

# The Wesleyan.

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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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## Thology.

### HOLINESS THE ONLY HAPPINESS ON THIS EARTH.

The journey we are engaged in is indeed great, and the way uphill; but the glorious prize which is set before us is also great, and our great and valiant Captain, who has long ago ascended up on high, supplies us with strength. If our courage at any time fails us, let us fix our eyes upon him, and, according to the advice of the apostle, in his divine Epistle to the Hebrews, look unto Jesus, removing our eyes from all inferior objects, that being carried up on high, they may be fixed upon him; which the original words seem to import. Then being supported by the Spirit of Christ, we shall overcome all those obstacles in our way, that seem most difficult to our indolent and effeminate flesh. And, though the way from the earth towards heaven is by no means easy, yet even the very difficulty will give us pleasure, when our hearts are thus eagerly engaged and powerfully supported. Even difficulties and hardships are attended with particular pleasure, when they fall in the way of a courageous mind; as the poet Lucan expresses it, "Serpents, thirst, and burning sands, are pleasing to virtue. Patience delights in hardships; and honour, when it is dearly purchased, is possessed with the greater satisfaction."

If what we are told concerning that glorious city obtain credit with us, we shall cheerfully travel towards it, nor shall we be at all deterred by the difficulties that may be in the way. But, however, as it is true and more suitable to the weakness of our minds, which are rather apt to be affected with things present and near than such as are at a great distance, we ought not to pass over in silence, that the way to the happiness reserved in heaven, which leads through this earth, is not only agreeable because of the blessed prospect it opens and the glorious end to which it conducts; but also for its own sake, and on account of the innate pleasure to be found in it, is far preferable to any other way of life that can be made choice of or indeed imagined. Nay, that we may not, by low expressions, derogate from a matter so grand and so conspicuous, that holiness and true religion which leads directly to the highest felicity, is itself the only happiness, as far as it can be enjoyed on this earth. Whatever naturally tends to the attainment of any other advantage, participates, in some measure, of the nature of that advantage. Now this way to perfect felicity is a means, that, in a very great measure participates of the nature of its end; nay, it is the beginning of that happiness, it is also to be considered as a part of it, and differs from it, in its completest state not so much in kind, as in degree; so that in scripture it has the same names; as, for instance, in that passage of the Evangelist, *This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God; that is, not only the way to eternal life, but also the beginning and first rudiments of it, seeing the same knowledge when completed, or the full beatific vision of God, is eternal life in its fulness and perfection.* Nor does the divine apostle make any distinction between these two. *Now, says he, we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see openly, or as he expresses it, face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I also am known.* They will be there perfectly holy and without spot; and even here they are called holy and, in some respect, they are so. Hence it is, that those who are really and truly good and pious are, in scripture, often called blessed, though they are not fully and perfectly so. *Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord. Blessed are the undefiled*

this subject are not altogether to be rejected; for they almost unanimously are agreed that felicity, so far as it can be enjoyed in this life, consists, solely, or at least principally, in virtue. But, as to their assertion, that this virtue is perfect in a perfect life, it is rather expressing what were to be wished, than describing things as they are. They might have said with more truth and justice, that it is imperfect in an imperfect life; which, no doubt, would have satisfied them, if they had known, that it was to be made perfect in another place, and in another life that truly deserves the name, and will be complete and perfect. In this however, we heartily agree with them, that virtue or, as we rather choose to express it, piety, which is absolutely the sum and substance of all virtues and all wisdom, is the only happiness of this life, so far as it is capable thereof.

And if we seriously consider this subject but a little, we shall find the saying of the wise King Solomon concerning this wisdom to be unexceptionably true; *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* Doth religion require any thing of us more than that we live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? Now what, I pray, can be more pleasant or peaceable than these? Temperance is always at leisure, luxury always in a hurry. The latter weakens the body and pollutes the soul, the former is the sanctity, purity, and sound state of both. It is not one of Epicurus's fixed maxims, that "life can never be pleasant without virtue." Vices seize upon men with the violence and rage of furia; but the Christian virtues replenish the breast which they inhabit with a heavenly peace and abundant joy, and thereby render it like that of an angel. The slaves of pleasure and carnal affections have within them, even now, an earnest of future torments; so that, in this present life, we may truly apply to them that expression in the Revelations, *They that worship the beast, have no rest day or night.* "There is perpetual peace with the humble," says the most devout A' Kempis, "but the proud and the covetous are never at rest."

If we speak of charity, which is the root and spring of justice, what a lasting pleasure does it diffuse through the soul! Envy, as the saying is, "has no days of festivity;" it enjoys not even its own advantages, while it is tormented with those it sees in the possession of others; but charity is happy, not only in its own enjoyments, but also in those of others, even as if they were its own: nay, it is then most happy in the enjoyment of its own good things, when, by liberality, it makes them the property of others. In short, it is a Godlike virtue. There is nothing more divine in man, "than to wish well to man, and to do good to as many as one possibly can." But piety, which worships God in constant prayer and celebrates Him with the highest praises, raises man above himself, and gives him rank among the angels. And contemplation, which is indeed the most genuine and purest pleasure of the human soul, and the very summit of felicity, is nowhere so sublime and enriched, as it will be found to be in true religion, where it may exultate in a system of divine truth—most extensive, clear and infallibly certain; mysteries that are most profound; and hopes that are the most exalted; and he that can render these subjects familiar to his mind even on this earth enjoys a life replete with heavenly pleasure.

I might enlarge greatly on this subject, and add a great many other considerations to those I have already offered, but I shall only further observe that that sweet virtue of contentment so effectual for quieting the mind, which philosophy sought for in vain, religion alone has found; and last also discovered, that it takes its rise from a firm confidence in the almighty power of divine

Providence. For what is there that can possibly give uneasiness to him who commits himself entirely to that paternal goodness and wisdom, which he knows to be infinite, and so surely devolves the care of all his concerns upon it!

If any of you object, that we often see good men meet with severe treatment, and also read, that many are the afflictions of the righteous, I answer—do you not also read what immediately follows? *But the Lord deliver you out of them all.* Psal. xlix. 19. And it would be madness to deny, that this more than compensates the other. But neither are the wicked quite exempted from the misfortunes and calamities of life; and when these fall upon them, they have nothing to support them under such pressures, none to extricate or deliver them. But a true Christian, encouraged by a good conscience and depending upon the divine favour, bears with patience all these evils, by the efforts of generous love and unshaken faith. They all seem light to him. He despises what he suffers, while he waits with patience for the object of his hope. And indeed what either in life or in death can he be afraid of, whose life is hid with Christ in God; and of whom it may be justly said, without exaggeration, "If the world should be crushed and broken to pieces, he would be undaunted, even while the ruins fell upon his head!"—*Archbishop Leighton's Lectures on Theology.*

### RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

From the Manuscripts of Mr. Watson.

To be reconciled to God, in the sense of the holy Scripture, is not the accommodation of some slight and accidental difference. The quarrel is deep; and the result of persevering enmity on our part is deadly. Our case is not that of a son forfeiting, by some imprudence, a father's smile; but that of children disinherited. It is more. It is that of subjects convicted of capital offences, and under a sentence of death, which extends to the soul, and through eternity. Proportioned to the evil is the blessing; and to the fatal character of the quarrel is the glory and grace of the reconciliation. To be reconciled is, in a word, to be again placed in a state of absolute and eternal friendship with our offended God. To this all obstacles have been removed on the part of Him who might have retained his anger for ever, by that wondrous act of wisdom and love, the gift of Christ. "God is love." His anger, therefore, is principle, not passion. The difficulty of showing mercy to sinners has been overcome by the death of Christ in our stead; and now the abundant mercy of God flows forth, and he reconciles all to himself who accept the grace. The question then is, If the reconciliation is friendship with God, what does this include?

1. It commences with the forgiveness of sins. That act restores the friendship. It includes the free and full forgiveness of sin. It leaves no lingering anger in the mind of God, and no trace of guilt on the conscience. Love, boundless love, flows from the heart of the Father, embracing his lost child. Final confidence and gratitude spring up in the breast of the subject of the mercy. Enmity is subdued by love extreme; and fear which hath torment is cast out. The very sin is forgotten; and the friendship to man in his original glory, and to the angels that never sinned, is not more perfect than it is to that man who is reconciled to God by the death of his Son.

2. Friendship with God includes the right to pray. I grant that this is given before actual reconciliation takes place; but it is given only in virtue of God's reconciling the world unto himself, and with reference to the actual reconciliation. There is this difference too; one is a common right; the other is an especial and higher right. To the prayer of the penitent, one object is proposed, that of mercy; but now that the man is a child of God, the whole compass

of spiritual blessings is placed within his reach. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." O wondrous condition of man, to have God so near to him as all that he calls upon him for! "All things, whatever ye ask in my name, believing, ye shall receive." In all sickness, need, or any other adversity; in all duties, in all sufferings, in all high aspirations of the soul after God; there is the throne, the Intercessor, the mercy-seat, the promise, the fulness of God. Largely he has bestowed; largely he may now bestow; but who shall measure orathom that fulness of God which restored friendship offers! The language of St. Paul shrinks to feebleness in the grasp of the mighty thought. He "giveth exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

3. Friendship with God comprehends a constant, vital, and hallowing intercourse with him. "Your sins have separated between God and you." That is the most emphatic note of the sad effects of our transgressions. But that tremendous evil is removed by reconciliation. Nor is any thing expressed in stronger language than this by the sacred writers. Our Lord prayed that believers might be one with him, as he is one with the Father. They are joined to the Lord, so as to be one spirit with him. A sense of God! This is the highest attainment of man; and includes conscious support from him; an interest in his yearning love; the renewing influence of his Spirit. No longer is the spirit carried about in any circles, seeking a rest which it cannot find. The dove returns to the ark. The centre is restored; and the machinery plays around it. God is the native element of souls. They have no light, no life, no purity; but his reconciliation rends the veil which has inclosed us in the damps and darkness of earthliness. When we are made sensible of our loss, we do not at once regain it. We pass through our night of penitence, like the traveller watching for the morning; but it breaks at last. The freshness of the breeze revives us; the clouds part; and then comes the burst of day, surrounding us, and all about us, with the vital glory. That light we shall never lose, unless we wilfully hide ourselves from it, till it is exchanged for the perfected vision of God.

4. Friendship with God is the pledge of safety. When I say safety, I mean to use the term absolutely, so long as this relation of friendship is maintained. It is of this that the Apostle speaks, and speaks to Christians ever moved by more than ordinary dangers, when he says, "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which ye have seen?" Does any one smile at this, and ask, "Do not the friends of Christ suffer?" We answer, "Yes." "Are they not often oppressed and poor? are not their very persons sometimes persecuted even unto death?" We answer, "Yes." "Are they not then harmed?" is the triumphant and closing question. We say both, that they are "harmed," and that they are not; and yet we utter the words of truth and soberness. We repeat the assertion, that they are put out of the way of "harm;" and that they are invulnerable and indestructible. For tell me how you can, in any civil sense, "harm" a friend of God, maintaining his fidelity? I give you zealous, zealous, and zealous of the world, and the various forms of a trifling death. One word of Christ dispartes the whole array. "Fear not them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." There is the limit, beyond which they cannot pass; the body, and the outward things which may affect it. O puny power of man! Shut up the Apostles in prison; but the free spirit sings praise at midnight. Multiply afflictions; persecutions also abound. Thunders the anathemas of bigotry: they that hat heaven; but