

THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

By John Wesley

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Sermon Title The First Fruits of the Spirit

Sermon Footnote (text of the 1872 edition)

Sermon Scripture "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Rom. 8:1

Intro

1. By "them which are in Christ Jesus," St. Paul evidently means, those who truly believe in him; those who, "being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." They who thus believe do no longer "walk after the flesh," no longer follow the motions of corrupt nature, but "after the Spirit"; both their thoughts, words, and works are under the direction of the blessed Spirit of God.

2. "There is therefore now no condemnation to" these. There is no condemnation to them from God; for he hath justified them "freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus." he hath forgiven all their iniquities, and blotted out all their sins. And there is no condemnation to them from within; for they "have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that they might know the things which are freely given to them of God" (1 Cor.2:12); which Spirit "beareth witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God." And to this is added the testimony of their conscience, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12).

3. But because this scripture has been so frequently misunderstood, and

that in so dangerous a manner; because such multitudes of "unlearned and unstable men" (hoi amatheis kai asteriktoi, men untaught of God, and consequently unestablished in the truth which is after godliness) have wrested it to their own destruction; I propose to show, as clearly as I can, first who those are which are in Christ Jesus, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: and, secondly, how there is no condemnation to these. I shall conclude with some practical inferences.

I

I. 1. First, I am to show, who those are that "are in Christ Jesus." And are they not those who believe in his name? those who are "found in him, not having their own righteousness, but the righteousness which is of God by faith?" these, "who have redemption through his blood," are properly said to be in him; for they dwell in Christ, and Christ in them. They are joined unto the Lord in one Spirit. They are ingrafted into him as branches into the vine. They are united, as members to their head, in a manner which words cannot express, nor could it before enter into their hearts to conceive.

2. Now "whosoever abideth in him, sinneth not"; "walketh not after the flesh." The flesh, in the usual language of St. Paul, signifies corrupt nature. In this sense he uses the word, writing to the Galatians, "The works of the flesh are manifest" (Gal. 5:19); and a little before, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust" (or desire) "of the flesh" (v. 16). To prove which, namely, that those who "walk by the Spirit," do not "fulfil the lusts of the flesh," he immediately adds, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusteth against the flesh (for these are contrary to each other); that ye may not do the things which ye would." So the words are literally translated; hina me ha an thelete, tauta poiete, not, "So that ye cannot do the things that ye would"; as if the flesh overcame the Spirit: a translation which hath not only nothing to do with the original text of the Apostle, but likewise makes his whole argument nothing worth; yea, asserts just the reverse of what he is proving.

3. They who are of Christ, who abide in him, "have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." They abstain from all those works of the

flesh; from "adultery and fornication"; from "uncleanness and lasciviousness"; from "idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance" from "emulations, wrath, strife, sedition, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings"; from every design, and word, and work, to which the corruption of nature leads. Although they feel the root of bitterness in themselves, yet are they endued with power from on high to trample it continually under foot, so that it cannot "spring up to trouble them"; insomuch that every fresh assault which they undergo, only gives them fresh occasion of praise, of crying out, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord."

4. They now "walk after the Spirit," both in their hearts and lives. They are taught of him to love God and their neighbour, with a love which is as "a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." And by him they are led into every holy desire, into every divine and heavenly temper, till every thought which arises in their heart is holiness unto the Lord.

5. They who "walk after the Spirit," are also led by him into all holiness of conversation. Their "speech is always in grace, seasoned with salt"; with the love and fear of God. "No corrupt communication comes out of their mouth; but only that which is good," that which is "to the use of edifying," which is "meet to minister grace to the hearers." And herein likewise do they exercise themselves day and night, to do only the things which please God; in all their outward behaviour to follow him "who left us an example that we might tread in his steps"; in all their intercourse with their neighbour, to walk in justice, mercy, and truth; and "whatsoever they do," in every circumstances of life, to "do all to the glory of God."

6. These are they who indeed "walk after the Spirit." Being filled with faith and with the holy Ghost, they possess in their hearts, and show forth in their lives, in the whole course of their words and actions, the genuine fruits of the Spirit of God, namely, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance," and whatsoever else is lovely or praiseworthy. "They adorn in all things the gospel of God our Saviour"; and give full proof to all mankind, that they are indeed actuated by the same Spirit "which raised up Jesus from the dead."

II

II. 1. I proposed to show, in the second place, how "there is no condemnation to them which are" thus "in Christ Jesus," and thus "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." And, first, to believers in Christ, walking thus, "there is no condemnation" on account of their past sins. God condemneth them not for any of these; they are as though they had never been; they are cast "as a stone into the depth of the sea," and he remembereth them no more. God, having "set forth his Son to be a propitiation "for them, "through faith in his blood," hath declared unto them "his righteousness for the remission of the sins that are past." he layeth therefore none of these to their charge; their memorial is perished with them.

2. And there is no condemnation in their own breast; no sense of guilt, or dread of the wrath of God. They "have the witness in themselves:" they are conscious of their interest in the blood of sprinkling. "They have not received again the spirit of bondage unto fear," unto doubt and racking uncertainty; but they "have received the Spirit of adoption," crying in their heart, "Abba, Father." Thus, being "justified by faith," they have the peace of God ruling in their hearts; flowing from a continual sense of his pardoning mercy, and "the answer of a good conscience toward God."

3. If it be said, "But sometimes a believer in Christ may lose his sight of the mercy of God; sometimes such darkness may fall upon him that he no longer sees him that is invisible, no longer feels that witness in himself of his part in the atoning blood; and then he is inwardly condemned, he hath again "the sentence of death in himself": I answer, supposing it so to be, supposing him not to see the mercy of God, then he is not a believer: For faith implies light, the light of God shining upon the soul. So far, therefore, as any one loses this light, he, for the time, loses his faith. And, no doubt, a true believer in Christ may lose the light of faith; and so far as this is lost, he may, for a time, fall again into condemnation. But this is not the case of them who now "are in Christ Jesus," who now believe in his name. For so long as they believe, and walk after the Spirit, neither God condemns them, nor their own heart.

4. They are not condemned, secondly, for any present sins, for now transgressing the commandments of God. For they do not transgress them: they do not "walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit." This is the continual proof of their "love of God, that they keep his commandments"; even as St. John bears witness. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. For his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God:" he cannot, so long as that seed of God, that loving, holy faith remaineth in him. So long as "he keepeth himself" herein, "that wicked one toucheth him not." Now it is evident, he is not condemned for the sins which he doth not commit at all. They, therefore, who are thus "led by the Spirit, are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18): not under the curse or condemnation of it; for it condemns none but those who break it. Thus, that law of God, "Thou shalt not steal," condemns none but those who do steal. Thus, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy," condemns those only who do not keep it holy. But against the fruits of the Spirit "there is no law" (5:23); as the Apostle more largely declares in those memorable words of his former epistle to Timothy: "We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this," (if, while he uses the law of God, in order either to convince or direct, he know and remember this), *hoti dikaio nomos ou keitai*, (not, "that the law is not made for a righteous man," but) "that the law does not lie against a righteous man:" it has no force against him, no power to condemn him; "but against the lawless and disobedient, against the ungodly and sinners, against the unholy and profane; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God." (1 Tim. 1:8, 9, 11).

5. They are not condemned, thirdly, for inward sin, even though it does now remain. That the corruption of nature does still remain, even in those who are the children of God by faith; that they have in them the seeds of pride and vanity, of anger, lust, and evil desire, yea, sin of every kind; is too plain to be denied, being matter of daily experience. And on this account it is, that St. Paul, speaking to those whom he had just before witnessed to be "in Christ Jesus," (1 Cor. 1:2, 9), to have been "called of God into the fellowship" (or participation) "of his Son Jesus Christ"; yet declares, "Brethren, I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ" (1 Cor.

3:1): "babes in Christ"; so we see they were "in Christ"; they were believers in a low degree. And yet how much of sin remained in them! of that "carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God!"

6. And yet, for all this, they are not condemned. Although they feel the flesh, the evil nature, in them; although they are more sensible, day by day, that their "heart is deceitful and desperately wicked"; yet, so long as they do not yield thereto; so long as they give no place to the devil; so long as they maintain a continual war with all sin, with pride, anger, desire, so that the flesh hath not dominion over them, but they still "walk after the Spirit"; "there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." God is well pleased with their sincere, though imperfect. obedience; and they "have confidence toward God," knowing they are his, "by the Spirit which he hath given" them. (1 John 3:24).

7. Nay, fourthly, although they are continually convinced of sin cleaving to all they do; although they are conscious of not fulfilling the perfect law, either in their thoughts, or words, or works; although they know they do not love the Lord their God with all their heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; although they feel more or less of pride, or self-will, stealing in, and mixing with their best duties; although even in their more immediate intercourse with God, when they assemble themselves with the great congregation, and when they pour out their souls in secret to him who seeth all the thoughts and intents of the heart, they are continually ashamed of their wandering thoughts, or of the deadness and dulness of their affections; yet there is no condemnation to them still, either from God or from their own heart. The consideration of these manifold defects only gives them a deeper sense, that they have always need of that blood of sprinkling which speaks for them in the ears of God, and that Advocate with the Father "who ever liveth to make intercession for them." So far are these from driving them away from him in whom they have believed, that they rather drive them the closer to him whom they feel the want of every moment. And, at the same time, the deeper sense they have of this want, the more earnest desire do they feel, and the more diligent they are, as they "have received the Lord Jesus, so to walk in him."

8. They are not condemned, fifthly, for sins of infirmity, as they are

usually called. Perhaps it were advisable rather to call them infirmities: that we may not seem to give any countenance to sin, or to extenuate it in any degree, by thus coupling it with infirmity. But (if we must retain so ambiguous and dangerous an expression), by sins of infirmity I would mean, such involuntary failings as the saying a thing we believe true, though, in fact, it prove to be false; or, the hurting our neighbour without knowing or designing it, perhaps when we designed to do him good. Though these are deviations from the holy, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, yet they are not properly sins, nor do they bring any guilt on the conscience of "them which are in Christ Jesus." They separate not between God and them, neither intercept the light of his countenance; as being no ways inconsistent with their general character of "walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

9. Lastly. "There is no condemnation "to them for anything whatever which it is not in their power to help; whether it be of an inward or outward nature, and whether it be doing something or leaving something undone. For instance, the Lord's Supper is to be administered; but you do not partake thereof. Why do you not? You are confined by sickness; therefore, you cannot help omitting it; and for the same reason you are not condemned. There is no guilt, because there is no choice. As there "is a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, not according to that he hath not."

10. A believer, indeed, may sometimes be grieved: because he cannot do what his soul longs for. He may cry out, when he is detained from worshipping God in the great congregation, "Like as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God: When shall I come to appear in the presence of God?" he may earnestly desire (only still saying in his heart, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt") to "go again with the multitude, and bring them forth into the house of God." But still, if he cannot go, he feels no condemnation, no guilt, no sense of God's displeasure; but can cheerfully yield up those desires with, "O my soul, put thy trust in God! for I will yet give him thanks, who is the help of my countenance and my God."

11. It is more difficult to determine concerning those which are usually

styled sins of surprise: as when one who commonly in patience possesses his soul, on a sudden and violent temptation, speaks or acts in a manner not consistent with the royal law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Perhaps it is not easy to fix a general rule concerning transgressions of this nature. We cannot say, either that men are, or that they are not, condemned for sins of surprise in general: but it seems, whenever a believer is by surprise overtaken in a fault, there is more or less condemnation, as there is more or less concurrence of his will. In proportion as a sinful desire, or word, or action is more or less voluntary, so we may conceive God is more or less displeased, and there is more or less guilt upon the soul.

12. But if so, then there may be some sins of surprise which bring much guilt and condemnation. For, in some instances, our being surprised is owing to some wilful and culpable neglect; or, to a sleepiness of soul which might have been prevented, or shaken off before the temptation came. A man may be previously warned either of God or man, that trials and dangers are at hand; and yet may say in his heart, "A little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to rest." Now, if such an one afterwards fall, though unawares, into the snare which he might have avoided, --that he fell unawares, is no excuse; he might have foreseen and have shunned the danger. The falling, even by surprise, in such an instance as this, is, in effect, a wilful sin; and, as such, must expose the sinner to condemnation, both from God and his own conscience.

13. On the other hand, there may be sudden assaults, either from the world, or the god of this world, and frequently from our own evil hearts, which we did not, and hardly could, foresee. And by these even a believer, while weak in faith, may possibly be borne down, suppose into a degree of anger, or thinking evil of another, with scarce any concurrence of his will. Now in such a case, the jealous God would undoubtedly show him that he had done foolishly. He would be convinced of having swerved from the perfect law, from the mind which was in Christ, and consequently, grieved with a godly sorrow, and lovingly ashamed before God. Yet need he not come into condemnation. God layeth not folly to his charge, but hath compassion upon him, "even as a father pitieth his own children." And his heart condemneth him not: in the midst of that sorrow and shame he can still say, "I will trust and

not be afraid; for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

III

III. 1. It remains only to draw some practical inferences from the preceding considerations. And, first, if there be "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and "walk not after the flesh , but after the Spirit," on account of their past sin; then why art thou fearful, O thou of little faith? Though thy sins were once more in number than the sand, what is that to thee, now thou art in Christ Jesus? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth?" all the sins thou hast committed from thy youth up, until the hour when thou wast "accepted in the Beloved," are driven away as chaff, are gone, are lost, swallowed up, remembered no more. Thou art now "born of the Spirit:" wilt thou be troubled or afraid of what is done before thou wert born? Away with thy fears! thou art not called to fear, but to the "spirit of love and of a sound mind." know thy calling! rejoice in God thy Saviour, and give thanks to God thy Father through him!

2. Wilt thou say, "But I have again committed sin, since I had redemption through his blood? And therefore it is, that "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." It is meet thou shouldest abhor thyself; and it is God who hath wrought thee to this self-same thing. But, dost thou now believe? hath he again enabled thee to say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth"; "and the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God?" Then that faith again cancels all that is past, and there is no condemnation to thee. At whatsoever time thou truly believest in the name of the Son of God, all thy sins, antecedent to that hour, vanish away as the morning dew. Now then, "stand thou fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made thee free." he hath once more made thee free from the power of sin, as well as from the guilt and punishment of it. O "be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage!" --neither the vile, devilish bondage of sin, of evil desires, evil tempers, or words, or works, the most grievous yoke on this side hell; nor the bondage of slavish, tormenting fear, of guilt and self-condemnation.

3. But secondly, do all they which abide "in Christ Jesus, walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit?" Then we cannot but infer, that whosoever now committeth sin, hath no part or lot in this matter. He is even now condemned by his own heart. But, "if our heart condemn us," if our own conscience beareth witness that we are guilty, undoubtedly God doth; for "He is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" so that we cannot deceive him, if we can ourselves. And think not to say, "I was justified once; my sins were once forgiven me:" I know not that; neither will I dispute whether they were or no. Perhaps, at this distance of time, it is next to impossible to know, with any tolerable degree of certainty, whether that was a true, genuine work of God, or whether thou didst only deceive thy own soul. But this I know, with the utmost degree of certainty, "he that committeth sin is of the devil." Therefore, thou art of thy father the devil. It cannot be denied: for the works of thy father thou doest. O flatter not thyself with vain hopes! Say not to thy soul, "Peace peace!" For there is no peace. Cry aloud! Cry unto God out of the deep; if haply he may hear thy voice. Come unto him as at first, as wretched and poor, as sinful, miserable, blind and naked! And beware thou suffer thy soul to take no rest, till his pardoning love be again revealed; till he "heal thy backslidings," and fill thee again with the "faith that worketh by love."

4. Thirdly. Is there no condemnation to them which "walk after the Spirit," by reason of inward sin still remaining, so long as they do not give way thereto; nor by reason of sin cleaving to all they do? Then fret not thyself because of ungodliness, though it still remain in thy heart. Repine not, because thou still comest short of the glorious image of God; nor yet because pride, self-will, or unbelief, cleave to all thy words and works. And be not afraid to know all this evil of thy heart, to know thyself as also thou art known. Yea, desire of God, that thou mayest not think of thyself more highly than thou oughtest to think. Let thy continual prayer be, Show me, as my soul can bear, The depth of inbred sin; All the unbelief declare, The pride that lurks within. But when he heareth thy prayer, and unveils thy heart; when he shows thee thoroughly what spirit thou art of; then beware that thy faith fail thee not, that thou suffer not thy shield to be torn from thee. Be abased. Be humbled in the dust. See thyself nothing, less than nothing, and vanity. But still, "Let not thy heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Still

hold fast, "I, even I, have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "And as the heavens are higher than the earth, so is his love higher than even my sins." Therefore, God is merciful to thee a sinner! such a sinner as thou art! God is love; and Christ hath died! Therefore, the Father himself loveth thee! Thou art his child! Therefore he will withhold from thee no manner of thing that is good. Is it good, that the whole body of sin, which is now crucified in thee, should be destroyed? It shall be done! Thou shalt be "cleansed from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit." Is it good, that nothing should remain in thy heart but the pure love of God alone? Be of good cheer! "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength." "Faithful is he that hath promised, who also will do it." It is thy part, patiently to continue in the work of faith, and in the labour of love; and in cheerful peace, in humble confidence, with calm and resigned and yet earnest expectation, to wait till the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this.

5. Fourthly. If they that "are in Christ," and "walk after the Spirit," are not condemned for sins of infirmity: as neither for involuntary failings, nor for anything whatever which they are not able to help; then beware, O thou that hast faith in his blood, that Satan herein gain no advantage over thee. Thou art still foolish and weak, blind and ignorant; more weak than any words can express; more foolish than it call yet enter into thy heart to conceive; knowing nothing yet as thou oughtest to know. Yet let not all thy weakness and folly, or any fruit thereof, which thou art not yet able to avoid, shake thy faith, thy filial trust in God, or disturb thy peace or joy in the Lord. The rule which some give, as to wilful sins, and which, in that case, may perhaps be dangerous, is undoubtedly wise and safe if it be applied only to the case of weakness and infirmities. Art thou fallen, O man of God? yet, do not lie there, fretting thyself and bemoaning thy weakness; but meekly say, "Lord, I shall fall every moment, unless thou uphold me with thy hand." And then arise! Leap and walk! Go on thy way! "run with patience the race that is set before Thee."

6. Lastly. Since a believer need not come into condemnation, even though he be surprised into what his soul abhors; (suppose his being surprised is not owing to any carelessness or wilful neglect of his own); if thou who believest art thus overtaken in a fault, then grieve unto the

Lord; it shall be a precious balm. Pour out thy heart before him, and show him of thy trouble, and pray with all thy might to him who is "touched with the feeling of thy infirmities," that he would establish, and strengthen and settle thy soul, and suffer thee to fall no more. But still he condemneth thee not. Wherefore shouldest thou fear? Thou hast no need of any "fear that hath torment." Thou shalt love him that loveth thee, and it sufficeth: more love will bring more strength. And, as soon as thou lovest him with all thy heart, thou shalt be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." Wait in peace for that hour, when the God of peace shall sanctify thee wholly, so that thy whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

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