

Go forth then, thou little child that believest in him, and his 'right hand shall teach thee terrible things':¹²³ Though thou art helpless and weak as an infant of days, the strong man shall not be able to stand before thee. Thou shalt prevail over him, and subdue him, and overthrow him, and trample him under thy feet. Thou shalt march on under the great Captain of thy salvation,¹²⁴ 'conquering and to conquer',¹²⁵ until all thine enemies are destroyed, and 'death is swallowed up in victory'.¹²⁶

Now thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,¹²⁷ to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, for ever and ever. Amen.¹²⁸

¹²³ Ps. 45:4.

¹²⁴ See Heb. 2:10.

¹²⁵ Rev. 6:2.

¹²⁶ 1 Cor. 15:54.

¹²⁷ 1 Cor. 15:57.

¹²⁸ Rev. 7:12. This use of a concluding ascription would seem conventional enough, especially in such a sermon, *ad aulum*. It is, however, quite rare for Wesley; only nine of his collected sermons carry such ascriptions: Nos. 1, *Salvation by Faith*; 9, 'The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption'; 12, 'The Witness of Our Own Spirit'; 29, 'Sermon on the Mount, IX'; 56, 'God's Approbation of His Works'; 63, 'The General Spread of the Gospel'; 71, 'Of Good Angels' (a collect); 85, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation' (where the benediction serves as an ascription); 107, 'On God's Vineyard' (where Wesley uses the Preface to the Sanctus as an ascription). Note that neither No. 2, *The Almost Christian*, nor No. 4, *Scriptural Christianity*, appears in this list. Nine of the early 'uncollected' sermons have formal ascriptions: Nos. 133, 'Death and Deliverance'; 134, 'Seek First the Kingdom'; 135, 'On Guardian Angels'; 136, 'On Mourning for the Dead'; 137, 'On Corrupting the Word of God'; 140, 'The Promise of Understanding'; 141, 'The Image of God'; 146, 'The One Thing Needful'; and 150, 'Hypocrisy in Oxford'.

SERMON 2

The Almost Christian

A Sermon preached at St. Mary's, Oxford,

before the University,

on July 25, 1741

Acts 26:28

Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

And many there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was in the world there have been many in every age and nation who were 'almost persuaded to be Christians'. But seeing it avails nothing before God to go *only thus far*, it highly imports us to consider,

First, what is implied in being *almost*,
Secondly, what in being *altogether* a Christian.¹

I.(I).1. Now in the being 'almost a Christian' is implied, first, heathen honesty.² No one, I suppose, will make any question of this, especially since by heathen honesty here I mean, not that which is recommended in the writings of their philosophers only,

¹ See 'Intro. Com.', p. 111 above; half-title from SOSO, I (1746). The distinction between 'almost' and 'altogether' Christians was by now a commonplace. Cf. *The Sermons of Mr. Henry Smith, Gathered into One Volume* (1657), pp. 420-23; William Sheppard, *Sincerity and Hypocrisy; or, the Sincere Christian and Hypocrite in their Lively Colours, Standing One by the Other* (1658); William Allen, 'Dedictory Epistle', *The Glass of Justification*, p. 20, speaks of a 'negative Christian'; in 1661 Matthew Mead preached a series of seven sermons at St. Sepulchre's, Holborn, on *The Almost Christian Discovered*; John Cardinal Bona, *Praeceptis and Practical Rules for a Truly Christian Life* (1678), p. 2; John Norris has extended references to 'those who serve God by halves, . . . the almost Christians', in *Christian Prudence* (1710), pp. 16-20, and in *Practical Discourses*, IV (1728), 'Concerning Practical Atheism', pp. 100-24; James Knight, *Eight Sermons* (1721), p. 274, speaks of 'lukewarm spirits'; and William Bates, Sermon X, in *Sermons*, p. 383. Throughout the Wesley corpus one finds references to 'the almost Christian', 'half-Christians', 'the good sort of men', 'saints of the world' (cf. No. 4, *Scriptural Christianity*, II.5 and n.).

² Wesley here understands 'honesty', as his audience would have, in its classical Latin sense of honour (as in Plautus, Cicero, Quintilian) denoting that form of self-disciplined conduct approved of by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.5; III.8; IV.3), a shared source which Wesley knew very well.

but such as the common heathens expected of one another, and many of them actually practised. By the rules of this they were taught that they ought not to be unjust; not to take away their neighbour's goods, either by robbery or theft; not to oppress the poor, neither to use extortion toward any; not to cheat or overreach either the poor or rich in whatsoever commerce they had with them; to defraud no man of his right, and if it were possible to owe no man anything.

2. Again, the common heathens allowed that some regard was to be paid to truth as well as to justice. And accordingly they not only had him in abomination who was forsworn, who called God to witness to a lie, but him also who was known to be a slanderer of his neighbour, who falsely accused any man. And indeed little better did they esteem wilful liars of any sort, accounting them the disgrace of humankind, and the pests of society.

3. Yet again, there was a sort of love and assistance which they expected one from another. They expected whatever assistance anyone could give another without prejudice to himself. And this they extended, not only to those little offices of humanity which are performed without any expense or labour, but likewise to the feeding the hungry if they had food to spare, the clothing the naked with their own superfluous raiment, and in general the giving to any that needed such things as they needed not themselves. Thus far (in the lowest account of it) heathen honesty went, the first thing implied in the being 'almost a Christian'. (II).4. A second thing implied in the being 'almost a Christian' is the having a form of godliness,³ of that godliness which is prescribed in the gospel of Christ—the having the *outside* of a real Christian. Accordingly the 'almost Christian' does nothing which the gospel forbids. He taketh not the name of God in vain,⁴ he blasphemeth and curseth not,⁵ he sweareth not at all, but his communication is 'Yea, yea,' 'nay, nay.'⁶ He profanes not the day of the Lord, nor suffers it to be profaned, even by the stranger that is within his gates.⁷ He not only avoids all actual adultery,

fornication, and uncleanness, but every word or look that either directly or indirectly tends thereto: nay, and all idle words, abstaining both from all detraction, backbiting, talebearing, evil-speaking, and from 'all foolish talking and jesting' (*ev̄r̄p̄arēla*), a kind of virtue in the heathen moralist's account.⁸ Briefly, from all conversation that is not 'good to the use of edifying', and that consequently 'grieves the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption',⁹

5. He abstains from 'wine wherein is excess',¹⁰ from revellings and gluttony. He avoids, as much as in him lies, all strife and contention, continually endeavouring to live peaceably with all men.¹¹ And if he suffer wrong, he avengeth not himself, neither returns evil for evil. He is no railer, no brawler, no scoffer, either at the faults or infirmities of his neighbour. He does not willingly wrong, hurt, or grieve any man; but in all things acts and speaks by that plain rule, 'Whatsoever thou wouldst not he should do unto thee, that do not thou to another.'¹²

6. And in doing good he does not confine himself to cheap and easy offices of kindness, but labours and suffers for the profit of many, that by all means he may help some. In spite of toil or pain, 'whatsoever his hand findeth to do, he doth it with his might,'¹³ whether it be for his friends or for his enemies, for the evil or for the good. For, being 'not slothful in' this or in any 'business',¹⁴ 'as he hath opportunity he doth good', all manner of good, 'to all men',¹⁵ and to their souls as well as their bodies. He reproves the wicked, instructs the ignorant, confirms the wavering, quickens the good, and comforts the afflicted. He labours to awaken those that sleep,¹⁶ to lead those whom God hath already awakened to

⁸ Wesley's translation of *ev̄r̄p̄arēla* follows the AV of Eph. 5:4, where *ev̄r̄p̄arēla* is disparaged. For the 'heathen moralist', however, cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.7 (108a), who had indeed reckoned it as a virtue: 'In the matter of "pleasantness" (*pr̄ad̄ia*) the mean is "wit" and the middle way is "witness" (*ev̄r̄p̄arēla*); excess here is buffoonery . . . and its deficiency is boorishness.' Wesley could presume that his audience understood this discrepancy between the *κωμῶν* of the New Testament and the classical usage of the heathen moralist'. Cf. Irène Simon, *Three Restoration Divines*, I. 316.

⁹ Cf. Eph. 4:29-30. ¹⁰ Eph. 5:18.

¹¹ See Rom. 12:18.

¹² Hillier: 'What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbour; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.' See also Tobit 4:15: 'And what thou hatest, do to no man.' Cf. Nos. 30, 'Sermon on the Mount, X', §822, 24; and 150, 'Hypocrisy in Oxford', L10. It is not clear how Wesley had come by this form of the 'Rule'.

¹³ Cf. Eccles. 9:10.

¹⁴ Rom. 12:11.

¹⁵ Cf. Gal. 6:10. Note the similarity here with the second of Wesley's *General Rules*.

¹⁶ See No. 3, 'Awake, Thou That sleepest'.

³ 2 Tim. 3:5. For references to Wesley's distinction between the 'form' and the 'power' of godliness, see the *General Rules* (in *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, 1743, *Billing*, No. 73, Vol. 9 of this edn.), §2; Nos. 3, 'Awake, Thou That sleepest', III.11; and 150, 'Hypocrisy in Oxford', II.2, *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, 1757, pp. 229-30; see also *Notes*, Matt. 13:28.

⁴ See Exod. 20:7.

⁵ Cf. Matt. 5:34, 37.

⁶ See Rom. 12:14.

⁷ See Exod. 20:10.

the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, that they may wash therein and be clean; and to stir up those who are saved through faith to adorn the gospel of Christ in all things.

7. He that hath the form of godliness uses also the means of grace; yea, all of them, and at all opportunities. He constantly frequents the house of God; and that not as the manner of some is, who come into the presence of the Most High either loaded with gold and costly apparel, or in all the gaudy vanity of dress, and either by their unseasonable civilities to each other or the impertinent gaiety of their behaviour disclaim all pretensions to the form as well as to the power of godliness. Would to God there were none, even among ourselves, who fall under the same condemnation: who come into his house, it may be, gazing about, or with all the signs of the most listless, careless indifference, 15 though sometimes they may *seem* to use a prayer to God for his blessing on what they are entering upon; who during that awful service are either asleep or reclined in the most convenient posture for it; or, as though they supposed God was asleep, talking with one another, or looking round, as utterly void of employment.¹⁷ Neither let these be accused of the form of godliness. No: he who has even this behaves with seriousness and attention in every part of that solemn service. More especially when he approaches the table of the Lord it is not with a light or careless behaviour, but with an air, gesture, and deportment 25 which speaks nothing else but 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!'¹⁸
8. To this if we add the constant use of family prayer by those who are masters of families, and the setting times apart for private addresses to God, with a daily seriousness of behaviour—he who uniformly practises this outward religion has the form of godliness. There needs but one thing more in order to his being 'almost a Christian', and that is, sincerity.
- (III).9. By sincerity I mean a real, inward principle of religion from whence these outward actions flow.¹⁹ And indeed if we have

¹⁷ An echo of frequent criticisms in the *Spectator* and other newspapers of indecorous behaviour in churches. E.g., in No. 460, Aug. 18, 1712, Richard Steele comments on 'the ceremonies, bows, curtsies, whisperings, smiles, winks, nods, with other familiar arts of salutation, which take up in our churches so much time that might be better employed'; he goes on to speak of gossips who could 'give a particular account how two or three hundred people were dressed' but no inking of the sermon. Cf. also *The Tatler*, No. 140, May 2, 1710.

¹⁸ Luke 18:13.

¹⁹ 'Sincerity' was a shibboleth in eighteenth-century religion, especially among the

not this we have not heathen honesty; no, not so much of it as will answer the demand of a heathen, Epicurean poet. Even this poor wretch, in his sober intervals, is able to testify:

Oderunt peccare boni virtutis amore;
Oderunt peccare mali fornicine poemae.^a

5

So that if a man only abstains from doing evil in order to avoid punishment,

Non pascas in cruce corvos^b

saith the pagan—there, 'thou hast thy reward'.²⁰ But even he will not allow such a harmless man as this to be so much as a *good* 10

^a Good men avoid sin from the love of virtue; wicked men avoid sin from the fear of punishment. [Cf. Horace, *Epistles*, l.xvi. 52-53.]

Oderunt peccare boni virtutis amore;
Tu nihil admittis in te fornicine poemae.

Here Wesley has garbled the second line for the sake of the contrast between *oderunt peccare boni* and *oderunt peccare mali*. The notion that Horace was an Epicurean was an eighteenth-century commonplace, and found support in Horace's jesting reference to himself as an Epicurean in *Epistles*, l.iv.16. There are frequent quotations from Horace in Wesley's sermons, usually prefaced by epithets as, e.g., 'the poor heathen' (Nos. 28, 'Sermon on the Mount, VIII', §18); 'your brother heathen' (56, 'God's Approbation of His Works', II.1); 'the old Roman' (78 'Spiritual Idolatry', 1.4); 'the old heathen poet' (102, 'Of Former Times', §8); 'the heathen poet' (129, 'Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels', II.1).¹

^b Thou shalt not be hanged [Horace, *Epistles*, l.xvi.48].

latitudinarians. C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism*, p. 144, believes that Edward Fowler (1632-1714), Bishop of Gloucester, was the first to make sincerity a prerequisite to justification, in his *The Design of Christianity* (1671). Samuel Johnson, in the *Dictionary* (1755), defined sincerity as 'honesty of intention' and quotes John Rogers (1679-1729), *The Necessity of Divine Revelation and the Truth of the Christian Religion* (1727): 'Jesus Christ has purchased for us terms of reconciliation, who will accept of sincerity instead of perfection; but then this sincerity implies our honest endeavours to do our utmost.' Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, I. 312-13, cites Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761) as affirming that 'sincerity is the one necessary requirement for the Christian profession.' See also William Bates, *Whole Works* (1st edn., 1700; 1815), II. 63; and William Reeves, *Fourteen Sermons Preached on Several Occasions* (1729), p. 251.

The early Wesley had commented on the prime importance of sincerity in a letter to his mother, July 29, 1725, and to Ann Granville, Oct. 3, 1731; the late Wesley makes almost the same point in a letter to Arthur Keene, Dec. 25, 1787. In between, see the references in the *Minutes* of 1746 (May 13), and in the following sermons: Nos. 6, 'The Righteousness of Faith', III.5; 9, 'The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption', IV.1; 12, 'The Witnesses of Our Own Spirit', §11; 18, 'The Marks of the New Birth', II.2; 19, 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God', II.10; 30, 'Sermon on the Mount, X', §9, 13; 17, 'On Corrupting the Word of God', poem.

²⁰ Horace, *Epistles*, l.xvi.47: '*habes pretium, loris non uretis*' ('You have your reward; you are not being flogged'). Cf. Matt. 6:2, 5, 16.

heaven. If then any man from the same motive (viz. to avoid punishment, to avoid the loss of his friends, or his gain, or his reputation) should not only abstain from doing evil but also do ever so much good—yea, and use all the means of grace—yet we could not with any propriety say, this man is even ‘almost a Christian’. If he has no better principle in his heart he is only a hypocrite altogether.

10. Sincerity therefore is necessarily implied in the being ‘almost a Christian’: a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will. It is necessarily implied that a man have a sincere view of pleasing God in all things: in all his conversation, in all his actions; in all he does or leaves undone. This design, if any man be ‘almost a Christian’, runs through the whole tenor of his life. This is the moving principle both in his doing good, his abstaining from evil, and his using the ordinances of God.²¹

11. But here it will probably be inquired, Is it possible that any man living should go so far as this and nevertheless be *only* ‘almost a Christian’? What more than this can be implied in the being ‘a Christian altogether’? I answer, first, that it is possible to go thus far, and yet be but ‘almost a Christian’, I learn not only from the oracles of God, but also from the sure testimony of experience.

12. Brethren, ‘great is my boldness toward you in this behalf.’²²

And ‘forgive me this wrong’²³ if I declare my own folly upon the housetop, for yours and the gospel’s sake. Suffer me then to speak freely of myself, even as of another man. I am content to be abased so ye may be exalted,²⁴ and to be yet more vile for the glory of my Lord.²⁵

13. I did go thus far for many years, as many of this place can testify: using diligence to eschew all evil, and to have a conscience void of offence,²⁶ redeeming the time,²⁷ buying up every opportunity of doing all good to all men,²⁸ constantly and carefully using all the public and all the private means of grace; endeavouring after a steady seriousness of behaviour at all times and in all places. And God is my record, before whom I stand, doing all this in sincerity; having a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do his will in all things, to please him who had

²¹ Note that, on this basis, a person obeying Wesley’s *General Rules* would be no better than an ‘almost Christian’.

²² Cf. 2 Cor. 7:4.

²³ 2 Cor. 12:13.

²⁴ See 2 Cor. 11:7. ²⁵ See 2 Sam. 6:21-22. See also JWJ, Apr. 2, 1739: ‘I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation . . .’

²⁶ Acts 24:16.

²⁷ Col. 4:5.

²⁸ Gal. 6:10.

called me to ‘fight the good fight’, and to ‘lay hold of eternal life.’²⁹ Yet my own conscience beareth me witness in the Holy Ghost that all this time I was but ‘almost a Christian.’³⁰

II. If it be inquired, ‘What more than this is implied in the being “altogether a Christian”?’ I answer:

(D) 1. First, the love of God. For thus saith his Word: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.’³¹ Such a love of God is this as engrosses the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties. He that thus loves the Lord his God, his spirit continually ‘rejoiceth in God his Saviour.’³² ‘His delight is in the Lord,’³³ his Lord and his all, to whom ‘in everything he giveth thanks.’³⁴ All *his* ‘desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name.’³⁵ His heart is ever crying out, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.’³⁶ Indeed, what can he desire beside God? Not the world, or the things of the world. For he is ‘crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him.’³⁷ He is crucified to the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life.³⁸ Yea, he is dead to pride of every kind: for love ‘is not puffed up,’³⁹ but he that dwelling in love ‘dwelleth in God, and God in him’, is less than nothing in his own eyes.

(II) 2. The second thing implied in the being ‘altogether a Christian’ is the love of our neighbour. For thus said our Lord in the following words: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’⁴⁰ If any man ask, ‘Who is my neighbour?’⁴¹ we reply, ‘Every man in

²⁹ 1 Tim. 6:12.

³⁰ Cf. No. 81, ‘In What Sense we are to Leave the World’, §23, where Wesley (in 1784) recalls that it had ‘pleased God’ to convert him from an ‘almost’ to an ‘altogether Christian’ in 1725. But see also JWJ, Jan. 4, 1739, and his letter to brother Charles, June 27, 1766, and cf. Benham, pp. 34-40. Note also that all editions of Wesley’s *Pain Account of Christian Perfection* refer to 1725 as the beginning of his conscious quest for perfection. The fact is that Wesley wavered from time to time about what it means to confess oneself ‘a Christian’.

³¹ Mark 12:30.

³² Cf. Luke 1:47.

³³ Cf. 1 Thess. 5:18.

³⁴ Cf. Isa. 26:8.

³⁵ Cf. Gal. 6:14.

³⁶ Ps. 1:2.

³⁷ Cf. Gal. 6:14. ³⁸ I.e., to all *sin* (see 1 John 2:16), since Wesley had long since agreed with Augustine that *autem in illa genera vittorum . . . omnia peccata concludunt* (‘indeed, all sins may be included within these three classes of vice’); cf. *Enarratio in Psalmum*, VIII.13, in Migne, *PL*, Vol. 36, col. 115. He would reiterate this tirelessly; see No. 7, ‘The Way to the Kingdom’, II.2 and n.

³⁹ 1 Cor. 13:4.

⁴⁰ Matt. 22:39, etc.

⁴¹ Luke 10:29.

the world; every child of his who is "the Father of the spirits of all flesh".⁴² Nor may we in any wise except our enemies, or the enemies of God and their own souls. But every Christian loveth these also as himself; yea, 'as Christ loved us'.⁴³ He that would more fully understand what manner of love this is may consider St. Paul's description of it. It is 'long-suffering and kind. It envieth not. It is not rash or hasty in judging. It is not puffed up,'⁴⁴ but maketh him that loves, the least, the servant of all. Love 'doth not behave itself unseemly',⁴⁵ but 'becometh all things to all men'.⁴⁶ She 'seeketh not her own', but only the good of others, that they may be saved. Love 'is not provoked'.⁴⁷ It casteth out wrath, which he who hath is wanting in love. It 'thinketh no evil'. It 'rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth'. It 'covereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things'.⁴⁸

(III).3. There is yet one thing more that may be separately considered, though it cannot actually be separate from the preceding, which is implied in the being 'altogether a Christian', and that is the ground of all, even faith. Very excellent things are spoken of this throughout the oracles of God. 'Everyone', saith the beloved disciple, 'that believeth, is born of God'.⁴⁹ 'To as many as received him gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name'.⁵⁰ And, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith'.⁵¹ Yea, our Lord himself declares, 'He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life,'⁵² and 'cometh not into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life'.⁵³

4. But here let no man deceive his own soul. It is diligently to be noted, the 'faith which bringeth not forth repentance' and love, and all good works, is not that 'right living faith' which is here spoken of, 'but a dead and devilish one. . . . For even the devils believe that Christ was born of a virgin, that he wrought all kind of miracles, declaring himself very God; that for our sakes he suffered a most painful death, to redeem us from death everlasting; that he rose again the third day; that he ascended into

⁴² Cf. Heb. 12:9; also No. 7, 'The Way to the Kingdom', I,8 and n.
⁴³ Cf. Eph. 5:2.
⁴⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 13:4.
⁴⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 13:5.
⁴⁶ Cf. 1 Cor. 9:22.
⁴⁷ Cf. 1 Cor. 13:5.
⁴⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 13:5-7.
⁴⁹ Cf. 1 John 5:1.
⁵⁰ Cf. John 1:12.
⁵¹ 1 John 5:4.
⁵² John 3:36.
⁵³ John 5:24.

heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, and at the end of the world shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. These articles of our faith the devils believe, and so they believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament. And yet for all this faith, they be but devils. They remain still in their damnable estate, lacking the very true Christian faith.⁵⁴

5. 'The right and true Christian faith is' (to go on in the words of our own Church) 'not only to believe that Holy Scripture and the articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation by Christ'—it is a 'sure trust and confidence' which a man hath in God 'that by the merits of Christ his sins *are* forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God'—'whereof doth follow a loving heart to obey his commandments'.⁵⁵

6. Now whosoever has this faith which 'purifies the heart',⁵⁶ by the power of God who dwelleth therein, from pride, anger, desire, 'from all unrighteousness',⁵⁷ 'from all filthiness of flesh and spirit',⁵⁸ which fills it with love stronger than death both to God and to all mankind—love that doth the works of God, glorying to spend and to be spent for all men, and that endureth with joy, not only the reproach of Christ, the being mocked, despised, and hated of all men, but whatsoever the wisdom of God permits the malice of men or devils to inflict; whosoever has this faith, thus 'working by love',⁵⁹ is not *almost* only, but *altogether* a Christian.

⁵⁴ Homily on the Salvation of Man [Pt. III, in a slight revision of Wesley's own earlier extract therefrom in *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works*, §13, for which see Vol. 12 of this edn.]

⁵⁵ Cf. Wesley, *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works*, §14; cf. also the Homily on the Salvation of Man, Pt. III.

⁵⁶ Cf. Acts 15:9; Jas. 4:8.

⁵⁷ 1 John 1:9.

⁵⁸ Cf. 2 Cor. 7:1.

⁵⁹ Cf. Gal. 5:6, Wesley's favourite text for his teachings on faith and good works (*fidem caritatem formam*), the linch-pin by which he joined his double doctrine of 'faith alone' and 'holy living'. Cf. Nos. 8, 'The First-fruits of the Spirit', III.3, 10, 'The Witness of the Spirit', I, 18, 19, 'The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God', III.1, 25, 'Sermon on the Mount', V, III.9, 35, 'The Law Established through Faith', I, II.3, 39, 'Catholic Spirit', I.14, 47, 'Heavenness through Manifold Temptations', II.3, IV.5, 62, 'The End of Christ's Coming', III.6, 65, 'The Duty of Reproving our Neighbour', III.14, 66, 'The Signs of the Times', II.8, 79, 'On Dissipation', §16, 90, 'An Israelite Indeed', II.4, II.11, 91, 'On Charity', III.11, 106, 'On Faith', Heb. 11:6, II.3, 107, 'On God's Vineyard', II.8, 109, 'The Trouble and Rest of Good Men', I.3, 114, *On the Death of John Fletcher*, I.3, 146, 'The One Thing Needful', III.3. Wesley records having preached from this text fifteen

7. But who are the living witnesses of these things? I beseech you, brethren, as in the presence of that God before whom 'hell and destruction are without a covering: how much more the hearts of the children of men!¹⁷⁵—that each of you would ask his own heart, 'Am I of that number? Do I so far practise justice, mercy, and truth, as even the rules of heathen honesty require? If so, have I the very *outside* of a Christian? The form of godliness? Do I abstain from evil, from whatsoever is forbidden in the written Word of God? Do I, whatever good my hand findeth to do, do it with my might?⁶⁰ Do I seriously use all the ordinances of God at all opportunities? And is all this done with a sincere design and desire to please God in all things?

8. Are not many of you conscious that you never came thus far? That you have not been even 'almost a Christian'? That you have not come up to the standard of heathen honesty? At least, not to the form of Christian godliness? Much less hath God seen sincerity in you, a real design of pleasing him in all things. You never so much as intended to devote all your words and works, your business, studies, diversions to his glory. You never even designed or desired that whatsoever you did should be done 'in the name of the Lord Jesus'⁶¹ and as such should be a 'spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.'⁶²

9. But supposing you had, do good designs and good desires make a Christian? By no means, unless they are brought to good effect. 'Hell is paved', saith one, 'with good intentions.'⁶³ The great question of all, then, still remains. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart? Can you cry out, 'My God and my all'? Do

times: twice in 1741, once in 1742 and 1747, twice in 1750, once in 1755, four times in 1760, three times in 1761, and once in 1787.

Cf. Jeremy Taylor, *Fides Formata*: Or, Faith Working by Love, in *Works* (1844), II. 19-28. For Luther's denunciation of the distinction between 'formed' and 'unformed' faith, see his *Commentary on Galatians*, 3:11. See also W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 51-68, for an analysis of the issues between *iustitia simplex*, *iustitia duplex*, etc.

⁵⁹ Cf. Prov. 15:11.

⁶¹ Col. 3:17.

⁶² Cf. 1 Pet. 2:5.

⁶³ Eccles. 9:10.

⁶⁴ This proverb was, of course, a commonplace in Wesley's time; cf. Richard Whitlock, *Zoaetopia* (1654); George Herbert, *Jacula Prudentium* (1651); and John Ray, *English Proverbs* (1670); it has a blurred history. St. Francis de Sales attributes it to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, in a letter to the Barrone de Chantal (Nov. 21, 1604) and in another letter to the Mother Superior of the Visitation in Lyons (Apr. 17, 1616); cf. Elisabeth Sopp, tr., *St. Francis de Sales, Selected Letters* (London, Faber and Faber, 1960), Letters 8, 92. The proverb itself has not yet been located in St. Bernard's published works. Cf. JWI, July 10, 1736. See also No. 125, 'On a Single Eye', III.5, where Wesley cites St. Chrysostom as saying that 'Hell is paved with the skulls of Christian priests.'

you desire nothing but him? Are you happy in God? Is he your glory, your delight, your crown of rejoicing? And is this commandment written in your heart, 'that he who loveth God love his brother also'?⁶⁴ Do you then love your neighbour as yourself? Do you love every man, even your enemies, even the enemies of God, as your own soul? As Christ loved you? Yea, dost thou believe that Christ loved *thee*, and gave himself for thee? Hast thou faith in his blood? Believest thou the Lamb of God hath taken away *thy* sins,⁶⁵ and cast them as a stone into the depth of the sea? That he hath blotted out the handwriting that was against *thee*, taking it out of the way, nailing it to his cross? Hast *thou* indeed redemption through his blood, even the remission of *thy* sins?⁶⁶ And doth his Spirit bear witness with *thy* spirit, that thou art a child of God?⁶⁷

10. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who now standeth in the midst of us, knoweth that if any man die without this faith and this love, good it were for him that he had never been born.⁶⁸ Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and call upon thy God: call in the day when he may be found. Let him not rest till he 'make his goodness to pass before thee, till he proclaim unto thee the name of the Lord'⁶⁹—'the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin.'⁷⁰ Let no man persuade thee by vain words to rest short of this prize of thy high calling.⁷¹ But cry unto him day and night who 'while we were without strength died for the ungodly,'⁷² until thou knowest in whom thou hast believed, and canst say, 'My Lord and my God.'⁷³ Remember 'always to pray and not to faint,'⁷⁴ till thou also canst lift up thy hand unto heaven and declare to him that liveth for ever and ever, 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.'⁷⁵

11. May we all thus experience what it is to be not almost only, but altogether Christians! Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus, knowing we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, and having the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost given unto us!⁷⁶

⁶⁴ 1 John 4:21.

⁶⁷ See Rom. 8:16.

⁷⁰ Exod. 34:6-7.

⁷⁴ Luke 18:1.

⁶⁵ See John 1:29.

⁶⁸ Cf. Mark 14:21.

⁷¹ Phil. 3:14.

⁷⁵ John 21:17.

⁶⁶ See Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14.

⁶⁹ Cf. Exod. 33:19.

⁷² Rom. 5:6.

⁷⁶ See Rom. 5:1, 2, 5.