



## God's Love to Fallen Man

Romans 5:1-11, 15

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This Summer we are learning from the founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley, who back in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century wrote, taught, and preached about a more faithful way of living. Throughout the month of July, we will hear some of Wesley's sermons re-written in modern vernacular to see if we can still hear a word toward faithful discipleship from the one who laid the foundation for our world-wide denomination.

Today's sermon, first published in 1782, is titled "God's Love to Fallen Man." As with many a good sermon, this sermon was not written in a vacuum, but was responding to others in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Most notably, this sermon is Wesley's response to Englishman Soame Jenyn's mid-century writing, titled, *Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, in which Jenyn claimed God **could** not have altered the entrance of evil into the world. Wesley's response comes in this sermon, which, according to those closest to Wesley, he wanted printed and distributed to everyone. In accordance with his wishes, some ten thousand copies of this sermon were printed and given away.

May God open our ears, minds, and hearts to receive the Word of the Lord as first spoken by John Wesley.

I don't know anyone who speaks highly of Adam, the first parent of humanity, for his failure and the trouble he brought upon all of humanity. It was through his *willful rebellion against God that 'sin entered the world.'* It is because of his singular disobedience to God that all of humanity was made sinful. Not only is it his fault that humanity, in its entirety, fell out of favor with God, but because of his first sin, all persons, everywhere, throughout time, have lost the virtue, righteousness, and true holiness in which we were first created. It is because of what this one man did that humanity at large is so broken, filled with *pride, malice, and all other diabolical tempers.*

Truly, throughout the history of humankind, we have looked at our brokenness and condemned our first parent, saying, '*For all [our brokenness] we may thank Adam.*' Such condemnation has come from every nation, every tongue, and in every age, so long as the story of God and creation has been known. Present company not excluded, there are very few who believe in the truth of scripture regarding the entrance of sin who don't put the blame on the first created of all humanity.

Adam's disobedience, which brought about pain and suffering for all humanity in the world, is certainly a topic we still question today. However, the question regarding the first sin is rarely targeted at Adam's failure. And no, this isn't a joke about whether blame should fall on the man

or the woman. Generally, when considering the first sin, the question we ask is why did **God** allow Adam to sin? Did God not foresee that Adam would rebel and give in to the temptation of evil? God set the rules and the penalty; certainly, God knew that the created would fail and that the punishment would condemn all of humanity. Why would God allow for such a small failure to bring such a grave eternal consequence? Would it not have been easier for God to have prevented Adam from committing that first sin? God certainly knew it would happen, that much is undeniable, for God is all-knowing. And God could have prevented it, also an undeniable truth, for God is all-powerful.

But to say God is all-knowing and all-powerful is also to say God knew what was best for humanity. That God allowed the disobedience to take place is to assert that the Creator knew the consequences, and still chose *not* to prevent it. God knew that the evil resulting from the first disobedience would not be as great as the good that would come from that same disobedience. God *saw that to permit the fall of the first man was far best for [humanity]; that abundantly more good than evil would accrue to [all of humanity because of Adam's] fall.*

It's interesting that not much has been written on this topic. Very few people have weighed in on this subject, and it certainly isn't one that is well understood by most Christians. This is especially odd because, not only is this topic quite intriguing, it's also of great importance. May God open the eyes of our understanding that we may have it revealed to us how through the fall of Adam, humanity in general has gained a capacity *First, of being more holy and happy on earth; and secondly, of being more happy in heaven, than otherwise they could have been.*

First let's consider how humanity in general has actually gained the capacity of being more holy and happy on earth that we could have been had Adam not committed that first sin. Simply stated, had Adam not fallen, Christ would not have died. This is as simple and clear as it gets. We could argue back and forth about this line of thinking, and I would only become all the more convinced of this truth. Unless all of humanity was condemned because of Adam's first sin, it would have been unnecessary for the Son of God to have become incarnate, taking on the nature of humanity. This is what scripture tells us: Through the one man – Adam – sin and death entered the world. Because we suffer from death, the Word became flesh, so that in Christ, we again be made alive. If we didn't suffer death, *there would have been no occasion for [Christ's] 'being obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.'* If we had not been separated from the favor and love of God, had we not been made unrighteous, there would be no reason for God to find a way to reconcile us to become righteous once more.

Why is this important? If there had been no reason for God to find a way to reconcile or redeem humanity, then there would be no such thing as having faith in God's grand love. We would have no reason to believe that God is all-loving, for Christ would not have been sent as a physical representation of God's love. We would have no faith in Christ as the Son of God who came to love us and give himself for us. We would have no reason to believe in the Spirit of God as a gift of God to renew in us the image of God, or as a gift of God that sanctifies us. Indeed, the whole privilege of justification by faith (which we just considered last week) could not have

existed. There would have been no **sacrifice** of Christ, and therefore, no **redemption** in the blood of Christ.

The same inability to express faith would also be true of our capability to express love. We may have been able to love the *Author of our being as our Creator and Preserver*, but we could not have loved God under the same deep relationship we do now as the one who gave up their Son for our glory. We may have been able to love the Son of God for being the express image of the person of God, an incarnate expression of God's presence, but we would have never loved Christ as the one who took upon our sins that we may have new life. We would not be able to love the Spirit of God as the one who reveals to us God as heavenly Mother and Father, or God as sacrificial Son, or as the one who leads us toward the light and truth of God, who works in us the renewal of the image of God.

From this consideration, we see the *unspeakable advantage we derive from the fall of our first parent*. We have the blessing of faith – faith in God the heavenly Father who gave the Son, and faith in God the Son, who gave his own life for us to have new life. We also have the blessing of love; as is *plainly declared by the Apostle: 'We love him, because he first loved us.'* Truly, *the greatest instance of [the love of God] had never been given if Adam had not fallen.*

Faith in, and love for God are huge benefits of this grand sequence of events. But these are not the only benefits. Our capacity to love our neighbor and to offer benevolences of any kind is also not possible without our abundant faith and love in God. This is echoed time and time again in the Apostle's teachings. Paul writes, *'Beloved, if God **so** loved us, we ought also to love one another.'* Don't miss the stress of this text: If God **so** loved us! This text is calling us to acknowledge how it is, that is, in what manner, God loved us. God loved us by giving us his only Son! What a great witness of love is it that the Son of God gave his life to demonstrate the great love of God for us. Christ divested himself of the glory of God, and took upon the form of a servant, humbling himself as far as one may humble themselves – giving himself in obedience to death. If God loved us in this way – If God **so** loved us – should we not also love one another in the same way? Hear this and appreciate this: this understanding of loving our neighbor, this witness for what it looks like to love one another according to God's will, would have been totally missed had Adam not first fallen. Had the first sin and fall of humanity never happened, we would have never received the teaching witness of such love in Christ and truly we would not comprehend God's will or desire for how we are to love one another.

By Adam's fall, we have received the ability to understand and appreciate what it means to love God and to love our neighbor. But that is not all we have gained. There is another huge point which, though not often considered, *deserves our deepest consideration*. Not only did sin enter the whole world by the first sin, but with it came pain. Just like with sin and death, pain plagues all of humanity. In the presence of pain, we again see the manifestation of the *unspeakable goodness of God!* It's amazing that God can bring so much good out of one act of disobedience.

Truly, God is able to bring amazing things out of that which we, humanity, consider to be sufferings. Had there been no suffering in the world then some of the most amazing aspects of

our faith would never have existed. It is because of our pain and suffering that we have a need for a God who can redeem our suffering. *What room could there be for trust in God if there were no such thing as pain and danger? It is by sufferings that our faith is tried*, and in these times, we search and turn to God. It is when we are plagued by hardships that we claim, 'Though I suffer, I will trust in God.' In times of sorrow, sickness, pain, or death, we turn to God for strength and life, and God is there to respond.

Another thing to show: if there were no such thing as evil in the world, what good would there be for such things as *patience, meekness, gentleness*, or tolerance? It's quite possible these things would never have existed for each has as their object some form of evil. How can one offer good for evil if evil itself didn't exist? And I know what you're thinking; you're thinking, wouldn't all these things still have been ingrained in the hearts of humanity even if evil never existed? Good question. And you're absolutely right, these would be part of our being; but, without evil in the world, we would have no reason to exercise them. Such things are only offered in response to evil. Without such evil as traffic to delay our travels, we would not practice patience. Without political leaders acting harshly toward others, we would not have to practice gentleness or tolerance. Evil allows us to exercise these traits, and the more we exercise them, the more our understanding of God's grace is strengthened and increased.

Again, to reemphasize, *just as God's permission of Adam's fall* gave all of humanity a thousand opportunities for suffering, we were given just as many more opportunities for experiencing holiness and happiness. Because of the suffering that exists, we are given countless opportunities for doing good, *of exercising [ourselves] in various good works which otherwise could have had no being*. We know, according to God's word, *the more good we do the happier we shall be*. The more we give food to the hungry, clothing to the uncovered, housing to the homeless, and the more we visit those that are sick or in prison, and the more we offer acts of kindness to those that are hurting and grieving, the more we do these things, the more we know the joy of God's eternal reward in our own hearts.

A quick summary of what we've covered so far: The more holy we are the happier we must be, especially considering holiness and happiness are inextricably linked. The more good we offer toward others, the more we celebrate God's kingdom within our own hearts. Therefore, it can be said, the fall of Adam should be seen as an advantage for humanity for it gives us an opportunity of being more holy, it gives us the opportunity of doing *innumerable good works which otherwise could not have been done*, and it gives us the opportunity to see God's great glory as that which provides for us strength and love in times of suffering.

From these things, we should be able to understand that because of the fall of humanity, there are not only great benefits in the present time, but there will be infinitely greater advantages to come in eternity. Surely, we can claim that those who are doing God's will in this lifetime are those in whom God delights most. Those who love God and share God's great love in the present world are favored by God for faithfully living out God's eternal will. Nevertheless, though we can experience great holiness and happiness in this life because of the opportunity to share in the good work of God in the world, how much greater will our happiness be when

we join God in eternal glory? *There will be an abundant reward in heaven for suffering as well as for doing the will of God.* For in the time to come, in the eternal glory of all eternity, we will continue to enjoy the great happiness of God's glory, but the sufferings and anguish, the grief and pain, the sin and death shall be no more!

Listen up, everyone needs to hear these final words. Everything we have said up to now centers in on this one point. *The fall of Adam produced the death of Christ! If God had prevented the fall of man, 'the Word' [would never have been] 'made flesh' and no one would have seen the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father. Of all the considerations, this one is so great it overtakes all other thoughts. Unless 'by one man judgment had come upon all [humanity] to condemnation' neither angels nor [humanity] could have ever known 'the unsearchable riches of Christ'.*

See how little reason we have to be angered or disappointed in the fall of our first parent? There are so many unspeakable advantages both in the present time and eternity because of the first sin of humanity. With such goodness and glory as the outcome, we have little reason for questioning God in permitting that first act of disobedience to take place. It is because of that event that God's mercy, *by infinite degrees, rejoices over judgment!* There should be no person who blames God for Adam's sin. No, instead we should bless God for using that singular act to lay the framework for the great redemption and the manifestation of eternal glory through the Creator's wisdom, holiness, justice, and mercy.

Let us rejoice in the great wisdom and knowledge of God! Although we may never fully understand God's ways, we may discern the nature of God that runs throughout time and into eternity. According to the clear evidence of all that has been, God has laid out since the beginning of time that, created in the image of God, we were permitted to fail that by the grace of God and the love exhibited in the Son of God, we *may be infinitely holier and happier to all eternity!*

Praise be to God. Amen.