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The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 30

Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount: Discourse Ten

"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine; lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone Or if he ask a fish, will give him a serpent If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask him Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Matt. 7:1-12.

1. Our blessed Lord, having now finished his main design, having first delivered the sum of true religion, carefully guarded against those glosses of men whereby they would make the Word of God of none effect; and having, next, laid down rules touching that right intention which we are to preserve in all our outward actions, now proceeds to point out the main hindrances of this religion, and concludes all with a suitable application.
2. In the fifth chapter, our great Teacher has fully described inward religion in its various branches. He has there laid before us those dispositions of soul which constitute real Christianity; the tempers contained in that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord;" the affections which, when flowing from their proper fountain, from a living faith in God through Christ Jesus, are intrinsically and essentially good, and acceptable to God. In the sixth he hath shown how all our actions likewise, even those that are indifferent in their own nature, may be made holy, and good, and acceptable to God, by a pure and holy intention. Whatever is done without this he declares is of no value with God: Whereas, whatever outward works are thus consecrated to God are, in his sight, of great price.
3. In the former part of this chapter, he points out the most common and most fatal hindrances of this holiness: In the latter, he exhorts us by various motives, to break through all, and secure that prize of our high calling.
4. The first hindrance he cautions us against is judging. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Judge not others, that ye be not judged of the Lord, that ye bring not vengeance on your own heads. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again:" -- A plain and equitable rule, whereby God permits you to determine for yourselves in what manner he shall deal with you in the judgment of the great day.
5. There is no station of life, nor any period of time, from the hour of our first repenting and believing the gospel till we are made perfect in love, wherein this caution is not needful for every child of God. For occasions of judging can never be wanting. And the temptations to it are innumerable; many

whereof are so artfully disguised that we fall into the sin before we suspect any danger. And unspeakable are the mischiefs produced hereby, -- always to him that judges another, thus wounding his own soul, and exposing himself to the righteous judgment of God; -- and frequently to those who are judged, whose hands hang down, who are weakened and hindered in their course, if not wholly turned out of the way, and caused to turn back even to perdition. Yea, how often when this "root of bitterness springs up," are "many defiled thereby;" by reason whereof the way of truth itself is evil spoken of, and that worthy name blasphemed whereby we are called!

6. Yet it does not appear that our Lord designed this caution only, or chiefly, for the children of God; but rather for the children of the world, for the men who know not God. These cannot but hear of those who are not of the world; who follow after the religion above described; who endeavour to be humble, serious, gentle, merciful, and pure in heart; who earnestly desire such measures of these holy tempers as they have not yet attained, and wait for them in doing all good to all men, and patiently suffering evil. Whoever go but thus far cannot be hid, no more than "a city set upon a hill." And why do not those who 'see" their "good works glorify their Father which is in heaven" What excuse have they for not treading in their steps -- for not imitating their example and being followers of them, as they are also of Christ Why, in order to provide an excuse for themselves, they condemn those whom they ought to imitate. They spend their time in finding out their neighbour's faults, instead of amending their own. They are so busied about others going out of the way, that themselves never come into it at all; at least, never get forward, never go beyond a poor dead form of godliness without the power.

7. It is to these more especially that our Lord says, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye;" -- the infirmities, the mistakes, the imprudence, the weakness of the children of God; -- "but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye" Thou considerest not the damnable impenitence, the satanic pride, the accursed self-will, the idolatrous love of the world, which are in thyself, and which make thy whole life an abomination to the Lord. Above all, with what supine carelessness and indifference art thou dancing over the mouth of hell! And "how then," with what grace, with what decency or modesty, "wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye;" -- the excess of zeal for God, the extreme of self-denial, the too great disengagement from worldly cares and employments, the desire to be day and night in prayer, or hearing the words of eternal life -- "And behold a beam is in thine own eye!" Not a mote, like one of these. "Thou hypocrite!" who pretendest to care for others, and hast no care for thy own soul; who makest a show of zeal for the cause of God, when in truth thou neither lovest nor fearest him! "First cast out the beam out of thine own eye:" Cast out the beam of impenitence! Know thyself! See and feel thyself a sinner! Feel that thy inward parts are very wickedness, that thou art altogether corrupt and abominable, and that the wrath of God abideth on thee! Cast out the beam of pride; abhor thyself; sink down as in dust and ashes; be more and more little, and mean, and base, and vile in thine own eyes! Cast out the beam of self-will! Learn what that meaneth, "If any man will come after me, let him renounce himself." Deny thyself, and take up thy cross daily. Let thy whole soul cry out, "I came down from heaven," -- for so thou didst, thou never-dying spirit, whether thou knowest it or no, -- "not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." Cast out the beam of love of the world! Love not the world, neither the things of the world. Be thou crucified unto the world, and the world crucified unto thee. Only use the world, but enjoy God. Seek all thy happiness in him! Above all, cast out the grand beam, that supine carelessness and indifference! Deeply consider, that "one thing is needful;" the one thing which thou hast scarce ever thought of. Know and feel, that thou art a poor, vile, guilty worm, quivering over the great gulf! What art thou A sinner born to die; a leaf driven before the wind; a vapour ready to vanish away, just appearing, and then scattered into air, to be no more seen! See this! "And then shalt thou

see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." Then, if thou hast leisure from the concerns of thy own soul, thou shalt know how to correct thy brother also.

8. But what is properly the meaning of this word, "Judge not" What is the judging which is here forbidden It is not the same as evil-speaking, although it is frequently joined therewith. Evil-speaking is the relating anything that is evil concerning an absent person; whereas judging may indifferently refer either to the absent or the present. Neither does it necessarily imply the speaking at all, but only the thinking evil of another. Not that all kind of thinking evil of others is that judging which our Lord condemns. If I see one commit robbery or murder, or hear him blaspheme the name of God, I cannot refrain from thinking ill of the robber or murderer. Yet this is not evil judging: There is no sin in this, nor anything contrary to tender affection.

9. The thinking of another in a manner that is contrary to love is that judging which is here condemned; and this maybe of various kinds. For, First, we may think another to blame when he is not. We may lay to his charge (at least in our own mind) the things of which he is not guilty; the words which he has never spoke, or the actions which he has never done. Or we may think his manner of acting was wrong, although in reality it was not. And even where nothing can justly be blamed, either in the thing itself or in the manner of doing it, we may suppose his intention was not good, and so condemn him on that ground, at the same time that he who searches the heart sees his simplicity and godly sincerity.

10. But we may not only fall into the sin of judging by condemning the innocent; but also, Secondly, by condemning the guilty to a higher degree than he deserves. This species of judging is likewise an offence against justice as well as mercy; and yet such an offence as nothing can secure us from but the strongest and tenderest affection. Without this we readily suppose one who is acknowledged to be in fault to be more in fault than he really is. We undervalue whatever good is found in him. Nay, we are not easily induced to believe that anything good can remain in him in whom we have found anything that is evil.

11. All this shows a manifest want of that love which ou logizetai kakon, -- thinketh no evil; which never draws an unjust or unkind conclusion from any premises whatsoever. Love will not infer from a person's falling once into an act of open sin that he is accustomed so to do, that he is habitually guilty of it: And if he was habitually guilty once, love does not conclude he is so still, much less, that if he is now guilty of this, therefore he is guilty of other sins also. These evil reasonings all pertain to that sinful judging which our Lord here guards us against; and which we are in the highest degree concerned to avoid, if we love either God or our own souls.

12. But supposing we do not condemn the innocent, neither the guilty any farther than they deserve; still we may not be altogether clear of the snare: For there is a Third sort of sinful judging, which is the condemning any person at all where there is not sufficient evidence. And be the facts we suppose ever so true; yet that does not acquit us. For they ought not to have been supposed, but proved; and till they were, we ought to have formed no judgment; -- I say, till they were; for neither are we excused; although the facts admit of ever so strong proof, unless that proof be produced before we pass sentence, and compared with the evidence on the other side. Nor can we be excused if ever we pass a full sentence before the accused has spoken for himself. Even a Jew might teach us this, as a mere lesson of justice abstracted from mercy and brotherly love. "Doth our law," says Nicodemus, "judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth" (John 7:51.) Yea, a Heathen could reply, when the chief of the Jewish nation desired to have judgment against his prisoner, "It is not the manner of

the Romans" to judge "any man, before he that is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him."

13. Indeed we could not easily fall into sinful judging were we only to observe that rule which another [Seneca] of those heathen Romans affirms to have been the measure of his own practice. "I am so far," says he, "from lightly believing every man's or any man's evidence against another, that I do not easily or immediately believe a man's evidence against himself. I always allow him second I thoughts, and many times counsel too." Go, thou who art called a Christian, and do likewise, lest the heathen rise and condemn thee in that day!

14. But how rarely should we condemn or judge one another, at least how soon would that evil be remedied, were we to walk by that clear and express rule which our Lord himself has taught us! -- "If thy brother shall trespass against thee," or if thou hear or believe that he hath, "go and tell him of his fault, between him and thee alone." This is the first step thou art to take. "But if he will not hear, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." This is the second step. "If he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church," either to the overseers thereof, or to the whole congregation. Thou hast then done thy part. Then think of it no more, but commend the whole to God.

15. But supposing thou hast by the grace of God "cast the beam out of thine own eye," and dost now "clearly see the mote or the beam which is in thy brother's eye," yet beware thou dost not receive hurt thyself by endeavouring to help him. Still "give not that which is holy unto dogs." Do not lightly account any to be of this number; but if it evidently appear that they deserve the title, then "cast ye not your pearls before swine." Beware of that zeal which is not according to knowledge. For this is another great hindrance in their way who would be "perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect." They who desire this cannot but desire that all mankind should partake of the common blessing. And when we ourselves first partake of the heavenly gift, the divine "evidence of things not seen," we wonder that all mankind do not see the things which we see so plainly; and make no doubt at all but we shall open the eyes of all we have any intercourse with. Hence we are for attacking all we meet without delay, and constraining them to see, whether they will or no. And by the ill success of this intemperate zeal, we often suffer in our own souls. To prevent this spending our strength in vain our Lord adds this needful caution (needful to all, but more especially to those who are now warm in their first love,) "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine; lest they trample them under foot, and turn again and rend you."

16. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs." Beware of thinking that any deserve this appellation till there is full and incontestable proof, such as you can no longer resist. But when it is clearly and indisputably proved that they are unholy and wicked men, not only strangers to, but enemies to God, to all righteousness and true holiness; "give not that which is holy," to agion, -- "the holy thing," emphatically so called, unto these. The holy, the peculiar doctrines of the gospel -- such as were "hid from the ages and generations" of old, and are now made known to us only by the revelation of Jesus Christ and the inspiration of his Holy Spirit -- are not to be prostituted unto these men, who know not if there be any Holy Ghost. Not indeed that the ambassadors of Christ can refrain from declaring them in the great congregation, wherein some of these may probably be; we must speak, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear; but this is not the case with private Christians. They do not bear that awful character; nor are they under any manner of obligation to force these great and glorious truths on them who contradict and blaspheme, who have a rooted enmity against them. Nay, they ought not

so to do, but rather to lead them as they are able to bear. Do not begin a discourse with these upon remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost; but talk with them in their own manner, and upon their own principles. With the rational, honourable, and unjust Epicure, reason of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." This is the most probable way to make Felix tremble. Reserve higher subjects for men of higher attainments.

17. "Neither cast ye your pearls before swine." Be very unwilling to pass this judgment on any man. But if the fact be plain and undeniable, if it is clear beyond all dispute, if the swine do not endeavour to disguise themselves, but rather glory in their shame, making no pretence to purity either of heart or life, but working all uncleanness with greediness; then "cast" not ye your pearls before them. Talk not to them of the mysteries of the kingdom; of the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; which of consequence, as they have no other inlets of knowledge, no spiritual senses, it cannot enter into their hearts to conceive. Tell not them of the "exceeding great and precious promises" which God hath given us in the Son of his love. What conception can they have of being made partakers of the divine nature, who do not even desire to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Just as much knowledge as swine have of pearls, and as much relish as they have for them, so much relish have they for the deep things of God, so much knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel, who are immersed in the mire of this world, in worldly pleasures, desires, and cares. O cast not those pearls before these, "lest they trample them under their feet!" -- lest they utterly despise what they cannot understand, and speak evil of the things which they know not. Nay, it is probable this would not be the only inconvenience which would follow. It would not be strange if they were, according to their nature, to "turn again, and rend you;" if they were to return you evil for good, cursing for blessing, and hatred for your goodwill. Such is the enmity of the carnal mind against God and all the things of God. Such is the treatment you are to expect from these, if you offer them the unpardonable affront of endeavouring to save their souls from death, to pluck them as brands out of the burning.

18. And yet you need not utterly despair even of these, who, for the present, "turn again and rend you." For if all your arguments and persuasives fail, there is yet another remedy left; and one that is frequently found effectual when no other method avails; this is prayer. Therefore whatever you desire or want, either for others or for your own soul, "ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The neglect of this is a Third grand hindrance of holiness. Still we "have not, because we ask not." O how meek and gentle, how lowly in heart, how full of love both to God and men, might ye have been at this day, if you had only asked; -- if you had continued instant in prayer! Therefore, now, at least, "ask, and it shall be given unto you." Ask, that ye may thoroughly experience and perfectly practise the whole of that religion which our Lord has here so beautifully described. It shall then be given you, to be holy as he is holy, both in heart and in all manner of conversation. Seek, in the way he hath ordained, in searching the Scriptures, in hearing his word, in meditating thereon, in fasting, in partaking of the Supper of the Lord, and surely ye shall find: Ye shall find that pearl of great price, that faith which overcometh the world, that peace which the world cannot give, that love which is the earnest of your inheritance. Knock; continue in prayer, and in every other way of the Lord: Be not weary or faint in your mind. Press on to the mark: Take no denial: Let him not go until he bless you. And the door of mercy, of holiness, of heaven shall be opened unto you.

19. It is in compassion to the hardness of our hearts, so unready to believe the goodness of God, that our Lord is pleased to enlarge upon this head, and to repeat and confirm what he hath spoken. "For everyone," saith he, "that asketh, receiveth;" so that none need come short of the blessing; "and he that

seeketh," even everyone that seeketh, "findeth" the love and the image of God; "and to him that knocketh," to everyone that knocketh, the gate of righteousness shall be opened. So that here is no room for any to be discouraged, as though they might ask or seek or knock in vain. Only remember always to pray, to seek, to knock, and not to faint. And then the promise standeth sure. It is firm as the pillars of heaven; -- yea, more firm; for heaven and earth shall pass away; but his word shall not pass away.

20. To cut off every pretence for unbelief, our blessed Lord, in the following verses, illustrates yet farther what he had said, by an appeal to what passes in our own breasts. "What man," saith he, "is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone" Will even natural affection permit you to refuse the reasonable request of one you love "Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent" Will he give him hurtful instead of profitable things So that even from what you feel and do yourselves you may receive the fullest assurance, as on the one hand that no ill effect can possibly attend your asking, so, on the other, that it will be attended with that good effect, a full supply of all your wants. For "if ye, being evil, know I how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven," who is pure, unmixed, essential goodness, "give good things to them that ask him!" or, (as he expresses it on another occasion,) "give the Holy Ghost to them that ask him" In him are included all good things; all wisdom, peace, joy, love; the whole treasures of holiness and happiness; all that God hath prepared for them that love him.

21. But that your prayer may have its full weight with God, see that ye be in charity with all men; for otherwise it is more likely to bring a curse than a blessing on your own head; nor can you expect to receive any blessing from God while you have not charity towards your neighbour. Therefore, let this hindrance be removed without delay. Confirm your love towards one another, and towards all men. And love them, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

22. This is that royal law, that golden rule of mercy as well as justice, which even the heathen Emperor caused to be written over the gate of his palace; a rule which many believe to be naturally engraved on the mind of everyone that comes into the world. And thus much is certain, that it commends itself, as soon as heard, to every man's conscience and understanding; insomuch that no man can knowingly offend against it without carrying his condemnation in his own breast.

23. "This is the law and the prophets." Whatsoever is written in that law which God of old revealed to mankind, and whatsoever precepts God has given by his holy Prophets which have been since the world began," they are all summed up in these few words, they are all contained in this short direction. And this, rightly understood, comprises the whole of that religion which our Lord came to establish upon earth.

24. It may be understood either in a positive or negative sense. If understood in a negative sense, the meaning is, "Whatever ye would not that men should do to you, do not ye unto them." Here is a plain rule, always ready at hand, always easy to be applied. In all cases relating to your neighbour, make his case your own. Suppose the circumstances to be changed, and yourself to be just as he is now. And then beware that you indulge no temper or thought, that no word pass out of your lips, that you take no step which you should have condemned in him, upon such a change of circumstances. If understood in a direct and positive sense, the plain meaning of it is, "Whatsoever you could reasonably desire of him, supposing yourself to be in his circumstances, that do, to the uttermost of your power, to every child of man."

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