter forth of new doctrines.” Most men have so *lived away* the substance of that religion, the profession of which they still retain, that no sooner are any of those truths proposed which difference the Spirit of Christ from the spirit of the world, than they cry out, “You bring strange things to our ears; we would know what these things mean”: though he is only preaching to them “Jesus and the

resurrection,” with the necessary consequence of it, if Christ be risen, you ought then to die unto the world, and to live wholly unto God.

2. This is a hard saying to the natural man, who is alive unto the world, and dead unto God; and one that he will not readily be persuaded to receive as the truth of God, unless it be so qualified in the interpretation, as to have neither use nor significance left. He “receives not the” words “of the Spirit of God,” taken in their plain and obvious meaning; “they are foolishness unto him; neither” indeed “can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” They are perceivable only by that spiritual sense, which in him was never yet awakened for want of which he must reject, as idle fancies of men, what are both the wisdom and the power of God.

3. That “circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter”—that the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ, of one who is in a state of acceptance with God, is not either outward circumcision, or baptism, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him that created it—is one of those important truths that can only be spiritually discerned. And this the Apostle himself intimates in the next words, “Whose praise is not of men, but of God.” As if he had said, “Do not expect, whoever you are, who thus follows your great Master, that the world, the one who follow him not, will say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’ Know that the circumcision of the heart, the seal of your calling, is foolishness with the world. Be content to wait for your applause till the day of your Lord’s appearing. In that day shalt you have praise of God, in the great assembly of men and angels.”

I design, first, particularly to inquire of what this circumcision of the heart consists; and, secondly, to mention some reflections that naturally arise from such an inquiry.

## I. What Circumcision of the Heart Implies

1. I am, first, to inquire, of what that circumcision of the heart consists, which will receive the praise of God. In general we may observe, it is that habitual disposition of soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, “from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit,” and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so “renewed in the spirit of our mind,” as to be “perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.”

### *Circumcision of the Heart Implies a Deep Humility*

2. To be more particular: circumcision of heart implies humility, faith, hope, and charity. Humility, a right judgment of ourselves, cleanses our minds from those high conceits of our own perfection, from that undue opinion of our own abilities and attainments, which are the genuine fruit of a corrupted nature. This entirely cuts off that vain thought, “I am rich, and wise, and have need of nothing,” and convinces us that we are by nature wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. It convinces us, that in our best estate we are, of ourselves, all sin and vanity; that confusion, and ignorance, and error reign over our understanding; that unreasonable, earthly, sensual, devilish passions usurp authority over our will; in a word, that there is no whole part in our soul, that all the foundations of our nature are out of course.

3. At the same time we are convinced, that we are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that, without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing but add sin to sin; that it is he alone who works in us by his almighty power, either to will or do that which is good; it being as impossible for us even to think a good thought, without the supernatural assistance of his Spirit, as to create ourselves, or to renew our whole souls in righteousness and true holiness.

4. A sure effect of our having formed this right judgment of the sinfulness and helplessness of our nature is a disregard of that "honor which comes of man," which is usually paid to some supposed excellency in us. He who knows himself, neither desires nor values the applause that he knows he does not deserve. It is therefore "a very small thing with him, to be judged by man's judgment." He has all reason to think, by comparing what it has said, either for or against him, with what he feels in his own breast, that the world, as well as the god of this world, was "a liar from the beginning." And even as to those who are not of the world; though he would choose, if it were the will of God, that they should account of him as of one desirous to be found a faithful steward of his Lord's goods, if by chance this might be a means of enabling him to be of more use to his fellow-servants, yet as this is the one end of his wishing for their approbation, so he does not at all rest upon it. For he is assured, that whatever God wills, he can never lack instruments to perform; since he is able, even of these stones, to raise up servants to do his pleasure.

#### *Circumcision of the Heart Implies a Steadfast Faith*

5. This is that lowliness of mind, which they have learned of Christ, who follow his example and tread in

his steps. And this knowledge of their disease, whereby they are more and more cleansed from one part of it, pride and vanity, disposes them to embrace, with a willing mind, the second thing implied in circumcision of the heart—that faith which alone is able to make them whole, which is the one medicine given under heaven to heal their sickness.

6. The best guide of the blind, the surest light of them that are in darkness, the most perfect instructor of the foolish, is faith. But it must be such a faith as is “mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds,” to the overturning of all the prejudices of corrupt reason, all the false maxims revered among men, all evil customs and habits, all that “wisdom of the world which is foolishness with God”; as “casts down imaginations,” reasoning, “and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

7. “All things are possible to him who” thus “believes.” “The eyes of his understanding being enlightened,” he sees what is his calling—even to glorify God, who has bought him with so high a price, in his body and in his spirit, which now are God’s by redemption, as well as by creation. He feels what is “the exceeding greatness of this power,” who, as he raised up Christ from the dead, so is able to revive us, dead in sin, “by his Spirit which dwells in us.”

“This is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith”; that faith, which is not only an unshaken assent to all that God has revealed in Scripture—and in particular to those important truths: “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners”; “he bore our sins in his own body on the tree”; “he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours

only, but also for the sins of the whole world”<sup>\*</sup>—but likewise the revelation of Christ in our hearts; a divine evidence or conviction of his love, his free, unmerited love to me a sinner; a sure confidence in his pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit; a confidence, by which every true believer is enabled to bear witness: “I know that my Redeemer lives,” that I have an “Advocate with the Father,” and that “Jesus Christ the righteous” is my Lord, and “the propitiation for my sins”; I know he has “loved me, and given himself for me”; he has reconciled me, even me, to God; and I “have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”

8. Such a faith as this cannot fail to show evidently the power of him that inspires it, by delivering his children from the yoke of sin, and “purging their consciences from dead works”; by strengthening them so that they are no longer constrained to obey sin in the desires thereof; but instead of yielding their members unto it, as “instruments of unrighteousness,” they now “yield themselves” entirely “unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.”

### *Circumcision of the Heart Implies a Lively Hope*

9. Those who are thus by faith born of God, have also strong consolation through hope. This is the next thing that the circumcision of the heart implies; even the testimony of their own spirit with the Spirit which witnesses in their hearts that they are the children of God. Indeed it is the same

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<sup>\*</sup>Wesley originally included a parenthetical note in the body of the sermon at this point that reads, “The following part of this paragraph is now added to the sermon formerly preached.” He is pointing to a difference between the original version of *Circumcision of the Heart* in 1733 and the version he published in 1748. The added lines are meant to strengthen the evangelical character of faith as a

Spirit who works in them that clear and cheerful confidence that their heart is upright toward God; that good assurance, that they now do, through his grace, the things which are acceptable in his sight; that they are now in the path which leads to life, and shall, by the mercy of God, endure in it to the end. It is he who gives them a lively expectation of receiving all good things at God's hand; a joyous prospect of that crown of glory, which is reserved in heaven for them.

By this anchor a Christian is kept steady in the midst of the waves of this troublesome world, and preserved from striking upon either of those fatal rocks—presumption or despair. He is neither discouraged by the misconceived severity of his Lord, nor does he “despise the riches of his goodness.” He neither apprehends the difficulties of the race set before him to be greater than he has strength to conquer, nor expects there to be so little as to yield in the conquest, till he has put forth all strength. The experience he already has in the Christian warfare, as it assures him his “labor is not in vain,” if “whatever he finds to do, he does it with his might”; so it forbids his entertaining so vain a thought, as that he can otherwise gain any advantage, as that any virtue can be shown, any praise attained, by faint hearts and feeble hands; or, indeed, by any but those who pursue the same course with the great Apostle of the Gentiles—“I,” says he, “so run, not as uncertainly; I so fight, not as one who beats the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest, by

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personal assurance of Christ's love in the heart of the believer—in other words, not just that Christ died for the sins of the whole but that Christ also died for *me*. The parenthetical is removed in this edition both because it breaks up the text and because of Wesley's use of the archaic abbreviation “N.B.” (or “nota bene”) which would only confuse the contemporary reader.

any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

10. By the same discipline is every good soldier of Christ to inure himself to endure hardship. Confirmed and strengthened by this, he will be able not only to renounce the works of darkness, but every appetite too, and every affection, which is not subject to the law of God. For “every one,” says St. John, “who has this hope, purifies himself even as he is pure.” It is his daily care, by the grace of God in Christ, and through the blood of the covenant, to purge the inmost recesses of his soul from the lusts that before possessed and defiled it; from uncleanness, and envy, and malice, and wrath; from every passion and temper that is after the flesh, that either springs from or cherishes his native corruption; as well knowing, that he whose very body is the temple of God, ought to admit into it nothing common or unclean; and that holiness becomes that house for ever, where the Spirit of holiness vouchsafes to dwell.

### *Circumcision of the Heart Implies Love*

11. Yet you lack one thing, whosoever you are, that to a deep humility, and a steadfast faith, has joined a lively hope, and thereby in a good measure cleansed your heart from its inbred pollution. If you will be perfect, add to all these, charity; add love, and you have the circumcision of the heart. “Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment.” Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. “Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable,” or honorable; “if there be any virtue, if there be any praise,” they are all comprised

in this one word—love. In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

12. Not that this forbids us to love anything besides God: it implies that we love our brother also. Nor yet does it forbid us (as some have strangely imagined) to take pleasure in any thing but God. To suppose this, is to suppose the Fountain of holiness is directly the author of sin; since he has inseparably annexed pleasure to the use of those creatures that are necessary to sustain the life he has given us. This, therefore, can never be the meaning of his command. What the real sense of it is, both our blessed Lord and his Apostles tell us too frequently, and too plainly, to be misunderstood. They all with one mouth bear witness, that the true meaning of those several declarations, “The Lord your God is one Lord”; “You shall have no other Gods but me”; “You shall love the Lord your God with all your strength”; “You shall cleave unto him”; “The desire of your soul shall be to his name”; is no other than this: the one perfect Good shall be your one ultimate end.

One thing shall you desire for its own sake—the fruition of him that is All in All. One happiness shall you propose to your souls, even a union with him that made them; the having “fellowship with the Father and the Son”; the being joined to the Lord in one Spirit. One design you are to pursue to the end of time—the enjoyment of God in time and in eternity. Desire other things, so far as they tend to this. Love the creature as it leads to the Creator. But in every step you take, be this the glorious point that terminates your view. Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work, be subordinate to this. Whatever you desire or fear, whatever

you seek or shun, whatever you think, speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole End, as well as Source, of your being.

13. Have no end, no ultimate end, but God. Thus our Lord: "One thing is needful." And if your eye be singly fixed on this one thing, "your whole body shall be full of light." Thus St. Paul: "This one thing I do; I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus." Thus St. James: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Thus St. John: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." The seeking happiness in what gratifies either the desire of the flesh, by agreeably striking upon the outward senses; the desire of the eye, of the imagination, by its novelty, greatness, or beauty; or the pride of life, whether by pomp, grandeur, power, or, the usual consequence of them, applause and admiration; "is not of the Father," comes not from, neither is approved by, the Father of spirits; "but of the world": it is the distinguishing mark of those who will not have him to reign over them.

## II. Reflections on Circumcision of the Heart

### *No One Shall Claim the Praise of God, unless His Heart Is Circumcised by Humility*

1. I have thus particularly inquired, what that circumcision of heart is, which will obtain the praise of God. I am, in the second place, to mention some reflections that naturally arise from such an inquiry, as a plain rule by which every man may judge of himself, whether he is of the world or of God. And, first, it is clear from what has been said, that

no man has a title to the praise of God, unless his heart is circumcised by humility; unless he is little, and base, and vile in his own eyes; unless he is deeply convinced of that inbred "corruption of his nature," "by which he is very far gone from original righteousness," being prone to all evil, averse to all good, corrupt and abominable; having a "carnal mind which is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be," unless he continually feels in his inmost soul, that without the Spirit of God resting upon him, he can neither think, nor desire, nor speak, nor act anything good, or well-pleasing in his sight. No man I say, has a title to the praise of God, till he feels his want of God; nor indeed, till he seeks that "honor which comes of God only"; and neither desires nor pursues that which comes of man, unless so far only as it tends to this.

*No One Shall Claim the Honor of God, unless His Heart Is Circumcised by Faith*

2. Another truth, which naturally follows from what has been said, is, that none shall obtain the honor that comes from God, unless his heart be circumcised by faith; even a "faith of the operation of God"; unless, refusing to be any longer led by his senses, appetites, or passions, or even by that blind leader of the blind, so idolized by the world, natural reason, he lives and walks by faith. He directs every step, as "seeking him that is invisible"; "looks not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal"; and governs all his desires, designs, and thoughts, all his actions and conversations, as one who has entered in within the veil, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God.

3. It were to be wished, that they were better acquainted with this faith, who employ much of their time and pains

in laying another foundation; in grounding religion on the eternal *fitness* of things on the intrinsic *excellence* of virtue, and the *beauty* of actions flowing from it; on the *reasons* as they term them, of good and evil, and the *relations* of beings to each other. Either these accounts of the grounds of Christian duty coincide with the scriptural, or not. If they do, why are well-meaning men perplexed, and drawn from the weightier matters of the law, by a cloud of terms, by which the easiest truths are explained into obscurity? If they are not, then it behooves them to consider who is the author of this new doctrine; whether he is likely to be an angel from heaven, who preaches another gospel than that of Christ Jesus; though, if he were, God, not we, has pronounced his sentence: "Let him be accursed."

4. Our gospel, as it knows no other foundation of good works than faith, or of faith than Christ, so it clearly informs us: we are not his disciples while we either deny him to be the Author, or his Spirit to be the Inspirer and Perfecter, both of our faith and works. "If any man does not have the spirit of Christ, he is not his." He alone can revive those who are dead unto God, can breathe into them the breath of Christian life, and so prevent, accompany, and follow them with his grace, as to bring their good desires to good effect. And, "as many as are thus led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." This is God's short and plain account of true religion and virtue, and "no other foundation can any man lay."

*No One Shall Claim the Crown of God, unless His Heart Is Circumcised by Hope*

5. From what has been said, we may, thirdly, learn that none is truly "led by the Spirit," unless that "Spirit bear witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God"; unless he see the

prize and the crown before him, and “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” So greatly have they erred who have taught that, in serving God, we ought not to have a view to our own happiness! More than that, we are often and expressly taught of God, to have “respect unto the compensation of reward”; to balance toil with the “joy set before us,” these “light afflictions” with that “exceeding weight of glory.” Indeed, we are “aliens to the covenant of promise,” we are “without God in the world,” until God, “according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (ESV).

6. But if these things are so, it is high time for those persons to deal faithfully with their own souls who are so far from finding in themselves this joyful assurance that they fulfill the terms, and shall obtain the promises, of that covenant, as to quarrel with the covenant itself, and blaspheme the terms of it; to complain, they are too severe; and that no man ever did or shall live up to them. What is this but to reproach God, as if he were a hard master, requiring of his servants more than he enables them to perform—as if he had mocked the helpless works of his hands, by binding them to impossibilities; by commanding them to overcome, where neither their own strength nor grace was sufficient for them?

7. These blasphemers might almost persuade those to imagine themselves guiltless, who, in the contrary extreme, hope to fulfill the commands of God, without taking any pains at all. Vain hope! That a child of Adam should ever expect to see the kingdom of Christ and of God, without striving, without *agonizing*, first “to enter in at the narrow gate”—that one who, as “conceived and born in sin,” and whose “inward parts are very wickedness,” should once entertain a thought of being “purified as his Lord is pure,”

unless he tread in his steps, and “take up his cross daily”; unless he “cut off his right hand,” and “pluck out the right eye, and cast it from him”—that he should ever dream of shaking off his old opinions, passions, tempers, of being “sanctified throughout in spirit, soul, and body,” without a constant and continued course of general self-denial!

8. What less than this can we possibly infer from the above-cited words of St. Paul, who, living “in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses” for Christ’s sake; who, being full of “signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds”; who, having been “caught up into the third heaven”; yet reckoned, as a late author strongly expresses it, that all his virtues would be insecure, and even his salvation in danger, without this constant self-denial? “So I run,” says he, “not with uncertainty; so I fight, not as one who beats the air,” by which he plainly teaches us, that he who does not thus run, who does not thus deny himself daily, does run with uncertainty, and fights to as little purpose as he that “beats the air.”

*No One Shall Claim the Glory of God, unless His Heart Is Circumcised by Love*

9. To as little purpose does he talk of “fighting the fight of faith,” as vainly hope to attain the crown of incorruption (as we may, lastly, infer from the preceding observations), whose heart is not circumcised by love. Love, cutting off both the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life—engaging the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, in the ardent pursuit of that one object—is so essential to a child of God, that, without it, whosoever lives is counted dead before him. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Though I have the gift of prophecy, and

understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing." Indeed, "though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing."

10. Here, then, is the sum of the perfect law; this is the true circumcision of the heart. Let the spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections. "Unto the place from which all the rivers came" to that place, let them flow again. Other sacrifices from us he would not; but the living sacrifice of the heart he has chosen. Let it be continually offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy love. And let no creature be suffered to share with him: for he is a jealous God. He will not divide his throne with another; he will reign without a rival. Be no design, no desire admitted there, but whatever has him for its ultimate object. This is the way in which those children of God once walked, who, being dead, still speak to us: "Desire not to live, but to praise his name. Let all your thoughts, words, and works, tend to his glory. Set your heart firm on him, and on other things only as they are in and from him. Let your soul be filled with so entire a love of him, that you may love nothing but for his sake."

"Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions." "Fix your eye upon the blessed hope of your calling, and make all the things of the world minister unto it." For then, and not till then is that "mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus"; when, in every motion of our heart, in every word of our tongue, in every work of our hands, we "pursue nothing but in relation to him, and in subordination to his pleasure"; when we, too, neither think, nor speak, nor act, to fulfill our "own will, but the will of him that sent us"; when, "whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God."