

The End of Christ's Coming

by John Wesley

The Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, which include sin and its fruits, by enabling us to believe in him and striking at the root of pride and self-will.

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, John 10:10, John 14:6, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 3:5, 1 John 3:8

Topics: "Redemption", "Overcoming Sin"

Description

John Wesley preaches on the purpose of Christ's coming, emphasizing that Jesus was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, which are sin and its consequences. He argues that human efforts to attain virtue are insufficient without divine intervention, as true change comes only through faith in God. Wesley explains that the Son of God not only reveals the nature of sin but also provides the means to overcome it, restoring humanity to its original state of righteousness and holiness. He stresses the importance of recognizing that real religion involves a complete transformation through Christ, not merely adherence to moral codes or rituals. Ultimately, Wesley encourages believers to trust in Christ's power to deliver them from sin and to seek a genuine relationship with God.

Transcript

"For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8.

1. Many eminent writers, heathen as well as Christian, both in earlier and later ages, have employed their utmost labour and art in painting the beauty of virtue. And the same pains they have taken to describe, in the liveliest colours, the deformity of vice; both of vice in general, and of those particular vices which were most prevalent in their respective ages and countries. With equal care they have placed in a strong light the happiness that attends virtue, and the misery which usually accompanies vice, and always follows it. And it may be acknowledged, that treatises of this kind are not wholly without their use. Probably hereby some, on the one hand, have been stirred up to desire and follow after virtue; and some, on the other hand, checked in their career of vice, -- perhaps reclaimed from it, at least for a season. But the change effected in men by these means is seldom either deep or universal: Much less is it durable; in a little space it vanishes away as the morning cloud. Such motives are far too feeble to overcome the numberless temptations that surround us. All that can be said of the beauty and advantage of virtue, and the deformity and ill effects of vice, cannot resist, and much less overcome and heal, one irregular appetite or passion.

^All these fences and their whole array,

One cunning bosom-sin sweeps quite away.^

2. There is, therefore, an absolute necessity, if ever we would conquer vice, or steadily persevere in the practice of virtue, to have arms of a better kind than these; otherwise, we may see what is right, but we cannot attain it. Many of the men of reflection among the very Heathens were deeply sensible of this. The language of their heart was that of Medea: --

_Video meliora, proboque;

Detertiora sequor: _

How exactly agreeing with the words of the Apostle: (Personating a man convinced of sin, but not yet conquering it:) "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil I would not, that I do!" The impotence of the human mind, even the Roman philosopher could discover: "There is in every man," says he, "this weakness;" (he might have said, this sore disease;) "_gloriae sitis_", -- thirst for glory. Nature points out the disease; but nature shows us no remedy."

3. Nor is it strange, that though they sought for a remedy, yet they found none. For they sought it where it never was and never will be found, namely, in themselves; in reason, in philosophy: Broken reeds, bubbles, smoke! They did not seek it in God, in whom alone it is possible to find it. In God! No; they totally disclaim this; and that in the strongest terms. For although Cicero, one of their oracles, once stumbled upon that strange truth, "_Nemo unquam vir magnus sine afflatu divino fuit_", -- "There never was any great man who was not divinely inspired;" yet in the very same tract he contradicts himself, and totally overthrows his own assertion, by asking, "_Quis pro virtute aut sapientia gratias dedit Deis unquam_?" -- "Who ever returned thanks to God for his virtue or wisdom?" The Roman poet is, if possible, more express still; who, after mentioning several outward blessings, honestly adds, --

_Haec satis est orare Jovem, qui donat et aufert;

Det vitam, det opes: aequum mi animum ipse parabo. _

We ask of God, what he can give or take, --

Life, wealth; but virtuous I myself will make.

4. The best of them either sought virtue partly from God and partly from themselves, or sought it from those gods who were indeed but devils, and so not likely to make their votaries better than themselves. So dim was the light of the wisest of men, till "life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel;" till "the Son of God was manifested to destroy the works of the devil!"

But what are "the works of the devil," here mentioned? How was "the Son of God manifested" to destroy them? And how, in what manner, and by what steps, does he actually "destroy" them? These three very important points we may consider in their order.

I. 1. And, First, what these works of the devil are, we learn from the words preceding and following the text: "We know that he was manifested to take away our sins." (1 John 3:5.) "Whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not: Whosoever sinneth, seeth him not, neither knoweth him." (1 John 3:6.) "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose was the Son of God

manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8.) "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." (1 John 3:9.) From the whole of this it appears, that "the works of the devil," here spoken of, are sin, and the fruits of sin.

2. But since the wisdom of God has now dissipated the clouds which so long covered the earth, and put an end to the childish conjectures of men concerning these things, it may be of use to take a more distinct view of these "works of the devil," so far as the oracles of God instruct us. It is true, the design of the Holy Spirit was to assist our faith, not gratify our curiosity; and therefore the account he has given in the first chapters of Genesis is exceeding short. Nevertheless, it is so clear that we may learn therefrom whatsoever it concerns us to know.

3. To take the matter from the beginning: "The Lord God" (literally, JEHOVAH, the GODS; that is, One and Three) "created man in his own image;" -- in his own natural image, as to his better part; that is, a spirit, as God is a spirit; endued with understanding; which, if not the essence, seems to be the most essential property, of a spirit. And probably the human spirit, like the angelical, then discerned truth by intuition. Hence he named every creature, as soon as he saw it, according to its inmost nature. Yet his knowledge was limited, as he was a creature: Ignorance, therefore, was inseparable from him; but error was not; it does not appear that he was mistaken in any thing. But he was capable of mistaking, of being deceived, although not necessitated to it.

4. He was endued also with a will, with various affections; (which are only the will exerting itself various ways;) that he might love, desire, and delight in that which is good: Otherwise his understanding had been to no purpose. He was likewise endued with liberty; a power of choosing what was good, and refusing what was not so. Without this, both the will and the understanding would have been utterly useless. Indeed, without liberty, man had been so far from being a free agent, that he could have been no agent at all. For every unfree being is purely passive; not active in any degree. Have you a sword in your hand? Does a man, stronger than you, seize your hand, and force you to wound a third person? In this you are no agent, any more than the sword: The hand is as passive as the steel. So in every possible case. He that is not free is not an agent, but a patient.

5. It seems, therefore, that every spirit in the universe, as such, is endued with understanding, and, in consequence, with a will, and with a measure of liberty; and that these three are inseparably united in every intelligent nature. And observe: Liberty necessitated, or over-ruled, is really no liberty at all. It is a contradiction in terms. It is the same as unfree freedom; that is, downright nonsense.

6. It may be farther observed, (and it is an important observation,) that where there is no liberty, there can be no moral good or evil, no virtue or vice. The fire warms us; yet it is not capable of virtue: It burns us; yet this is no vice. There is no virtue, but where an intelligent being knows, loves, and chooses what is good; nor is there any vice, but where such a being knows, loves, and chooses what is evil.

7. And God created man, not only in his natural, but likewise in his own moral, image. He created him not only "in knowledge," but also in righteousness and true holiness. As his understanding was without blemish, perfect in its kind; so were all his affections. They were all set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects. And as a free agent, he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding. In so doing, he was unspeakably happy; dwelling in God, and God in him; having an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son, through the eternal Spirit; and the continual testimony of his conscience, that all his ways were good and acceptable to God.

8. Yet his liberty (as was observed before) necessarily included a power of choosing or refusing either good or evil. Indeed it has been doubted whether man could then choose evil, knowing it to be such. But it cannot be doubted, he might mistake evil for good. He was not infallible; therefore not impeccable. And this unravels the whole difficulty of the grand question, _Unde malum?_ "How came evil into the world?" It came from "Lucifer, son of the morning." It was the work of the devil. "For the devil," saith the Apostle, "sinneth from the beginning;" that is, was the first sinner in the universe, the author of sin, the first being who, by the abuse of his liberty, introduced evil into the creation. He,

-- Of the first,

If not the first archangel,

was self-tempted to think too highly of himself. He freely yielded to the temptation; and gave way, first to pride, then to self-will. He said, "I will sit upon the sides of the north: I will be like the Most High." He did not fall alone, but soon drew after him a third part of the stars of heaven; in consequence of which they lost their glory and happiness, and were driven from their former habitation.

9. "Having great wrath," and perhaps envy, at the happiness of the creatures whom God had newly created, it is not strange that he should desire and endeavour to deprive them of it. In order to this, he concealed himself in the serpent, who was the most subtle, or intelligent, of all the brute creatures; and, on that account, the least liable to raise suspicion. Indeed, some have (not improbably) supposed that the serpent was then endued with reason and speech. Had not Eve known he was so, would she have admitted any parley with him? Would she not have been frightened rather than deceived? as the Apostle observes she was. To deceive her, Satan mingled truth with falsehood: -- "Hath God said, Ye may not eat of every tree of the garden?" -- and soon after persuaded her to disbelieve God, to suppose his threatening should not be fulfilled. She then lay open to the whole temptation: -- To "the desire of the flesh;" for the tree was "good for food:" To "the desire of the eyes;" for it was "pleasant to the eyes:" And to "the pride of life;" for it was "to be desired to make one wise," and consequently honoured. So unbelief begot pride: She thought herself wiser than God; capable of finding a better way to happiness than God had taught her. It begot self-will: She was determined to do her own will, not the will of Him that made her. It begot foolish desires; and completed all by outward sin: "She took of the fruit, and did eat."

10. She then "gave to her husband, and he did eat." And in that day, yea, that moment, he died! The life of God was extinguished in his soul. The glory departed from him. He lost the whole moral image of God, -- righteousness and true holiness. He was unholy; he was unhappy; he was full of sin; full of guilt and tormenting fears. Being broke off from God, and looking upon him now as an angry Judge, "he was afraid." But how was his understanding darkened, to think he could "hide himself from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden!" Thus was his soul utterly dead to God! And in that day his body likewise began to die, -- became obnoxious to weakness, sickness, pain; all preparatory to the death of the body, which naturally led to eternal death.

II. Such are "the works of the devil;" sin and its fruits; considered in their order and connexion. We are, in the Second place, to consider how the Son of God was manifested in order to destroy them.

1. He was manifested as the only-begotten Son of God, in glory equal with the Father, to the inhabitants of heaven before and at the foundation of the world. These "morning stars sang together," all these "sons of God shouted for joy," when they heard him pronounce, "Let there be light; and there was light;" -- when he "spread the north over the empty space," and "stretched out the heavens as a curtain." Indeed, it was the

universal belief of the ancient Church, that God the Father none hath seen, nor can see; that from all eternity He hath dwelt in light unapproachable; and it is only in and by the Son of his love that he hath, at any time, revealed himself to his creatures.

2. How the Son of God was manifested to our first parents in paradise it is not easy to determine. It is generally, and not improbably, supposed that he appeared to them in the form of a man, and conversed with them face to face. Not that I can at all believe the ingenious dream of Dr. Watts concerning "the glorious humanity of Christ," which he supposes to have existed before the world began, and to have been endued with I know not what astonishing powers. Nay, I look upon this to be an exceeding dangerous, yea, mischievous hypothesis; as it quite excludes the force of very many scriptures which have been hitherto thought to prove the Godhead of the Son. And I am afraid it was the grand means of turning that great man aside from the faith once delivered to the saints; -- that is, if he was turned aside; if that beautiful soliloquy be genuine which is printed among his Posthumous Works, wherein he so earnestly beseeches the Son of God not to be displeased because he cannot believe him to be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

3. May we not reasonably believe it was by similar appearances that He was manifested, in succeeding ages, to Enoch, while he "walked with God;" to Noah, before and after the deluge; to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, on various occasions; and, to mention no more, to Moses? This seems to be the natural meaning of the word: "My servant Moses is faithful in all my house. -- With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of Jehovah shall he behold;" namely, the Son of God.

4. But all these were only types of his grand manifestation. It was in the fulness of time (in just the middle age of the world, as a great man largely proves) that God "brought his first-begotten into the world, made of a woman," by the power of the Highest overshadowing her. He was afterwards manifested to the shepherds; to devout Simeon; to Anna, the Prophetess; and to "all that waited for redemption in Jerusalem."

5. When he was of due age for executing his priestly office, he was manifested to Israel; preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God in every town and in every city. And for a time he was glorified by all, who acknowledged that he "spake as never man spake;" that "he spake as one having authority," with all the wisdom of God and the power of God. He was manifested by numberless "signs, and wonders, and mighty works which he did," as well as by his whole life; being the only one born of a woman "who knew no sin," who, from his birth to his death, did "all things well;" doing continually "not his own will, but the will of Him that sent him."

6. After all, "behold the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world!" This was a more glorious manifestation of himself than any he had made before. How wonderfully was he manifested to angels and men, when he "was wounded for our transgressions;" when he "bore all our sins in his own body on the tree;" when, having "by that one oblation of himself once offered, made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," he cried out, "It is finished; and bowed his head, and gave up the ghost!" We need but just mention those farther manifestations, -- his resurrection from the dead; his ascension into heaven, into the glory which he had before the world began; and his pouring out the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost; both of which are beautifully described in those well-known words of the Psalmist: "Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and hast received gifts for men; yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among" or in

"them."

7. "That the Lord God might dwell in them:" This refers to a yet farther manifestation of the Son of God; even his inward manifestation of himself. When he spoke of this to his Apostles but a little before his death, one of them immediately asked, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?" By enabling us to believe in his name. For he is then inwardly manifested to us when we are enabled to say with confidence, "My Lord, and my God!" Then each of us can boldly say, "The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." [Gal. 2:20] And it is by thus manifesting himself in our hearts that he effectually "destroys the works of the devil."

III. 1. How he does this, in what manner, and by what steps, he does actually destroy them, we are now to consider. And, First, as Satan began his work in Eve by tainting her with unbelief, so the Son of God begins his work in man by enabling us to believe in him. He both opens and enlightens the eyes of our understanding. Out of darkness he commands light to shine, and takes away the veil which the "god of this world" had spread over our hearts. And we then see not by a chain of reasoning, but by a kind of intuition, by a direct view, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their former trespasses;" not imputing them to me. In that day "we know that we are of God," children of God by faith; "having redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sin." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ;" -- that peace which enables us in every state therewith to be content; which delivers us from all perplexing doubts, from all tormenting fears; and in particular, from that "fear of death whereby we were all our life-time subject to bondage."

2. At the same time the Son of God strikes at the root of that grand work of the devil, -- pride; causing the sinner to humble himself before the Lord, to abhor himself, as it were, in dust and ashes. He strikes at the root of self-will; enabling the humbled sinner to say in all things, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." He destroys the love of the world; delivering them that believe in him from "every foolish and hurtful desire;" from the "desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life." He saves them from seeking, or expecting to find, happiness in any creature. As Satan turned the heart of man from the Creator to the creature; so the Son of God turns his heart back again from the creature to the Creator. Thus it is, by manifesting himself, he destroys the works of the devil; restoring the guilty outcast from God, to his favour, to pardon and peace; the sinner in whom dwelleth no good thing, to love and holiness; the burdened, miserable sinner, to joy unspeakable, to real, substantial happiness.

3. But it may be observed, that the Son of God does not destroy the whole work of the devil in man, as long as he remains in this life. He does not yet destroy bodily weakness, sickness, pain, and a thousand infirmities incident to flesh and blood. He does not destroy all that weakness of understanding, which is the natural consequence of the soul's dwelling in a corruptible body; so that still,

Humanum est errare et nescire:

"Both ignorance and error belong to humanity." He entrusts us with only an exceeding small share of knowledge, in our present state; lest our knowledge should interfere with our humility, and we should again affect to be as gods. It is to remove from us all temptation to pride, and all thought of independency, (which is the very thing that men in general so earnestly covet under the name of liberty.) that he leaves us encompassed with all these infirmities, particularly weakness of understanding; till the sentence takes place, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return!"

4. Then error, pain, and all bodily infirmities cease: All these are destroyed by death. And death itself, "the last enemy" of man, shall be destroyed at the resurrection. The moment that we hear the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, "then shall be fulfilled the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." "This corruptible" body "shall put on incorruption; this mortal" body "shall put on immortality;" and the Son of God, manifested in the clouds of heaven, shall destroy this last work of the devil!

5. Here then we see in the clearest, strongest light, what is real religion: A restoration of man by Him that bruises the serpent's head [Gen. 3:15], to all that the old serpent deprived him of; a restoration not only to the favour but likewise to the image of God, implying not barely deliverance from sin, but the being filled with the fullness of God. It is plain, if we attend to the preceding considerations, that nothing short of this is Christian religion. Every thing else, whether negative or external, is utterly wide of the mark. But what a paradox is this! How little is it understood in the Christian world; yea, in this enlightened age, wherein it is taken for granted, the world is wiser than ever it was from the beginning! Among all our discoveries, who has discovered this? How few either among the learned or unlearned! And yet, if we believe the Bible, who can deny it? Who can doubt of it? It runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end, in one connected chain; and the agreement of every part of it, with every other, is, properly, the analogy of faith. Beware of taking any thing else, or anything less than this, for religion! Not any thing else: Do not imagine an outward form, a round of duties, both in public and private, is religion! Do not suppose that honesty, justice, and whatever is called morality, (though excellent in its place,) is religion! And least of all dream that orthodoxy, right opinion, (vulgarly called faith,) is religion. Of all religious dreams, this is the vainest; which takes hay and stubble for gold tried in the fire!

6. O do not take any thing less than this for the religion of Jesus Christ! Do not take part of it for the whole! What God hath joined together, put not asunder! Take no less for his religion, than the "faith that worketh by love;" all inward and outward holiness. Be not content with any religion which does not imply the destruction of all the works of the devil; that is, of all sin. We know, weakness of understanding, and a thousand infirmities, will remain, while this corruptible body remains; but sin need not remain: This is that work of the devil, eminently so called, which the Son of God was manifested to destroy in this present life. He is able, he is willing, to destroy it now, in all that believe in him. Only be not straitened in your own bowels! Do not distrust his power, or his love! Put his promise to the proof! He hath spoken: And is he not ready likewise to perform? Only "come boldly to the throne of grace," trusting in his mercy; and you shall find, "He saveth to the uttermost all those that come to God through him!"

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