

Surviving Summaries, Excerpts, and Transcriptions of John Wesley's Oral Sermons

[updated April 1, 2026]

A separate file on this website (under 'Research Aids') titled 'John Wesley Sermon Register' compiles every recorded instance of John Wesley preaching where the surviving source includes mention of the biblical text on which he preached. In most of these records, if there is additional information about the sermon, it is typically limited to a comment on how the sermon was received.

The present file contains all known instances (about 100) where the surviving record of Wesley's preaching includes some indication of the sermon's content—from brief summaries or excerpts to (at least partial) transcriptions.

In a few instances the oral sermon is on the biblical text of one of Wesley's published sermons (identified in footnotes); these provide some sense of how Wesley's oral preaching compared to his published sermons (particularly if the two are relatively close in date).

The majority of items in this file will be of interest because they allow a glimpse of the content of Wesley's preaching on biblical texts which are not among his published sermons (even if he preached on the text often). There are echoes in these sermons of material in published sermons on other texts. But some of the material appears nowhere else in surviving records.

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Surviving Records of the Content of John Wesley's Oral Sermons

Genesis 22:1ff

Monday morning he called us all to offer up our Isaac, by Abraham's example.

William Ripley (June 29, 1772 in York)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 43.]

Deuteronomy 10:12–13

He *first* spoke of the relation. 'The Lord thy God', he was the God of Israel after the flesh by virtue of an outward covenant; and he is now the God of all that are partakers of Abraham's faith, and even of all that sincerely seek and wish to be made so.

Secondly of the believer's duty, taking the particulars as they lay in the text.

[1.] To *fear the Lord* our God. The first motions of conversion may well begin in fear, from an awakened sense of our guilt, misery and helplessness and the justice, holiness and majesty of that God with whom we have to do.

This will induce us in dependence on his promises,

[2.] To *walk in his way*. Which he explained of his ordinances, guilt, and want will constrain us to prayer by ourselves, because the Lord sees in secret, [and] with others, because he has promised to meet and to bless with his presence where two or three are gathered together in his name. For the like reasons our hearts will be drawn forth towards reading the Scriptures, attendance on preaching, and receiving the bread and wine, as so many means which the Lord has expressly appointed and by which he does usually confer faith and grace upon his people, and thereby bring us

3. To *love him*, when we can see our sins pardoned and our persons accepted, for till then it is impossible to love him cordially. But when this is effected, when Divine love is shed abroad in the heart, the rest becomes easy. That is,

4. To *serve him* and that *with all our heart and with all our soul*. Our obedience must be impartial and earnest. And when our desires are thus actuated, it is our comfort that the Lord considers all our actions undertaken in his fear as services done to himself; not only the solemn exercises of devotion, but all our good offices towards our brethren, and even what we do with design of serving ourselves, [such as] eating, drinking, buying, etc.; every action performed in faith, as acts of service and sacrifice to himself.

He showed, *thirdly*, that thus to live and do is for our good:

1. In life. Setting us free from the miserable thralldom of sin, from the tyranny of the devil, and filling us with peace and joy and communion with God.

2. In death. This will comfort us when earthly things will be empty cisterns. The answer of a good conscience towards God is of so great value in such an hour, that none but those who then possess it can possibly conceive it.

3. In judgment.

He concluded with a close and lively application both to the saints and sinners.

John Newton (April 22, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 49–51.]

Joshua 24:15¹

In the morning he said the Canaanites need not dwell in the land, for we have many promises that sin shall be destroyed root and branch. But why is it not? First, because of slavish sinful fear. Second, because of loving it. Third, by sloth. And fourthly, by unbelief.

If freely, O free, full salvation to all believers; asking them if they believed God was willing to save them now.

William Ripley, *Memoirs*, 40 (June 16, 1772 in Yarm)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 40.]

1 Samuel 17

[JW] preached a comfortable sermon, from little David and great Goliath; reading the whole chapter, and made excellent remarks, as he spiritualized the whole; and showed that the sling of faith, and stones of God's promises, would soon lay the proud giant, self, and sin low.

William Ripley (June 18, 1772, in Osmotherley)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 41.]

1 Samuel 20:3

[JW preached] in the evening from this testimony, 'There is only a step between me and death!' After proving that, he inserted the words and showed that there is only a step between us and life.

William Ripley (June 28, 1772 in York)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 43.]

1 Kings 18:21

['How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.']

He briefly explained the former part of the chapter and then dropping the first occasion, spoke of the words in a general way. Of the case which many are still in, that they halt between two opinions with respect: 1) to justification, 2) to sanctification, [and] 3) to happiness.

Education, custom and our natural depravity join to give us early misapprehensions in these points. Conscience, experience, and Scripture unite to undeceive us, but the most part [of humanity] are convinced but not persuaded. They fluctuate in opinion and contradict themselves in practice. They are:

sometimes for self and form,

sometimes for grace and power,

sometimes they are upon the point of renouncing the world that they may serve God, and

sometimes as near renouncing God that they may enjoy the world.

He went over each particular in the application.

John Newton (April 5, 1761, in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 255.]

¹Cf. JW, Sermon 94, 'On Family Religion' (May 26, 1783), *Works*, 3:333–46.

1 Kings 19:13

Mr. Wesley asked every one, ‘What doest thou here Elijah?’ Close and nervous I felt it; but oh the exhortation was cutting—every word against those who neglected class or band, early rising, and dress of children. He earnestly desired all who could not come on Sabbath mornings to go amongst the swine, with the words of the Bishop of Bristol: ‘If those who cannot get up at four, do not get up at five, they deserve hanging up by the neck bone!’ Mr. Wesley said no one can lay nine hours in bed with the life of God; nay, not with bodily health. Sleep little, eat little; and work much—and you will never be nervous.

William Ripley (June 22, 1784 in Hull)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 67.]

2 Kings 5:12[–18]

[‘Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.’]

After explaining the passage in the literal sense, he accommodated it to the gospel and observed:

1. That God has provided and made known to us one plain, simple, and sure method of salvation—faith, justification, holiness.
2. That man is not satisfied with this way of the divine appointment, but will devise various ways of his own, differing from the way of truth, and from each other. From hence proceed the innumerable errors and vast uncertainty in religious opinions. They pervert God’s order by their additions and alterations and they reverse it seeking holiness without justification, justification without faith, and boasting of faith when they have neither inward [n]or outward evidence to produce.
3. That every way but that presented in the gospel is insufficient and vain.

John Newton (June 7, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 263.]

Job 7:17–18

He first considered the words in order.

I. *What is man?*

1. How small and inconsiderable [is he] amidst the immensity of the Creator’s works. But his minuteness might be passed over, if his diminutive bulk is found to contain some real excellence. But alas, upon a slight enquiry we find that as his size is inferior to many [of] the beasts, so

2. His wisdom is mere ignorance and foolishness and he is [in] some respects below them all. Man is not only ignorant of the nature and properties of almost all things above him, below him, and around him, but is grossly ignorant of himself, even of the very end of his being. And this [in] not only heathens and Indians (of which he gave one example from his own knowledge), but even thousands of inhabitants of this land of gospel light, perhaps thousands in this very town, though not a large one.

3. He enquired what is man in respect to goodness. In this article the account stands worst of all, [for man is] prone to do evil continually and incapable of himself so much as to think a good thought. This is man.

II. *That thou shouldst magnify him.* The Lord has done great things for us but in this he especially magnified us in giving his son to die for our sins. The value and importance of the human soul, though sunk in dregs and buried in ruins, is fully evinced by the amazing price paid for its redemption.

III. *And that thou shouldst set thy heart upon him.* A wonderful expression but fully proved. [For] the Lord:

encompasses [us] with his kind providence,
holds our souls in life,
gives us rain and fruitful seasons,
fills our hearts with food and gladness,
supports us under trials,
strengthens us against temptations,
gives us the presence of his grace, the evidence of his love and
has promised us glory and immortality.

All this [is given] to mean, ignorant, foolish and sinful man.

IV. *That thou shouldst visit him every morning.*

Other good things are delivered out to us often in the lump.

Time alone, as the most invaluable treasure, is parceled out to us by days, hours, and minutes; nor can we receive a second portion, till the former is expended. The hours of sleep give us a pre-intimation of death, in the total cessation of our bodily senses and faculties. Yet as even then our internal senses are often vigorous and awake and we hear and see and feel in our dreams without the assistance of ears or eyes or hands. This is a strong and repeated proof that the soul can exist well while the body lies sleeping in the grave.

And as the Lord visits us every morning, with new light, new life and new strength, he hereby teaches us to expect with equal certainty a resurrection from the dead according to his promise. The Lord usually visits us too unless we have stupefied our faculties with cares or indulgences when we awake. And [he] makes an impression upon our first morning thoughts which it would be [in] our interest and wisdom to cherish, though we are often prone to let the favour pass unimproved.

V. *And try him every moment.* [These] afford us continual opportunities of showing our love to him, proving and exercising us according to our strength, that he may hereafter crown us with victory and honour.

He applied each particular:

that we should bear in mind our weakness and nothingness;
that we should magnify the Lord who has magnified us;
that we should set our hearts upon him, who sets his heart upon us when in our low and lost estate;
that we should improve [profit from] his visits and mercies;
that we should think, speak and act as in his presence who tries our heart and reins every moment;
and lastly, that we should be careful frequently to try ourselves, to examine our motives, our means and our end that in all we may [be] approved to God and our consciences.

John Newton (April 26, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 68–71.]

Job 22:21

[‘Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.’]

In which the following thing[s] are supposed.

1. That some men are strangers to God. In the proof indeed, he showed that they were many and those not only among the heathen but the greater part of those who are called Christians. They believe there is a God in a vague manner, as they believe there is an emperor of China. But they have no more acquaintance with one than the other. They know nothing of his power, his love, or his will.

2. Some men are not at peace. This is a consequence of the former; for while strangers to God, they are condemned by their own consciences. They are full of evil, painful dispositions and then they weary themselves in seeking peace in worldly things where it is impossible to be found.

3. An acquaintance infallibly ensures peace. This
takes guilt from the conscience,
gradually weakens corruption in the heart, [and]
enables us to bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness and
leads us to seek that satisfaction in God which the creatures could not afford us.

He enforced the whole from the word *now*; answering the various delusive pretences by which many would be excused, in putting the evil day of repentance (as they judge it) far from them.

John Newton (May 1, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 96–97.]

Psalm 37:1

[‘Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.’]

He showed:

First, the necessity of the caution, since the ungodly are around us on all sides. Every nation, city, and almost every family has some of these to exercise and try those who fear the Lord.

Secondly, the nature of the fretting. [He] cautioned against it, [for it] work[s] several ways against God, our neighbour, or ourselves.

It tempts us: [1]) sometimes to question the reality of the Lord’s providence and government of the world; [2]) sometimes to murmur and complaining of his dispensations, thus striking directly at the root of our faith and love. It makes us either angry or injurious or sullen and hardhearted towards our neighbours. And it destroys, so far as it prevails, the peace of our own breast.

John Newton (March 22, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 146–47.]

Psalm 147:3

[‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.’]

I. He first explained the phrase *a broken heart*. It [does] not mean, he said, what is usually so termed by the world, [as] that mixture of pride and stubbornness which stirs up the potsherd of the earth to strive with their maker. Which it is not [to] be wondered at, if it ends in death or madness. Or that when weak man dares to contend with God, he should sink in the contest. But it signifies that work of the

Spirit of God upon the heart, which is termed conviction. He then described the usual order of it.

For the most part a person is first convinced of some one particular sin. Soon after, many more. Some, that perhaps have been years forgotten, are brought and fixed upon [the] mind.

He then is led to see the chambers of imagery [see Ezek. 8:12], the sins of his heart, and from thence at length to the sin and corruption of his nature, that fountain from whence all his defilement flows in the stream of his thoughts, words, and actions.

Upon this ensues a fear of that wrath and punishment which an enlightened conscience sees to be the demerit of sin, together with the sting and evil that is properly in sin itself but which perhaps has not been felt till the commandment came with power.

Then, every hateful passion [and] every disorderly affection sting and enflame the soul. The pain of which, joined to the aforementioned dread, differ only in degree and duration from what our Lord calls the never dying worm.

When a person is brought to this and sees no hope or possibility of deliverance by anything he can either do or suffer, then he may be truly said to be *broken in heart*.

II. He considered the remedy by which this cure is wrought. The Lord Jesus is the only, the infallible physician. And faith in his blood is the only, the infallible cure. But it behooves all to be cautious that they are not deceived in taking up with something short of a living faith and consequently insufficient.

III. He enquired in what manner this remedy is applied and what it is, from Hebrews 11:1. He showed that it is a powerful divine persuasion wrought in the mind by God, of a personal interest in salvation by Christ. This takes away guilt; this removes fear; this destroys corruption.

He concluded with a lively application.

First to such as have neither known the disease nor the cure spoken of. Those who are either quite careless and indifferent about religion or those who are lost and buried under the form but strangers to the power.

Second to those who are broken in heart indeed. These he ex[h]orted:

1. to close [i.e., come to terms with] with the conviction and not seek carnal relief of any kind.
2. to wait on the Lord in the use of means without weariness or intermission.

He, third pressed those who were once broken in heart, but have been healed by the grace of God, to a conversation suitable to the great things they have received. Which he did by briefly commenting on 2 Peter 1:5–8.

To add to faith, virtue, courage in professing and zeal in defending and recommending it. [Being] tempered with knowledge and prudence to be bold as lions but wise as serpents.

And to this, [add] temperance, that the more they know the more self denial they may practice.

And in consideration of the trials to which we may be daily called, to arm themselves with patience, not of a stoical kind, but such as is founded upon godliness that is a due sense of the Divine disposal of all events for our good.

And [it] is connected with brotherly kindness, labouring to add to these, love as the great bond and connection of them all. If these things are in us and, likewise abound, we shall neither be idle, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord.

John Newton (April 28, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 82–85.]

Isaiah 30:18–21

[‘And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment. Blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem. Thou shalt weep no more. He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.’]

I cannot give a regular scheme of his discourse. [Therefore] I set down unconnected the following observations:

From verse 18.

1. How different God’s ways and thoughts are from ours. The people were before represented as ripe for destruction, but here the Lord is waiting to be gracious.
2. That it is in the display of mercy that the Lord is greatly exalted; his mercy is over all his works.
3. They are blessed and happy that wait for him, that wait in his ways, in the ordinances in which he has appointed to meet his people. For though he may seem to put them off, he will surely meet them at last.

From the 19th [verse]

1. Religion is a social not a solitary thing. Believers are described as assembling and dwelling together yet,
2. It is personal. *Thou shalt weep no more*. The promises have no life or sweetness till they are brought home to the heart.
3. It is our bounden and expected duty still to cry to the Lord.
4. The certainty of his answering. So sure as he hears, so sure as he is God, he will fulfill the prayers and cries of his people.

From verse 20.

1. They who set out in God’s ways are warned beforehand to look for affliction and trouble. Some is accidental from an evil world; some essential, arising from the sense of an evil life and the corruptions of an evil heart.
2. The promises of teachers is mentioned as a balance for all these.
3. We are taught here to regard human teaching [as] the external ministry [and] as a great blessing, though ineffectual in itself.

From verse 21 he observed

1. That the outward teaching is promised to be accompanied with the teaching of the Spirit.
2. It is called a *word*, to signify the power and efficacy with which the Lord speaks to the heart. A word, a hint is sufficient, though man multiplies words and arguments to no purpose.
3. It is said a word *behind thee*, to denote the sudden, unsought, unexpected way in which the Lord first called us, when we are as it were turning to the right or the left or any way to get from him.
4. The word says *this is the way*, which shows the certainty and clearness with which the Spirit speaks to the soul. It points out the way so plainly that it cannot be mistaken.

5. It adds *walk ye in it*, giving power as well as light, which manifests it to be of God and distinguishes it from that light which may reside in the unrenewed understanding which whatever notion it may give us of the way, will never dispose us to walk cordially in it.

John Newton (Apr. 28, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 80–82.]

Isaiah 35:8

I admired Mr. Wesley's preaching very much. Sometimes he preached in a learned style in churches and among the great ones, and when he came among simple people he laid all his greatness aside. At one place in a barn filled with cottagers he took for his text the words of the prophet, 'A way shall be there and a way and it shall be called the way of holiness.'

He began by saying, 'Love is the way to heaven.'

He then interrogated the people by saying, 'But you will say, how can we know when we love God?' He said, 'I ask you men, how do you know when you love your wives? Ye wives, how do you know when you love your husbands? Ye parents, how do you know when you love your children?' Then he said, 'You answer, I feel it.' He then said, 'That is right, it is better felt than explained.' And he went on to show the people what steps they must take in order to gain the love of God, and exhorted them to continue in the love as the way to happiness here and forever.

John Barritt (April 27, 1789 in Enniscorthy, Ireland)
[Barritt, Manuscript Journal, MARC, MA 1977/208, 13–15.]

Isaiah 40:1

[JW] made a lively good discourse from, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God!' Proving to the confusion of all that affirm the contrary that God can and will comfort his people—not by keeping sin in them, but by destroying it root and branch.

William Ripley (June 17, 1772 in Thirsk)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 40.]

Isaiah 45:22

In the evening, at the Foundery, he [JW] preached upon 'Look unto me all the ends of the earth and be saved!' He explained [1.] what it was to look unto Jesus; and 2. what it was to be saved. To be saved, he said was: 1) to be convinced of sin, 2) to be justified, [and] 3) to be sanctified.

Conviction he observed was the first work of the Spirit and was variable as to the means and degrees. Justification or the new birth, is an instantaneous work of the Holy Ghost and is illustrated by the birth of a child. He affirmed that sanctification is also an instantaneous work, being the death of sin. This he illustrated by the death of the body, which must be an instantaneous stroke.

He endeavoured to prove that these two operations in the souls were easily distinguished by supposing a professor of each to stand up. Ask the first, have you no pride or anger or desire? He will answer, Yes I find much of these boils in my heart and at times they greatly trouble me; but by the grace of God, I can keep them under and desire to—to the prize of my high calling. Ask the other the same questions and he will answer, No, by the grace of God I find no remains of any evil and have likewise the

witness from above that they are all done away and the change was instantaneous.

He affirmed that if sanctification is not an instantaneous work because not mentioned in the Bible, neither is justification; for we can only prove either from the reason of the thing experience.

William Briggs (November 10, 1762 in London)
[Briggs Letter to CW, Nov. 10, 1762, MARC, DDPr 1/11.]

Isaiah 57:1–2

[‘The righteous perish and no man layeth it to heart.’]

Mr. Wesley told us, God often took them away before calamitous seasons; and when gone, he employed them amongst the angels, to minister to them who are heirs of salvation.

William Ripley (July 9, 1784 in Wakefield)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 72.]

Isaiah 66:8–9

[‘Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord. Shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God.’]

Here he [JW] showed that God in this respect was carrying on a wonderful work amongst the Methodists, in convincing and removing or pardoning sin; and renewing the heart, and that speedily.

William Ripley (June 18, 1772 in Osmotherley)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 40–41.]

Isaiah 66:8–9

Mr. Wesley preached ... from Isaiah 66:8–9: ‘Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such a thing? Shall a nation be born in a day? etc.’

He showed in a literal sense it could *not* be, but spiritually understood it could, nay it has been the case. That it might be said to be fulfilled when on the day of Pentecost three thousand were converted under one sermon [cf. Acts 2:41], and soon after five thousand [cf. Acts 4:4]. [He] spoke of the rapid progress of the gospel among all nations in the apostolic days, and afterwards. And of the work of God within the last century among the Methodists.

Then he applied it to the work of grace in the hearts of individuals. ‘Soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children. Shall *I* bring the birth, and not cause to bring forth, saith the Lord. Shall I cause to bring forth and shut the womb? saith *thy* God.’ And here he observed that till the apostles’ days instantaneous salvation was rarely spoken of; that though we have some scripture examples left upon record, yet they were not many. But that the light of grace shines brighter and brighter to the perfect day, and is now more clear than in the primitive church. [He] told us his own bigotry to the Church of

England when at Oxford and how impossible he believed it that any could be justified in a moment by faith—till visiting the prisons. One and another was justified under his prayer. But then he thought these were rare instances, and it was because these were soon to die that God showed them peculiar mercies.

But he could not allow even yet that there were living witnesses who knew their sins forgiven. But in a little [time], some were in deep distress after hearing him and his brother preach, and while he joined with them in prayer, one and other of these also testified the same thing and walked according to the profession made. And then said he, ‘What was I that I could reply against God?’ But twenty years after this time, he said he could not believe there was such a thing as instantaneous sanctification.

And when Jane Cooper first spoke of having received it thus, he could have hit her in the face. But when he saw Bathsheba Hall and many other witnesses of this in London, he became again silent before the Lord. But then he observed it was at first reckoned a great thing if a person obtained this in five, six, or seven years after they were justified. But now said he, it is not so. I knew one Hannah Hooley in this town who was justified at 14 years old, and sanctified about six weeks after, and she stood firm for two years and then fled to Abraham’s bosom. And many I have known convinced of sin one month and justified the next; justified one month and sanctified the next. Nay, many convinced one week or one day, and sanctified the next. One young lady he said was convinced of sin, justified, and sanctified in twelve hours—who before was quite carnal and unawakened. Then he strongly enforced the text ‘Shall I bring to the birth and not give power to bring forth, etc.’ insisting ‘All things are now ready. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day, etc.

Hester Ann Roe (April 1, 1782 in Macclesfield)
[manuscript journal, pp. 179–80.]

Isaiah 66:8–9

‘He took occasion ... to show the nature of the work which God had wrought among the Methodists, namely, that it was a quick work—a deep work—a clear work—an extensive work—a lasting work—and a growing work.’

Thomas Rutherford (August 2, 1772 in Leeds)
[Henry Moore, *An Account of the Lord’s Dealings with Thomas Rutherford*
(London: Butterworth, 1807), 51–52.]

Jeremiah 6:16

[‘Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein’]

He considered the scriptural religion as a way of faith, love, and obedience and showed that each of these was an old way, as old as the Reformation, the apostles, the prophets, David, Moses, Noah, and Adam.

And a good way, the way of peace and happiness here and the hereafter.

John Newton (April 5, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 256–57.]

Jeremiah 8:20

[‘The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.’]

A close popular discourse, under phrases *harvest* and *summer*. He spoke of the gracious seasons when God is more eminently working with his word and ministers in convincing and converting sinners to himself.

Such were the first times of the gospel,

Such in our days were the revivals in Scotland and New England.

Such a time it is at present in our own land.

In other places, it may be truly said the harvest and summer is past, but the Lord is still dealing wonderfully among us. Yet in this town, he observed there is reason to fear the work is at a stand [still] and many have reason to make the complaint they are not yet saved, either from the guilt or power of sin. On these observations [he] formed a pressing exhortation to fear the Lord and seek his mercy.

John Newton (April 12, 1761 in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 281–82.]

Hosea 14:4

[‘I will heal their backslidings.’]

First. The general sense of these words is that all mankind are backsliders, revolvers from the living God. In a particular manner applicable to all who have in some measure known the power of God.

Second. How God will heal their backsliding.

First. In what sense anyone that ever knew the power of God are backsliders?

Who are they that are backsliders after they have either sought or ever known the life (grace) of God, in preventing grace, gentle drawings from above. Desires to know the love of God. Let me die the death of the righteous, and light as well as good desires. You had light to discern that eternity is all that is worth a thought, and that we are justified by faith. Likewise, some convictions, an inward reproving or monitor, the loving Spirit of God. Backsliders from preventing grace: desire after God decreases; unfaithful stewards of the grace of God. The world appearing again a delightful thing. How you do not so clearly discern the light of God. It does not shine as it did once. Not so scrupulous as you were once; you can now give place to evil. If this be your case, you are plainly a backslider from preventing grace.

Are there not many of you come further? God had given you repentance; a conviction that every thought of your heart is evil. Did not you then plead guilty before God, unable to repel the power of your sins? Remorse, condemnation, fear of the devil, of the wrath of God. When you are thus cut off from all trust in yourselves, then you may be said to have that first repentance. How surprising it is that many have learned a kind of cant word, ‘You do not take them off from their own works.’ What can be a more heavier stroke to self-dependence than, ‘Lord, I am damned; [I] give up every plea beside.’ What self-dependence is now left? Have you got rid of this happy repentance; are you easy before God makes you easy?

A higher experience still: Christ was revealed in you. You could cry out he loved me and gave himself for me, He spoke the word of healing to your soul, removed the guilt and power of sin. But where are you now? Do you find his Spirit witnessing with your spirit? Is the power of God withdrawn? Is the lamb become a lion again? Suppose that sin hath dominion again over you; what is the grand danger in this case (place)? Beware of miserable comforters who cry, Peace, Peace, when there is no peace.

What says the God that gave the Scriptures? 'I will heal their backslidings.' Sinner, take it to thyself. Let me not depart from this place till thine eyes behold again the salvation of God. You ask, how will the Lord heal you; a great danger lest you [end] up with a half healing, or no healing at all. Some will tell [you], you cannot be healed, or not so perfectly healed but there will be some scar left behind.

In the north of England, a wretched man heard my brother first at Newcastle. He was healed at once and continued so for two years. At length, he was called to preach. He came to me to consult about it, and was much discouraged because he was a tinker. I told him it was no blame at all. He came to London, but was rejected by the people. From thence he went to Carlisle and then to Newcastle. He then fell into all manner of wicked ways and wandered into the vales of Cumberland. At a little inn, there were a parcel of lead miners drinking and swearing and they fell of abusing the Methodists, calling them a parcel of damned rogues that went about the country deceiving people; and this man was one of them and [someone] hath found it out. Speak, man, speak. He answered, 'I know you are all a parcel of villians, and I am more a child of the devil than any of you; and I am afraid that all of you will have a better place in hell than me.' As I happened to be in those parts and hearing of him, found him out, and gave him in charge to one of our brethren. Coming again into those parts, I found him full of faith and full of God.

Look up and be thou saved; unto him that hath died for thee; though your sins be as red as crimson, his blood shall wash them white as snow. The Lord make you as at first; come naked to a naked Christ.

George Story (September 1, 1766 in Plymouth Dock)
[*Works*, 4:518–19.²]

Ezekiel 37:1–11

[The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. ... Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.']

He showed under each particular how it typified the work of God in conversion of souls by the preaching of the word in every age and how it has been particularly illustrated and fulfilled in our own time. I cannot well set down particulars, perhaps the reading [of] the verses may lead me more into them than anything I could write.

John Newton (March 25, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 170–71.]

²Source: Duke, Rubenstein, George Story Papers, a notebook labeled P.xviii. Written in Macaulay's shorthand.

Habakkuk 2:14

['For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.']

He [JW] showed the most probable time when and how this great work would begin and be carried on. It appeared that this reformation would begin first in England; secondly in the other Reformed churches; and thirdly the papists; and fourthly the Jews; fifthly the Mahometans; sixthly and lastly the pagans.

Allen Edmundson (July 23, 1781 in Keighley)
[Edmundson, Manuscript Commonplace Book, 1779–83.³]

New Testament

Matthew 7:14⁴

['Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.']

In his sermon, he showed a straight and narrow way to life: First, the gate of repentance and faith. Second, the narrow way that our Lord lays down in the eight beatitudes, in the sermon which he preached on the mount.

William Ripley (June 16, 1772 in Yarm)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 40.]

Matthew 22:4

Come to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, was the subject; and seeing preaching in the field and house resembled somewhat the Marriage of the Lamb—which will come suddenly one day before two thousand-years are finished, which have rolled round since Jesus Christ's birth 1784 times.

William Ripley (July 11, 1784 in Halifax)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 73.]

³Keighley Local Studies Library Archive (shelf number BK15/13/18a). Keighley, West Yorkshire.

⁴Cf. JW, Sermon 31, 'Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, XI' (1750), *Works*. 1:664–74.

Matthew 22:17

[‘Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?’]

He [JW] discoursed largely on duties of magistrates, and on the obedience which was due to them; setting forth how far it was consistent with Christian liberty for people to insist upon their rights, when they found themselves oppressed by inferior magistrates exercising a discretionary authority which exceeded their commission.

William Stephens, secretary of the trustees of Savannah Georgia (November 13, 1737)
Stephens, *A Journal of the Proceedings in Georgia* (London: W. Meadows, 1742), 1:19.

Matthew 25:46

[‘And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.’]

On the nature and duration of all torments:

The duration is strictly and properly eternal. The same word is used (in the Greek) both of the punishment and happiness there mentioned.

The nature he considered according to the old division, the pain of loss and the pain of sense; or what they are lose and what they feel.

As to the *first*, they lose both [a] what they once had and [b] what they might have had.

[a] They lose all they had. Death is to the wicked a fatal and irretrievable bankruptcy. It cuts them off at once from all their enjoyments, and sends them into an unknown desert somewhere. Laughter and festivity, diversions, possessions, lands, houses, honours, titles, profits, pleasures, friends, relatives all vanish and like the baseless fabric of a vision leave not a trace behind. And this will be a double loss to those whose affections were fixed and entwined in these things and these only.

[b] But they lose likewise, what they might have had. While they live they lose the pleasures and comforts of true religion. They are strangers to the peace which passeth understanding, the joys of the Holy Ghost and the light of God’s countenance. They know not that sense of the love of God, which improves prosperity and makes adversity, supportable and welcome. Thus, they lose during life what alone can make life truly desirable.

And when they die they will [experience] a new dreadful, unthought of, irreparable loss; the loss of God, the loss of their souls. To be cut off and banished for ever from the only fountain of happiness seems a light thing at present to those who are immersed in flesh and blood and sensuality. But when they are stripped of all, when they are helpless and miserable in themselves, torn from the creatures and driven far far from him who made them, they will find that absence, and estrangeness from him is alone sufficient to make an intelligent creature wretched.

But there is *secondly*, the pain sense or what they will feel. There is a positive punishment for both body and soul, a never dying worm and a fire that cannot be quenched. Perhaps there is a reference to the two usual methods of consuming dead bodies then in use. Burning by the heathens and burial by the Jews. Both are applied to the whole man, both [body] and soul will perish and [be] consume[d], be food for fire and for worms and yet never be consumed or ended, but always in the same dreadful state.

By the worm may be signified: the stings and remorse of conscience; all evil tempers as pride, hatred, envy, insatiable and unavailing desire; all evil passions as rage against God, against themselves, and each other; unspeakable terrors and black impenetrable despair.

And farther, the stings and wounds they will receive: from their companions in torment; from the devil and his angels, the sworn implacable enemies of human nature, who it is likely will be permitted and appointed to exert all their power, malice and fury in tormenting the wicked; and from their old abettors and partners in iniquity, who will reproach each other, with bitter hatred and imprecations.

The everlasting fire is perhaps figurative of the wrath of God, that indignation and vengeance which shall burn like brimstone, penetrate and pierce every part of the soul; and perhaps it is strictly literal for the pain allotted to the body. [Newton adds: *The last is Wesley's opinion.*] This is the same idea of the descent of sin. This all have deserved and many will surely experience [it], but blessed be God who has sent his Son, his word, his Spirit to deliver us from so great a death.

John Newton (April 9, 1761, in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 268–70.]

Mark 1:15⁵

... He offered salvation to all – from ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’

He showed first, when the gospel of Christ is preached and received in any *nation, city, town, neighborhood, or family*, it may be said the kingdom of God is set up there. Or if any individual embraces Christ and the glad tidings of salvation by faith, the kingdom of God is set up in that heart—and completed when his kingly power is manifested and all his foes in that heart slain, so that he reigns alone.

Then, second, what it consists in: righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Ghost. All these begun in justification, but without their contraries in sanctification. Then he *enforced* the text, ‘*This kingdom of heaven is at hand.*’ He addressed himself to all sorts of people, states, and conditions—old and young; yea to children 6 or 7 years old; drunkards, swearers, Sabbath-breakers, thieves, liars, and lewd persons—and told them: You may *now* be delivered from the power of your most besetting sins, even this day, this moment. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, crying: ‘serve the devil no longer, he is a bad master. Yield now to him who loveth you, who died for you, who will save you from all your sins here and from hell hereafter. He loves you all; *even thee*, thou poor sinner. He bled for thee and wilt thou resist him still? Dost thou *feel* thou art a sinner deserving nothing but hell? Art thou willing to know Jesus as thy Saviour? And art thou afraid to come? Fear not. Look up. He is nigh thee. Dost thou want a pardon for all thy sins? Shall I tell thee thou mayest have it next year? Next month? Next week? Nay, I *dare* not. I am not sure thou canst. Tomorrow is none of thy own. But thou mayest have it *today*. It is at hand. I am sent to offer it. Look up *now*, even this moment. ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved’ [Acts 16:31]. It is true that in *general* the work of repentance is carried on by very slow degrees. Most people are a long time after they are convinced of sin before they are justified. But why is it? Even because of unbelief. The word of faith is nigh thee. Fear not, only believe.

Art thou a child of God, a believer, and feelest his kingdom in a measure set up in thy heart? Dost thou know, ‘he hath loved *me* and given himself for *me*’, and yet dost thou feel the remains of anger, pride, self-will, inordinate desires and affections? Then thou knowest the meaning of those words

’Tis worse than death my God to love
And not my God alone.

Thou are assured ‘Without holiness no man shall see the Lord’. But thou art all *unholy*, all *unclean*. Thou art now convinced none but God can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. Hear then his promise to thee:

⁵Cf. JW, Sermon 14, ‘The Repentance of Believers’ (1767), *Works*, 1:335–52.

‘I will sprinkle clean water upon *thee*, and thou *shalt be clean*, from all thy *filthiness*, and from all thy *idols* will I cleanse thee. A *new* heart also will I give thee, and a new spirit will I put within thee. And I will take away the *stony* heart out of thy flesh, and I will give thee an heart of flesh, and I will put *my Spirit* within thee and cause thee to walk in my statutes and thou shalt keep my judgments and do them’. ‘I will circumcise thy heart and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, etc.’ ‘His will is thy sanctification.’

But art thou to wait a year, a month, a week? Art thou to stay till thou are more worthy? Not at all. Come just as thou art. Come *now*, a helpless sinner to a mighty savior. But some may say, Is not sanctification a gradual as well as an instantaneous work? Yes, it is both. You may obtain a growing victory over sin from the moment you are justified. But this is not enough. The *body* of sin—the carnal mind—must be *destroyed*. The *old man* must be *slain*, or we cannot put on the new man which is created after God (or which is the image of God) in righteousness and true holiness. And this is done in a moment. To talk of this work being gradual would be nonsense, as much as if we talked of gradual justification. However, most persons are a long time after they are justified, before they are sanctified wholly. But does it need to be so? Not at all. I have known a person justified one month, and sanctified the next; justified one week, and sanctified the next. Nay, I have known a person justified and sanctified in an hour and glorified the next. ‘A thousand years are with the Lord as one day, and one day as a thousand years.’ ‘He that believeth shalt be saved.’

Where art thou then? O believer, who art longing for all that righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost spoken of in my text! This kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is *nigh thee*. *It is here*. *Take it*. *Now* believe. Wait for nothing. Lord Jesus, speak to that heart. Tell it, ‘I am God and not man.’ Say unto it, ‘*I will*, be clean.’ I am here mighty to save. Behold me, behold me, etc.

Then he prayed for penitents, for backsliders, for the unawakened, and for children, such as could till now break the Sabbath, steal apples, tell lies, disobey parents, etc. In short, I never heard him so particular. He was full of life and love and power, and wept several times while he prayed.

Hester Ann Roe (March 30, 1782 in Leek)

[manuscript journal, pp. 173–76.]

[cf. Rogers, *Extracts*, 180–84 (some alterations).]

Mark 4[:3–20]

[‘Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow. ... He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. ... And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.’]

[Newton: I shall not attempt a scheme but set down a few observations on that portion of Scripture as I can recollect them from him.]

The word of God is always the same. From whence then proceed the difference observed in the preaching it, [as] some totally reject it, some receive it for a while, [and] some bring forth fruit? He answered from the parable that it is owing to the different disposition of the hearers.

[1.] The far greater part are compared to the highway side. They hear without thought or attention and immediately so soon as, or perhaps before, they go from the place the enemy of their souls takes it out of their hearts. Some care, [but] pleasure or impertinence offers, which prevents their making any reflection upon what they have heard and they remain as they were.

[2.] Others escape this danger. They receive the word with joy, but their hearts are rocky. They have no depth of earth and therefore no root of close conviction in them. Therefore, when difficulties or

reproaches arise they are offended, they wither and fall away and generally throw an odium [i.e. very strong dislike] upon the profession they forsake.

[3.] With others, the word seems both to take root and to spring up but alas thorns spring up together with it. The cares of this world if they are poor, the deceitfulness of riches if rich, and the desire of other things in those of middling rank choke the word. They either greatly impede the growth of grace or absolutely prevent it. And so it is that the persons of either of these three degrees are liable to all these evils, as well as those who seem to be more directly in the way of them. The poor are often deceived by riches, and the rich are often overwhelmed with cares, and both rich and poor [are] pestered with unjust and unsuitable desires. Care of the head is a duty, care of the heart is a sin; and generally, whatever care discomposes our minds, if it tempts us to distrust God, if it unfits us for duty, if it makes [us] peevish to others or uneasy in ourselves, is of that sort which chokes the word.

Riches, he observed, are so deceitful that it is next to impossible for the best of Christians to have them without being worse for them. They almost necessarily foment pride, anger, self-sufficiency, and occasion many inroads upon our precious time. He took notice of the propriety of the word *choke*.

Grace is the breath of the divine life by which the soul pours forth itself in prayer and praise and draws back continual supplies from the fountain of life. But the love of the world, when it gets between God and the heart, interrupts this breathing and almost stops the passage.

[Newton comment: 'It was in my judgment a good suitable discourse, though perhaps he carried the notion of falling away, farther than it is necessary to agree with him.']

John Newton (May 1, 1757 in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 99–101.]

Mark 4:3[–20]

The question raised is why should the same Word have no effect on some people? Our Lord's account of the reason why: Three orders of people; why the word don't take effect; and who brings forth fruit.

[Two sections to the sermon]

I. The meaning of these words.

II. Apply them to ourselves.

[I. The meaning of these words.]

'He began to preach'; steadily, professedly; his first grand discourse.

'There was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea' in a fishing boat, that he should stay close to shore, lest he was crowded and he must retire.

'Behold, there went out a sower to sow.' First our Lord, then the twelve apostles, then the seventy and finally the rest. Every preacher of the gospel is a sower. Anyone who speaketh the Word of God. Christ is the principal sower, his ministers the subordinate seeds. All that are not his ministers sow not seeds but chaff.

The seed is the Word, the sower is the preacher, and the soil or ground is the heart and soul of man.

The Word preached is like seed sown in the furrows of the field. [the account ends here; next pages missing in papers]

George Story (September 2, 1766 at Plymouth Dock)

[Duke, Rubenstein, George Story Papers, a notebook labeled P.xviii.]

Mark 4:25–28

[‘For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath. And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.’]

After taking notice of the different senses in which the kingdom of God is spoken of, he considered and pursued the similitude and showed how apposite it is to the Christian experience. The first outward appearance of the living seed sown in the heart are small, weak, and unless skillfully observed, easily mistaken. But as there is life, it continues springing [up], though often insensible not to bystanders only but even to the possessors. But at length it appears to more advantage, like corn, first the blade, then [the] ear—a complete system of holiness as to parts, though imperfect. And is advancing towards the full corn in the ear when grace shall be ripened into glory.

He made two inferences.

1. How we may reconcile those who will have the work of grace [as] an instantaneous and others [as] a gradual thing? By allowing both, the first motions either of convictions or faith, are sudden as lightening, one sermon, one [instance], one word effects. But the progress of each is continually advancing.

2. How much of this work is to be ascribed to God and how much man may be considered as a worker in his own salvation? The similitude of seed explains it. Seed when put in the earth will grow if the rain and the sun afford their influences but not else. So it is God alone that sows the seed, which is not natural to the heart. It is God alone [who] can water it. It is he alone [who] can cherish and forward it with the warm influences of his grace. Our part indeed it is to rise night and day, to watch and pray, and use diligence in all the appointed means. But neither have we sufficiency even for this of ourselves. So that upon the whole when we have [put forth] the utmost of our poor doings, we must acknowledge that the Lord is the Alpha and Omega, the beginner, continuer and finisher of our faith.

John Newton (April 30, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 92–93.]

Mark 4:26–28

We had a glorious discourse from the words of our blessed Lord, ‘First the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn’; which he explained by that admirable text of St. John: ‘Little children, young men, and fathers.’

William Ripley (July 3, 1784 at Epworth)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 69.]

Mark 9:23

He told us all things are possible to them who believe. He then defined faith. He said, We could not believe when we would; but we might believe if we would; showing God's working on the mind, from the first dawn, to the perfect day. And in every stage of the divine life, he said, if we only acted according to what grace God had given, we should be enabled to believe for more. But if not, it would cut the very sinews of our faith.

William Ripley (July 23, 1784 in Bingley)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 76–77.]

Mark 12:34

[‘And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.’]

‘Thou art not far.’

He first described the person to whom this was said and second showed wherein he came short of the kingdom of God.

[*First*] In his description of the scribe, he took in the particulars of the Pharisee's protestation [in] Luke 18. As many of the scribes were Pharisees (that is of the strictest profession of religion) he supposed [lay down without proof] to make the most of his character. This in the text was one. If so, to take both parts together:

- 1) He acknowledged himself indebted to the goodness of God for all that he had or was.
- 2) He was morally honest or did no harm, though honesty when right[ly] understood is of a wide extent as he showed in explaining extortion.
- 3) He was strict in all the ordinances of worship.
- 4) He was very bountiful and charitable.
- 5) He was sensible that all the foregoing particulars were nothing worth without religion of the heart.
- 6) He seemed to be enquiring and seeking after this also.

Under each of these steps, he showed how far such a one here outstripped the practice of most professed Christians, yet even thus far a man might go and yet fall short of the kingdom of God.

For it seems, *secondly*, that the scribe was destitute of true repentance and ignorant, both of the nature and necessity of true faith, and if so by consequence, devoid both of the love of God and of his neighbour, notwithstanding his notions about them.

This led him to set forth the gospel hope in the gospel order: conviction, repentance, faith, pardon, holiness.

John Newton (March 21, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 145–46.]

Luke 8:27–35

[‘... Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.’]

He *began* with observing that the actions and miracles of our Lord recorded in the gospel are not only historical but typical and that the many bodily cures he then performed are proper emblems of the more important cures he still works upon the souls of men. He showed that the man possessed by devils, driven among the tombs, naked, wounded and distracted, not to be tamed by medicine or confined even by chains and fetters, is a strong representation of our sinful state by nature, in which we are: agitated by many hurtful and outrageous passions; wandering and hurried from object to object; despoiled of our proper robes and ornaments; wounding our consciences and peace; inaccessible to good advice; and not to be restrained by the strongest ties of duty, gratitude, interest or resolutions.

He *then* showed the blessed change the word and the grace of Christ makes when it comes to the heart, similar to what is recorded of the man in the text. Our legion is dispossessed and we are delivered. We are brought to sit composed at his feet, to delight in his company, to receive his instructions [and] to be guided by them. We put on garments of holiness and good works and are restored to a right mind, to a regular understanding, a subordinate will and proper poise and balance of affection. So that we judge of things and are influenced by them according to their real value and in their due order.

Lastly, he applied the whole to the different parts of the audience.

[Note: Polly, Newton’s wife had requested that he preach on this verse. There is no record of JW preaching on this text any other time.]

John Newton (March 22, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 148–50.]

Luke 9:62

[‘And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’]

The passage refers to what is related of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:20.

[‘And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee?’]

‘To put the hand to the plow’ may denote any beginning motions to serious religion, in desires, increase of light, or conviction: to be sensible of the importance of the one thing needful, to make enquiries after it, to break off outward sins, [to] attempt a positive reformation, and [to] attend upon the means of grace.

To lose these impressions, to neglect the means, to relapse to worldly cares and pursuits, etc. is to look back and this is exceeding dangerous.

John Newton (April 6, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 258.]

Luke 12:7⁶

[‘The very hairs of your head are all numbered.’]

The expression is figurative; it means that the providence of God is extended to small things as well as great things

I. We allow that men see but a little way, a few miles; an angel may take in the whole earth at one view; God takes in all space at every moment.

Theocritus: *Joviis omnia pleno* – all things are full of God. You know what is said and done in this room. God knows every creature, every angel, whether it be good or evil, every beast of the field, every bird, fish, insect.

[Heitzenrater summary: The manuscript then goes on in fragmented shorthand, dealing with several typical Wesleyan themes, many of which are found in the published sermon on this text: the relationship of animate and inanimate nature, the souls of brutes, the widening three circles in which providence can be perceived, the assertion that God ‘can see one thousand years as one moment’, the care of the Lord for both hero and sparrow alike, and the need for diligence, meditation, reconciliation.]

George Story (October 5, 1784 in Salisbury; written in Macaulay’s shorthand)

[Duke, Rubenstein, George Story Papers, a notebook labeled P.x, pp. 25–28.]

[Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, 171–72.]

Luke 12:42

[‘And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?’]

He observed that the usual phrase ‘that all good things are lent to us’ is not strictly proper, since a borrower is always supposed to have a right while the loan is in [his] possession and is only obliged to return it at the time and on the terms agreed. The expression in the text is nearer the truth and more instructive. He enquired,

I. *Who is the wise steward?* [He is] the man who knows and considers that he stands in the relation of a steward towards God: that every good, every faculty, every opportunity he enjoys is a talent entrusted to him to be employed in his master’s service and that he has nothing great or small that can with any propriety be called his own.

The wise steward considers that his soul, with all its powers, is the Lord’s, [and that] his understanding, will, affections, memory, imagination, are given him to be used and improved in exact conformity to the Divine will and precepts.

So likewise his body. That is his senses, health, strength, members, together with all external advantages, whatever share of wit, judgment, graces, interest, substance, learning, success, pleasure or anything else that he esteems valuable. These and every one of these are so many talents, to be carefully and prudently laid out in our Lord’s service and according to our Lord’s directions. And not one of them to be misspent upon ourselves, and not one of them to be in any manner trifled with.

⁶Cf. JW, Sermon 67, ‘On Divine Providence’ (Mar. 3, 1786), *Works*, 2:535–50.

II. The *faithful steward* is he who knowing and considering all this, steadily and constantly carries it into practice.

III. He applied the subject (in this and the forgoing head, repeating all the former particulars) [and] urged us to consider how far we had been wise and faithful. He observed that whenever we forget, [or] whenever we cease to think of our obligations to God, we are foolish. And whenever we act in such a negligent disposition we are unfaithful stewards. That is whenever we employ our understandings in anything that has not either a tendency to increase the knowledge of God in ourselves or enable us the better to communicate it to others – when we follow our own will – when we pretend either to love or dislike any person or anything without a reason founded upon the word of God – when we exercise our memory or imagination upon any thing that has not some usefulness.

So likewise, whenever we employ our senses, our health, strength or members upon things in which the service of God is not concerned, or when we do not use them to the utmost when that calls us. Wwhen our tongues are engaged in converse that is neither to the praise of God nor mutual edification. And farther, when our time, influence, skill, [or] capacity are taken up with trifling aims – when we do not strive to exert all in the sanctuary service – when we look on our money as our own – when we can spend any part of it to procure eatables when we are not hungry, [and] drink when we are not thirsty, to obtain foolish diversions or to gratify pride or vanity.

In these and all instances (O how innumerable are they) we are equally foolish and unprofitable.

John Newton (April 27, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 74–76.]

Luke 15:7

[‘I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.’]

He first explained the words and then showed the grounds of the assertion. The inhabitants of heaven rejoice in: the glory of God; the manifestation of his attributes, his wisdom, power, and goodness.

Now these are more eminently displayed in the conversion of notorious sinners than in such who, having been by restraining grace withheld from scandalous courses, may in comparison of the others be called righteous, as not needing the same kind of repentance.

John Newton (May 5, 1759 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 216.]

Luke 20:[34–]36

[‘Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.’]

A contrast to his yesterday’s discourse [on Matt. 25:46]. The children of the resurrection (the children of God), those who obtain the benefits to which the resurrection is the entrance, die no more.

Their number is complete and needing of no repair.

They neither marry nor are given in marriage, which is needful in the present dispensation to preserve the species.

They are equal to the angels in their knowledge, love, purity, glory and privilege. Indeed the Scripture seems to speak of them in some sense as superior to the angels, at least of the highest order. And their representatives are described as possessing the inmost and nearest circle round the throne (Rev. 4:6; compare Ps. 8, Heb. 1:14 and 2:11, 16). From hence arise the noblest motives to obedience, gratitude and a cheerful disdain of the fleeting perishable things of this life.

John Newton (April 10, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 272–73.]

Luke 21:34–36

[for Watch-Night services on two separate years]

[‘And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. ... Watch ye therefore, and pray always....’]

I. He first spoke of the signs of the times mentioned in that chapter and endeavoured to show that they are even now fulling [i.e., being fulfilled]. He insisted on four: wars, earthquakes, signs in or from heaven, and roaring or rising of the waves mentioned in verse 25.

II. He considered the charge with the reason. How much it imports us to take heed and be upon our guard, lest either things that are sinful or things that are even in their own nature indifferent should overcharge and stupefy our hearts. To many that awful day shall come unawares. That it may not be so to us, we have need to watch and pray, [for] either of these without the other are insufficient.

III. He spoke of the promise implied to those who are enabled to improve [i.e., profit from] the caution. That so doing they shall be accounted worthy to escape when destruction goes forth. The Lord shall hide and secure his own people and when he gives the outward court worshippers [i.e., nominal Christians] to be trodden down, he will take care of his remnant.

John Newton (April 29, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 89–90.]

Luke 22:19⁷

[‘And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them.’]

I showed at large: 1) That the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a *means of conveying* to men either *preventing*, or *justifying*, or *sanctifying grace*, according to their several necessities. 2) That the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they *want* the *grace* of God, either to *restrain* them from sin, or to *show their sins forgiven*, or to *renew their souls* in the image of God. 3) That inasmuch as we come to his table, not to *give* him anything, but to *receive* whatsoever he sees best for us, there is *no previous preparation* indispensably necessary, but a *desire* to receive whatsoever he pleases to give. And 4) That *no fitness* is required at the time of communicating, but a *sense of our state*, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; every one who knows he is *fit for hell* being just *fit to come to Christ*, in this as well as all other ways of his appointment.

John Wesley (June 28, 1740 in London) [JW, *Journal*, 19:159 in this edn.]

⁷Cf. JW, Sermon 101, ‘The Duty of Constant Communion’ (1787), *Works*, 3:427–39.

Luke 24:25–26
[on Easter Sunday]

[‘Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?’]

[A full and powerful discourse. I cannot attempt to analyse it throughout.] He enquired:

First, what the prophets had spoken concerning Christ. That he should be God made man, that he should suffer, die, be buried, rise, and ascend to glory.

Secondly, he showed the necessity that all these things should be as they were foretold. He must suffer because he stood in the place of sinners. He must be glorified that they might be sanctified and by ascending up on high he received gifts for men. He must be man that he might be capable of suffering. And he must be more than man; yea, he must be nothing less than God that his sufferings or doings might be meritorious.

Thirdly, he showed how much cause we have to take up the complaint in the text. We are by nature ἀνόητοι [foolish], without understanding in these great points of which the prophets spoke. He instanced in justification and sanctification, *mistaking the former for the latter, and the latter for a mere shadow, an outside form of religion*. And when we have received something of these truths, we are slow of heart to take them in their full extent.

John Newton (March 26, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 176–77.]

Luke 24:34
[on Easter Sunday]

[‘Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.’]

He observed that different people require and understand different proofs of the resurrection. The natural man is only capable of an external rational proof. But the real believer has a proof beyond this, and far more powerful and convincing, [which is] an experimental proof in his own heart. He showed to the former that Christ’s resurrection is an indubitable matter of fact, because:

1. It is testified by a sufficient number of witnesses.
2. These witnesses could not be deceived themselves.
3. Nor can they with any colour be suspected of a design to deceive others.

These three points being established, the matter is unanswerable.

But the believer can prove to himself that Christ is risen because he knows himself to be risen through him and with him. He is sure that this doctrine must be true by its important effects. In looking to a risen and ascended Saviour, he has found: pardon and deliverance from all his sins, a renewal of his whole nature, and power to maintain a life and conversation according to godliness.

John Newton (March 26, 1758 in Liverpool)

Luke 24:34
[on Easter Sunday]

Mr. Wesley preached at the new church [David Simpson's] from 'Christ is risen indeed'. He showed that there is a rational and an experimental evidence for this, but the latter is to be preferred. That as Christ Jesus rose again for our justification, so the moment any vile polluted sinner believes on Christ and is justified, in that instant this experimental evidence begins. He receives the Spirit of adoption, whereby he can in that moment cry 'Abba Father'; 'My Lord and my God'. But this experimental evidence is much stronger when that promise is fulfilled, 'I will send the Comforter to abide with you forever.' That this indwelling of God as our sanctifier is the privilege of all believers, and is received by faith as well as justification. He then encouraged those who are seeking this and those who have attained.

Hester Ann Roe (March 31, 1782 in Macclesfield)
[manuscript journal, p. 177; cf. Rogers, *Extracts*, 184–85.]

John 3:7

['Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.']

He showed the ground, the nature, and the necessity of it.

[1] This spiritual death, which Adam by his fall entailed upon his posterity and through which we are by nature without God and without hope, devoid of all good, replete with all evil, and obnoxious to all misery is the foundation of this doctrine and intent.

[2] And nature of it is to repair the divine image in us, and to restore the privileges and favour to us which sin has despoiled us of. He illustrated the metaphor in the text and showed at large that the state of a child in the womb and of one born into the world are not more different than the state of a dead and a regenerated soul. The sinner before conversion is without the proper use of his faculties; the eyes of his understanding are closed, his ears are stopped and his heart motionless towards God; neither has he any conception of the light of life or the breath of the Spirit of God.

[3] He showed the necessity of this change by proving that we can neither be happy here or hereafter without it and concluded with suitable inferences, etc.

John Newton (March 19, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 135–36.]

John 5:39

['Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.']

I showed, concerning the Holy Scriptures: 1) That to search (that is, read and hear them) is a command of God. 2) That this command is given to all, believers or unbelievers. 3) That this is commanded or ordained as a means of grace, a means of conveying the grace of God to all, whether unbelievers (such as those to whom he first gave this command, and those to whom faith cometh by hearing) or believers, who by experience know that 'all Scripture is profitable', or a means to this end, 'that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works' [2 Tim. 3:17].

John Wesley, *Journal* (June 26, 1740 in London)

John 7:37

[‘In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.’]

He began with observing the ceremony usually performed on the last day of the feast [and] there mentioned of drawing water and pouring it on the brazen altar, which he supposed might give occasion to this declaration of our Lord in which he considered.

1. What is meant by drinking? Answered from the 39th verse, it implies receiving the Spirit of God, not in a miraculous but an experimental and internal sense, since it hints at something not to be bestowed before the resurrection of Jesus. He instanced in those fruits of love, joy, peace and that spirit of prayer and praise which is the true Christian’s portion.

2. What it is to *come* [unto me]? From the context it appears only another expression for believing.

3. What is thirsting in the scripture sense? It is a figurative expression and denotes desire. And which is nothing but [what] the enjoyment of the object can satisfy. For such an affection is thirsty, if drink is withheld, neither riches nor honour nor power can allay. Such is the thirst likewise of the new born soul after God [and] nothing worldly can seem as an equivalent, nothing but pardon, grace and holiness can make it happy or contented.

From these premises, he inferred a close and weighty address to sinners to seek after the fountain of life.

John Newton (April 24, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 55–56.]

John 11:48

[‘If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.’]

He made a very short discourse [and] began with observing how much the wisdom of the world is very foolishness. And [he] enquired what would be the consequence if all men should believe in Christ, not nominally only but with the cordial faith the gospel describes, a faith in Jesus as saviour of sinners and a saviour from sin to each individual.

It would then [be] that each man: would love God and his neighbour, would do no wrong, would abound in good works, would be a faithful subject to the king and a true lover of his country, and would enjoy continual peace in his own breast.

These were the several heads, [and] in conclusion, he inferred:

1. That whoever oppose the genuine preaching of the gospel have neither one nor another of these properties.

2. That the way to be useful or comfortable is to be a believer.

3. That it is the great duty of all who have received the gospel themselves, to promote the study and knowledge of it to the utmost of their power.

John Newton (March 23, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 161–62.]

Acts 10:34–35

[‘But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.’]

[Newton comment: This I think the most exceptionable discourse I ever heard from him. Therefore, I shall say little of it. I thought in his account of the fear of God and true righteousness, which he says may be found in an acceptable degree among the wildest heathen nations, he was neither consistent with Scripture or with himself. I think the meaning of the words is plain if referred to the prejudices Peter and his brethren entertained against the calling of the Gentiles. What he [Peter] now heard from Cornelius confirmed and illustrated the vision recorded in the former part of the chapter.]

John Newton (March 6, 1761 in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 259–60.]

Acts 17:30

[‘And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.’]

[In] which he observed was a declaration the wise and learned Athenians little expected to hear applied to themselves. Yet with all their boasted attainments and elegance they were grossly ignorant: of God and themselves, of the extent of their duty, the means of pardon, and the true end of their being.

In such ignorance our ancestors in this land were once buried, and the popish ignorance which afterwards succeeded, was little less deplorable and dangerous.

He farther observed in explaining the first clause that since the Reformation, most Protestant countries (ours in particular) had relapsed into gross ignorance again, having given up the great doctrines of grace which are light and life to the soul. This darkness likewise has been of late years removed, the gospel doctrines have been revived and published, and many have, many still do rejoice in the knowledge of God and in his love. The phrase ‘winked at’ (ὑπερίδων) signifies to overlook; that is, he forbore his justice [or we] might well have [been] punished. But mercy prevailed. He did not call them strictly to account, he waited to be gracious. Thus he bore with our forefathers; thus he has borne with us.

But now he *commands*. Now [that] he has given more light and better opportunities he expects a suitable return. He winked at the times of ignorance, but will not wink at the contempt of the gospel. So soon as this was published, he commanded all nations, wherever it appeared, to repent and receive it.

He applied *all* to the present time. We are not heathens but Christians, not papists but Protestants. Not Protestants in name only as was in general the case of the nation a few years ago, but we have the pure evangelical doctrine once more restored to us. And [we] not only hear but see with our own eyes the wonderful works of God. To us therefore, to all who hear, there is an especial command to repent. We have not the plea of ignorance to extenuate our unbelief, nor can any expect that God should wink at them, if they wink and shut their eyes against the light.

In the close, he explained the nature of repentance: not an unavailing [or] ineffectual sorrow, not a superficial or partial change. But a change of heart evidenced by a universal change of conduct. The means of this is faith in a crucified saviour.

John Newton (April 4, 1761 in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 252–53.]

Acts 20:27

[‘For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.’]

He [JW] dwelt only on one head, which was to show what was all the counsel of God. He divided it into four particulars: Repent, Believe, Love, and Obey.’

Allen Edmundson (April 23, 1780 in Bingley)
[Edmundson, Manuscript Commonplace Book, 1779–83.⁸]

Acts 24:16

[‘And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men.’]

He considered,

1. What is a good conscience? It implies: a knowledge of the word of God, a knowledge of one’s own heart, a faithful attention and application of the one to the other, and such a course of behaviour as an enlightened conscience can pronounce agreeable to this rule.

[Newton comment: ... I could have wished something more express[ed] on the only way of cleansing a filthy conscience – the blood of sprinkling, the blood of Jesus. I make no doubt that Wesley supposes this ..., but there is too little of it in his preaching.]

2. How is this exercise to be maintained? As the Spirit of God is necessary in every part: it is necessary to read the Scriptures, to examine ourselves, to meditate much and to pray without ceasing, and to watch against temptation.

John Newton (March 10, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 271–72.]

Romans 3:22–24

[‘For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.’]

From part of the foregoing verses (there is no difference) he showed that though, in an outward respect with regard to moral good and evil, there is a great difference between some men and others: some being licentious, some sober, some covetous, some generous, some religious, some profane. Yet with respect to justification and acceptance before God, all are upon equal terms. All [are] bound under the law and unable to pay a single farthing and that: *first*, because all have sinned and; *second* all have come short of the glory of God. Under the former phrase, he considered actual sin [and] under the latter, internal corruption.

And [he] showed from many excellent arguments not only that all mankind are sinners before God, but likewise those who think it some extenuation that they are not outwardly so bad as others are often if not always greater offenders in the judgment of God as well as more indisposed and inaccessible

⁸Keighley Local Studies Library Archive (shelf number BK15/13/18a). Keighley, West Yorkshire.

to conversion than those they despise. In as much as those spiritual sins by which we resemble the devil are rather worse than those which degrade us into brutes. Thus pride, though a secret and with some a venial sin, is a more direct affront and opposition to God than intemperance etc.

He then spoke of the meaning and extent of redemption, containing a deliverance from innumerable evils to which we are naturally liable and an admission to all possible blessings and happiness; [and] that this redemption *dearly purchased* by the blood of Christ, is *freely given* to us without price or consideration on our part and through grace when we had not so much as the inclination to seek it.

He concluded with suitable exhortation.

John Newton (April 23, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 53–54.]

Romans 5:5

[‘And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.’]

[JW observed] It is a blessing to have preventing, enlightening, or convicting grace. But this is not the salvation I am treating of. Unless we have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, we cannot be saved. It is well to make a beginning, but we must go forward, or perish everlastingly. We are both justified and sanctified by faith, and have a direct witness of the Spirit, without which neither can exist. Others judge us by our fruits: a calm, even, gentle, resigned, patient mind in all states and situations.

Robert Roe (September 4, 1780 in Bristol)
[*Arminian Magazine* 7 (1784): 524.]

Romans 6:23

His text was ‘The *wages* of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ He insisted strongly on this eternal life being the free gift of God, not obtained by works in the whole or in part, but alone through Jesus Christ our Lord and through faith in him.

That this eternal life is *love*, begun when, being justified by faith, we have peace with God and his love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost [see Rom. 5:5], so that we love him *because* he hath first loved us [see 1 John 4:19]. But then *this* love is often mixed with unbelief and wrong tempers, and therefore widely differs from pure love, of that which casts out all fear [see 1 John 4:18], which ruleth and filleth the whole soul in holiness.

That faith is the *hand-instrument* or receiver of this, but shortly faith shall be swallowed up in light; whereas *love* never faileth, but is consummated in glory forever.

Hester Ann Roe (March 31, 1782 in Macclesfield)
[manuscript journal, p. 177.]

Romans 8:13

[‘For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.’]

1. He explained the terms:

‘Mortify.’ The original word signifies not so properly to kill as to put to death. Christ has condemned sin in the flesh and he confers upon us the honour of executing his sentence.

‘The deeds of the body.’ That is the works of the flesh, the desires and properties of the old man. And this is to be done by denying them supply and starving them, by resisting and counteracting them. This must be done through the Spirit, the power of Jesus Christ continually received by faith and prayer; for to attempt it of ourselves would be *magno conatu nihil agere* [to accomplish nothing with great effort].

‘Ye shall live.’ The term of life, when applied spiritually, has a 3-fold signification: the life of faith, the life of holiness, and life eternal.

2. He showed the proof and illustration of the whole sentiment. The life of God and the flesh are exactly opposite. Whatever tends to promote the one, causes a proportional decay in the other. Every irregular desire and vain temptation, if complied with, is as water cast upon this divine fire. And every resolute opposition to them is a wind to animate and increase the flame.

The more closely we walk with God and are set against the world, so much the more faith is in exercise, [and] holiness increases and flourishes. But sin is a cloud which: intercepts between God and our souls, abates our zeal, repels our confidence and chills our affections.

Sin is a nipping wind, which blasts our fairest prospects of fruitfulness and turns a blooming garden into a barren wilderness.

John Newton (March 23, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 150–51.]

Romans 13:11

[‘And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.’]

In the application he told them, that it was unbelief that hindered. Faith would do the work. Say, I would believe; I can believe; I do believe; and the works are done. Come Lord Jesus, I am determined to believe; help thou my unbelief.

William Ripley (July 5, 1784 in Epworth)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 70.]

1 Corinthians 1:23–24

[‘But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.’]

He *first* enquired what is contained in the doctrine of ‘Christ crucified’? Previously describing our state by nature, as corrupt and polluted with inward and outward sin, lying under the curse of the law,

without hope and without God. In this condition the gospel proclaims a happy recovery through Christ crucified, pardon and justification by his blood and grace, and sanctification by his Spirit.

Secondly, why this doctrine is ‘foolishness to the Greeks’ and a ‘stumbling block’ to the Jews? He brought these names down to our own times applying the first to those who are wise, [and] the others to those who are righteous in their own eyes; or as he expressed it, the men of wisdom and the men of form.

The former reject everything beyond the grasp of their reasoning powers and comprehension. Though they might as well, if consistent with themselves, deny their own existence, or the notion of sun, light, motion, etc.—since all these are attended with difficulties insuperable to human reason. They trust to their own performances for acceptance of their persons with God and to their own resolution and prudence for correcting their lives. To these the method God has chosen in which to save sinners is foolishness, enthusiasm, etc. for it is directly opposite to the scheme of their proud hearts.

The latter typified by the Pharisees of old, [who] trust in their attendance upon the outward duties of worship and their compliance with the lesser points of the law, but ignorant of the righteousness of God, of spiritual obedience and the new birth, seeking to atone for their sins and to purify their hearts by what they call duties and services, by prayers and alms and fastings, while the thought of being saved wholly through Christ without any regard to their own duties, is worse than foolishness with them. They account it a stumbling block, downright wickedness, [and] an opening a door for licentiousness.

Thirdly, he considered to whom and how this despised gospel is made the wisdom and power of God? Those who are called, not outwardly only, but by the inward call of the Spirit,

1. These see Christ the wisdom of God inasmuch as in him the divine attributes are harmoniously reconciled. Justice and mercy, truth, power and love, all have their several claims answered. All illustrate and are illustrated by each other, whereas upon the best schemes of human wisdom, some or other of them must be eclipsed and jar [against each other].

2. In him they see a design worthy of God, completed by means adequate and answerable to the great end. The plan and the event exactly correspond. Again they experience Christ to be the power of God: in breaking the chain of their lusts, in changing the bent of their hearts, in enlighten[ing] their dark understandings, [in] subduing their stubborn wills, and [in] fix[ing] their affections, which heretofore cleaved to the dust, upon God alone.

John Newton (April 25, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 65–67.]

1 Corinthians 1:23–24

‘But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.’

It is plain here that the apostle is giving an account of his own and his brethren apostles’ doctrine, likewise the doctrine of all the true ministers of Christ to the latest ages of the world; that is, to preach Christ crucified, according to the commission which their Lord has given them. For in these words are the sum and substance of the doctrine of the apostles and all the ministers of the gospel.

The word, ‘we preach’, properly and in the original, signifies openly to publish and proclaim as a herald or ambassador, as one that proclaims a message from a king. So is it with those that preach the gospel of Christ: they do publish and proclaim a message from the great King of heaven.

But in order to understand what is here spoken, we must:

[I.] First inquire, What is meant by 'Christ crucified', and how it is to preach Christ crucified.

[II.] Secondly, show how the preaching of Christ crucified is to the Jews a 'stumbling-block' and to the Greeks 'foolishness'.

[III.] And thirdly, how the preaching of Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks.

I. What is meant by 'Christ crucified'. It is plain that the apostle means to preach that doctrine that centers in justification and sanctification through his blood; both these center in Christ. But what are we to understand by the doctrine of justification? All men are born in sin and by reason of this we are guilty before God. We are children of wrath even as others. We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and thus we are not justified by our works (these are not the cause of our justification before God). But we are justified by faith in the bleeding Lamb—his faith is counted for righteousness.

This is the first part of Christ crucified: justification by faith in his blood. But what are we to understand by the other part—viz., 'We are all by nature dead in trespasses and sins; therefore, we must all be born again.' Born from above. As great a change must pass upon us as when we were born at first. All our nature must be changed by the operation of the Holy Ghost and then be made alive, receive a new life (which is hid with Christ in God), and so, being born again, grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For he sanctifies throughout in soul and body. We go on from grace to grace, till we appear at last before him.

Now this is properly the doctrine of Christ crucified, with regard to justification and sanctification. When we preach and proclaim this doctrine to all men, of the renewing of our nature in the image of God, then we properly preach Christ crucified.

II. But how is it, when we preach this doctrine, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness. Here a difficulty may lie in our way. It may be objected, Who are the Jews? There are but few or none of them among us. True indeed, there are few or none of the nation of the Jews among us. But of their character, there are abundance. Of the temper and disposition of the Pharisees, there are great multitudes amongst us who have an outside righteousness and on that account despise others. Have we not found of them, in every Christian country, that are wise in their own eyes and think they have righteousness enough to justify them before God? Indeed, in that case they may say, There is not much need of Jesus Christ. But suppose we were to obey the law and be justified by our own works? What are we to do for that which is past, when the law requires a perfect obedience? How can we satisfy for the sins already committed? Again, my brethren, there are persons in every country and town who trust in their own righteousness and say in their hearts, 'Stand by; I am holier than thou. There are of this character, all over the kingdom.

It may also be said, What have we to do with the Greeks? They are gathered to their fathers long ago. But if their successors are still among us, it is the same thing. There is the same spirit and temper amongst us, their children, that was among them. The doctrine of Christ crucified will always be 'to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness'. The Greeks of old time were men that prided themselves in their own wisdom and took upon them to understand everything by their own reason. Is there not abundance of these all over England, that are satisfied they can comprehend everything by their own reason? But they certainly must not believe they have a soul; for who can account for the soul and body? Who can account for the impression the mind makes upon the body, and the body makes upon the mind? They can no more account for the union of their own soul and body than they can for the renewing of our nature.

Dr. Hunter, one of the greatest men of genius in the kingdom in physic and anatomy, when he had read his lectures to the young gentlemen his pupils, and described to them the various effects of

motion upon the body and how this motion was produced by the free circulation of the fluids, but could not account for the production of it at first, says, 'I call to you all, gentlemen; this is all the discovery that has ever been made.'⁹ How is it then, my brethren, that men will believe nothing but what they can account for? Those who are of this temper must certainly be brutes.

Suppose you come into conversation with one of those who talks so much about natural reason—you will find that he is not so wise as he ought to be. Suppose you should ask him if any part of his conduct is wrong. And you yourself may discover it; he perhaps may acknowledge it. But is not God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and knoweth all things? But he may say, I intend to repent and do better for the time to come, and I hope by that repentance the Lord will forgive all that is past. Suppose you should tell that man he is quite in the wrong; though he should repent never so much, yet that never could justify him before God (nor alone for the sins he has committed); and that there is but one way 'to be justified', i.e., by 'Christ that died, the just for the unjust; he is the propitiation for the sins of the world, and by him alone we can be justified'. Will not this appear foolishness to him? Will he not say a man can never be justified by the righteousness of another?

The admirers of Dr. [John] Taylor, which are all over the world, will tell you, How is it consistent with reason for a man to be justified by the righteousness of another? It appears foolishness to him. But suppose all crimes that are past are forgiven—how will you renew your natures? What will you do to be born again? But probably he will tell you that, in process of time I will mend. What is my reason and my understanding given me for, but to direct me when I am wrong, so that though I have acted a wrong part some times, I shall have a large deduction made, my own dear reason above all. If you told him that, as he professed to believe the Bible, and the Bible says that you must be born again, and till that change is wrought you cannot see the kingdom of heaven; will not he say, How absurdly do you talk—these are enthusiastic notions. All this appears foolishness to him.

A churchman will talk this way. Suppose it were to one that is prudent in his own eyes and wise in his own conceit. Ask him how he is to make atonement for what he has done amiss. He will tell you, I go constantly to church and the Sacrament, and I make no doubt by doing so, I will get a pardon and all my sins blotted out. Suppose, my brethren, you will tell such a person that he is quite of a different mind from St. Paul; that though they should go to church and the Sacrament every day, it would not atone for their sins. He probably would give you very harsh language. If you were to ask him, How do you intend to change your sinful nature? By praying more, and communicating more frequently, and hearing more, and by little and little all good habits will come and bad habits go off; and by and by, I will be what I want? But this is beginning at the wrong end of the point. For we must be born again, and this is done when we are sanctified and receive the Spirit which renews our nature. If you speak in this way to those persons, will they not say, This is the way to make all the men in the world enthusiasts? But nevertheless, though it be to the 'Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, yet to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God, and the wisdom of God'.

III. This is the third point to be considered, viz., How the preaching of Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks.

You may observe, my brethren, that they are outwardly called whenever the Bible declares that they ought to forsake sin and wickedness and turn to God. Whenever any portion is brought to your mind, you may then think you are called of God. Whenever you have a remarkable turn of providence, either in prosperity or adversity, this is a call from God. But again, does he not call you from within, when you

⁹The reference is to William Hunter (1718–83). Cf. *Two Introductory Lectures, delivered by Dr. William Hunter, to his last course of anatomical lectures* (London: J. Johnson, 1784). But JW does not seem to be quoting a printed source. Cf. JW's similar quotation in *On the Trinity*, §13, *Works*, 2:383.

find but a wish, that you may die the death of the righteous? Every good desire is a call from your heavenly Father. These are common calls. But over and above, there is what some call an effectual call: namely, when the Lord calls you by his grace; when he says, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee'; when he calls you from darkness to his marvelous light. Is not this the time you are called, and when you can say, I know that my Redeemer liveth. This is then the time you are called by his grace.

But again, my brethren, the doctrine of Christ crucified is the wisdom of God to them who are called, because all his attributes and perfections harmonize: justice and mercy meet together, the love of God and the justice of God are united in this scheme, and all the wisdom and the truth of God are likewise explained. When he thus declares that God and sinners are reconciled through his Son, there is a display of all his attributes and perfections. This gospel is the power of God unto salvation to men that may be without all form of religion. There are many that are outside Christians but utter strangers to the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The gospel is the powerful means whereby God saves sinners. My brethren, how many of you were such strangers to the gospel. The time was, when you were in darkness and without God and without hope in the world, that the Lord looked upon you. He revealed Jesus Christ, made of God [unto us] wisdom, righteousness, and redemption. He showed you the blood that was your peace. You were then able to say, 'My Lord and my God.' You had redemption through the blood of Jesus.

My brethren, what an amazing change was this, wrought on your spirits, when he thus proclaimed liberty to the captive and burst all your bonds asunder. Does not the Lord say, Look unto me all the ends of the earth, and be saved? Is not the Lord able to save? Is he not willing to blot all your sins as a cloud, and your iniquities as a thick cloud? If you can say from the heart, 'Lord, be merciful to me a sinner,' the Lord will blot out all your sins.

I observe again, that this gospel is the power of God with regard to sanctification. Certainly it is, my brethren. You have experience in some degree the moment you were justified. In that moment, the love of God was shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost. You could then say he loved you and gave himself for you. You then found that sin had no more dominion over you. Then, my brethren, this was the moment of your sanctification. Then you were endowed with power from on high, and from that time you had power to mortify the deeds of the body and subdue all love to the world. Then the kingdom of heaven was like a grain of mustard seed. From this time you could say, Jesus is mine, and I am enabled to love him and all mankind. The preaching of the gospel is able to bring unto you perfect soundness and sanctify you wholly; the Lord is both able and willing. My dear brethren, this is the will of God, even your sanctification. By looking unto him, dying and rising again and sitting at the right [hand] of God, you will be made holy.

The command is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.' The Spirit will perform this so that nothing may dwell in your hearts but love alone. Suppose ever any of you have tasted it in the least degree; who of you could not wish that nothing may dwell in your hearts but love alone, driving everything else out of your hearts.

The Lord grant that he may hasten this time. Let him reign alone in your hearts, and may you now cry unto him, My Lord and my God, do thou take all I have, and make me all thine, and keep me thine forever.

William Williamson (April 28, 1774 in Wakefield)
[A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the New Meeting-House at Wakefield, on the 28th of April, 1774 (Leeds: Printed, and sold by all the Booksellers, 1774).¹⁰]

¹⁰Williamson transcribed the sermon as preached, then published his expansion; included in *Works*, 4:520–24.

1 Corinthians 1:30

['But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.']

He spoke [on] the words in order. Christ is made:

1. *Wisdom*. Making us even wise to salvation, instructing us in the knowledge of God and ourselves in the nature and the means of happiness. But this only to those who need it, who are apprized of their own ignorance.

2. *Righteousness*. For justification, when we are sensible of our own sinfulness, and that we are in ourselves justly liable to the wrath and curse of God, then we are interested in all the merits of his life and death.

3. *Sanctification*. But this likewise to the unholy. We must first be sensible of our depravity and defilement and then by the faith we receive the grace and Spirit of Christ to cleanse, purify and adorn our hearts. He who is the fountain of life [and] of holiness in himself, becomes the principal of holiness [in] us and thenceforth [we] no more live as of ourselves, but Christ liveth in us and is the very life of our life.

4. *Redemption*. This, if understood of the present life, may be as a recapitulation of the former heads. [But] if of hereafter, it implies a full deliverance from: every sin, every evil, every enemy, every fear. [Indeed it is] a total removal of all that is contrary to the perfection of our nature and the possession of whatever can make us complete either in happiness or holiness.

John Newton (March 27, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 179–80.]

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

['What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.']

In the words he observed there are two strong reasons urging to an extensive duty. From the *first* clause, he spoke to several points.

1. That the Holy Spirit resides in every believer,

2. That this is the gift and mere mercy of God,

3. That a Christian is a temple of God. He illustrated this thought by pursuing the metaphor. A temple is a place in which prayer and praises ascend from man to God and where God more eminently manifests himself in blessings and mercies to man. Thus, we should be always rendering [prayer and praise] and this would be the way for us to be always receiving,

4. That these things are mentioned as the most obvious truths by the apostle of which no Christian, even the weakest, could be ignorant. Though in our days we see them questioned, denied, and ridiculed every day, and all that own them treated as enthusiasts.

From the *second* clause, he spoke of the propriety the Lord has in us by creation, redemption, and possession, and the amazing price and invaluable privileges of our deliverance.

From the *third*, he enquired what it is to glorify him,

1. In our souls.

2. In our bodies, in our understandings, wills, and affections; in our aims, thoughts, words and actions. In general, it is in all we have, and do, to intend the setting forth his glory and praise. Letting the light and the talents we have received from him, so shine, and so appear in the eyes of all that know us that they may be constrained to bear witness for us that we are the disciples of Jesus.

John Newton (April 23, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 51–53.]

1 Corinthians 8:1

[‘Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.’]

He spoke highly of knowledge and many other gifts, natural, acquired or divine—all which he proved to have a natural tendency to puff up, if not under subjection to love; for love only buildeth up in every virtue that forms the perfect Christian.

William Briggs (November 7, 1762 – during ‘London Blessing’ controversy)
[Briggs letter to CW, Nov. 10, 1762 (MARC, DDP 1/11).]

2 Corinthians 6:2

He proved ‘now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation’. He was very lively, and freely offered Jesus Christ to all; and proved both by reason and Scripture that now is the day of salvation, from the guilt, power, and in-being of sin.

William Ripley (June 19, 1772 in Stokesley)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 41.]

Galatians 2:20¹¹

[‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’]

I. What is implied in the first clause?

1. To be made partaker of his death for justification.
2. To be made conformable to him in his death, by [the] power received from his Spirit, to crucify the flesh with the lusts thereof; that is, to possess sanctification.

II. The nature of faith. It appears from this text that it is no less than a divine conviction that Christ *loved and gave himself for me*, in particular. However ambiguous the word may be thought in some places, here the sense is plainly fixed and cannot be mistaken.

III. The fruits of this faith, or the effect.

Hereby we no more live in ourselves, but Christ liveth in us.

¹¹Newton suggested to JW to preach on this text.

We live not to our own wisdom, we see that we are foolish and ignorant, that we have no understanding as of ourselves in the things of God. We live not to our own strength. We see and own that we are insufficient of ourselves to any good work or good thought. We live not to our own righteousness. We dare not call our best works, either ours or good. Above all, we live not to our own wills. We fulfill not our own desire. We seek not our own glory in anything we do, so far as we act from a real principle of faith.

But in all these respects, Christ liveth in us. He is: our wisdom discovering to us the way of peace, our strength enabling us to walk in it, [and] our righteousness in which we dare stand before a holy God. And hereby he enables [us] to perform the will of God, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and to follow him in all holiness and obedience.

[Newton comment: 'This is something of a sketch of the outline of the discourse, but I believe few could fill it up so lively, copious[ly], and yet [in such a] concise a manner as Mr. Wesley.']

John Newton (April 30, 1757 in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 94–95.]

Galatians 3:22

[‘But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to all that believe.’]

[He treated] under three heads.

I. That all mankind are concluded shut up in sin by the scripture doctrine. To prove and illustrate this he expounded the 6th [Thou shalt not kill], 7th [Thou shalt not commit adultery], and 8th [Thou shalt not steal] commandments according to our Lord’s comment, Matt. 5.

We are not only forbid[den] to commit actual murder but every groundless, or excessive motion to anger, every harsh invective, or opprobrious name, is declared a species of murder; so likewise to hate or bear ill will to our neighbour (1 John 3:15). And by comparing this text with [Gal. 6:1] it appears that only to omit reproving our brother when in a fault, we hate him and are as murderers in God’s sight.

So likewise, the commission of adultery is not restrained to the outward act, but extends to every motion of the eye and heart. [Matt. 5:27–28.] And we are chargeable with it whenever our affections are set upon worldly things (James 4:4).

And we are guilty of theft continually—for perhaps though we steal not from our neighbour, yet how often [and] how grossly do we rob God of our hearts and services!

II. The promise made and

III. The persons to whom. The promise of pardon, holiness, happiness by faith to those who believe not nominally or notionally, but in deed and in truth.

John Newton (April 26, 1757 in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 71–73.]

Galatians 5:6

[‘For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.’]

Circumcision was instituted by God, [as] the seal of his covenant, [and] the rite of admission to his church. It could not be omitted without sin under the Levitical state and the Jews were very exact in observing it. But the expression in general extends to all divine ordinances and may be applied to those enjoined under the New Testament. Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, reading [Scripture], hearing [sermons], prayer, etc. are good and necessary. But if alone, if not proceeding from faith and love, are unavailing and worthless in the sight of God. The believer will observe them duly, and the mere formalist may employ himself about them to little profit.

Uncircumcision likewise cannot profit. Indeed, it cannot be supposed that anyone could expect profit merely from the non-observance of a positive command. The apostle means by the former word all that the Jews gloried in and trusted to. By this latter he means all that the uncircumcision (the heathen) most valued themselves for. This may be all included in what is at this time with us called morality. Thus we are taught that neither a religious profession nor a course of benevolence and virtue so-called, can either justify a sinner in this world or save him from wrath in the world to come.

Neither the formal nor the moral man can attain to heaven, but faith in Jesus, working by love, producing a resemblance to him and sweetly fulfilling his commands. Or faith wrought by love in the soul and putting itself forth in continual exercises of love to God and man. The faith, which has this character, justifies us here in the sight of God, and in our conscience, and shall openly justify us hereafter in the presence of the whole world.

He concluded with a proper application.

John Newton (April 11, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 276–77.]

Galatians 5:18

[‘But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.’]

He *first* showed what is implied in being led by the Spirit.

As we are blind, we need a guide. As we are weak, or rather without strength, we need a support. The Holy Spirit supplies both these offices [good actions], bringing us to a knowledge of Jesus Christ by faith, directing our steps into the way of holiness and peace and maintaining our progress therein from step to step.

Secondly, what it is to be under the law.

1. In the primary sense it means an attachment or a subjection to the ceremonial laws of Moses. The apostle wrote this epistle to correct a mistake in this manner.

2. By allusion to the former it signifies a legal spirit in opposition to the gospel by which many slighting, or forgetting, the only propitiation for sin, look for justification and acceptance from their own works.

3. It means a bondage under the power of sin which the knowledge of the law irritates, but is unable to remove.

4. A fear and subjection to the sentence of the law, a dread of punishment, death, hell, etc.

Thirdly, he illustrated the proposition in the text that being led (as above mentioned) by the Spirit of God, [who] delivers us from being under the law in any of the foregoing respects. The ceremonies and shadows are abrogated, their end being fully answered by the appearance of Christ in the flesh. And when we are enabled to believe we see at once that he only is our righteousness and our peace. We receive from him, grace and strength against our corruptions, and find the sting of death and every evil taken away.

John Newton (March 20, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 139–40.]

Galatians 5:25

[‘If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit’]

The great truth of the divine life communicated from and maintained by the Spirit of God was, he observed, at times indistinctly apprehended and acknowledged by some of the wiser heathens. But their ideas of it were broken, confused and obscure and they often contradicted themselves. The gospel alone gives us a full and interesting view of this matter.

He inquired, *first*, what it is to live by the Spirit of God. In brief, it is comprised in the life of faith and implies: a sense of the divine presence, a persuasion of his favour, a continual dependence on him for power to serve him, and an actual communication of such grace and power from him suitable to our needs.

This should be a strong engagement to us to walk by the Spirit. That is, to regulate all our tempers, affections, thoughts, words, and actions agreeable to the word of God; to act in all things from a principle of love and to maintain a constant fear of offending or giving place to the smallest appearance of evil.

John Newton (March 21, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 141–42.]

Ephesians 3:14–20

Mr Wesley preached from Ephesians 3:14–20, ‘For this cause I bow my knees, etc.’ He addressed believers and explained the words in the order they stand; but insisted chiefly of Christian holiness, as being *rooted* and *grounded* in *love*, and hereby put into a capacity of comprehending the length and breadth, and depth, and height—yea, and a *growing* in grace till filled with *all* the fullness of God.

Hester Ann Roe (March 29, 1781 in Macclesfield)
[manuscript journal, p. 92; cf. Rogers, *Extracts*, 121–22.]

Ephesians 5:14

[‘Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.’]

The Rev. Mr. John Wesley preached at Hull on Sunday evening; and in the course of his sermon informed his hearers of the origin of nervous disorders—which, said he, all spring from the common cause: *sleeping too many hour in bed*. Mr. Wesley further asserted that a man who rises from his bed every morning at five o’clock must be free from nervous disorders.

Norfolk Chronicle (July 17, 1790), p. 4 [cf. JW, diary, June 27, 1790.]

On Thursday Mr. Wesley preached in Sheffield. He asserts that all nervous disorders originate from *sleeping too many hours in bed*, and says he never knew one man nervous who rose the five o’clock every morning.

Aris’s Birmingham Gazette (July 12, 1790), p. 3 [cf. JW, diary, July 8, 1790.]

Ephesians 6:10–11

I heard Mr. Wesley preach in Spitalfields Chapel with great liberty, from Eph. 6:11, ‘Put on the whole armour of God.’ I never heard a Christian armour so described before. In the course of his sermon he introduced an account of a French marshal, a very wicked man, but a great warrior, who in the blaze of battle lifted up his hand toward heaven, and swore by his Maker he would never quit the field while there was an Englishman alive in it! He was harnessed with steel, but while pronouncing the oath, with his arm extended, a musket ball entering the joints of the harness shot him in the arm pit, and down he fell. Mr. Wesley showed, in the beautiful contrast, that the Christian being armed with the panoply of God, i.e. his whole armour, no such part is left exposed, but the whole soul is covered and defended against every fiery dart of our common enemy, the devil.

Hester Ann (Roe) Rogers (October 24, 1790 in London)

[Thomas Coke, *The Character and Death of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers* (London: George Story, 1794), 68.]

Philippians 4:7

[‘And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’]

[JW preached] in two heads.

1. What the peace of God is and
2. How it keeps the heart.

His discourse was very short and rather an exposition of the verse than a methodical thesis. But the sum is: The peace mentioned is styled ‘the peace of God’, because he is both the author and the object of it.

It arises from such a sense of an interest in pardoning love, as [it] excludes doubts and servile fear.

It keeps the heart (the affections) rightly exercised upon right objects.

It keeps the mind (the reasoning powers) in due subordination to the Scripture, the Spirit and to faith; silencing those vain restless perplexing imaginations, which are so ready either to disturb or defile us.

And all this through Christ Jesus, he is our peace. His blood removes our guilt. His grace renews and purifies our souls; and /keeps us as the original word implies, like a city strongly garrisoned, so that our many enemies are not able to annoy us.

John Newton (March 18, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 141–42.]

Philippians 4:5[–7]

[Heitzenrater]: After some introductory comments about the Platonic nature of St. Paul's language and a quotation from Abraham Cowley ('and thence the truth is truest poetry') JW goes on to provide the general design of the sermon:

- I. What is the peace of God.
- II. How it passeth all understanding
- III. How it will keep our hearts.

The definition of the peace of God includes in outline form the three marks of that peace: calmness of manner, serenity, contentment. The basis of Wesley's view is reiterated in his typical trinitarian formulation: 'God is the object of it; [God] is our Father; God the Son is our Redeemer; God the Spirit is our Sanctifier.' One sure characteristic of such peace in a person's soul is that he is not afraid to die. The point is illustrated by a story about Colonel Gallatin who, though 'his knees smote' was 'not afraid of death at the battle of Fontenoy'.

The second point of the sermon enters the arena of spiritual epistemology. In describing how this peace passes understanding Wesley uses one of his favorite concepts: 'to say that it passeth all our sense' implies that 'it is deep in the understanding of the spirit'. Even the brute animals, he points out, 'have some shadow of a human understanding'. But the peace of God exceeds normal human understanding. He points out that 'we have spiritual senses to discern spiritual good and everlasting life; the wisdom of God requires it'. To support his point 'that [God's] peace surpasses their understanding' he refers to a saying by Mr. Selby 'at the University', for a man 'to comprehend the peace of God with his understanding is to think with his ears'.

The third point of the sermon is essentially a development of 'that phrase, Christian life'. The peace of God, Wesley says, 'garrisons the spirit' after the manner of garrisoning a city. This peace 'will keep our hearts, i.e., all our passion', on the one hand, and will also keep 'all the wondering of the manner, reason, and imagination'. It is, in the end, 'the common bond of all the branches of Christian perfection'. This leads Wesley to conclude on one of his favorite themes: the peace of God comes from giving your life to God, and results in 'having the mind of our Lord'.

George Story (October 6, 1784 in Salisbury; written in Macaulay's shorthand)
[Duke, Rubenstein, George Story Papers, a notebook labeled P.x, pp. [28v]–30.]
[Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, 170–72]

Colossians 1:10

‘Walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.’

This comprehensive exhortation of St. Paul is not intended for the gay, giddy, mad world but for those who love or fear God—principally for those who love, but also for those who fear, the Lord Almighty.

Formerly we were too hasty to jumble matters, and to make all either believers in the Christian sense or unbelievers. This manner of speaking, as it had a tendency to exalt some above what they ought, so depressed others without cause, even grieving those whom the Lord has not grieved.

I should be sorry to say or even to think that there were any in Londonderry who had no faith, namely they all believe there is a God. And I would hope that most of them have a conviction that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek, and this according to the apostle is a degree of faith. This is the faith of a heathen.

I have little doubt but most here present go beyond this, and believe that all that God hath revealed in the sacred Scriptures is certainly true. Now this is the faith of a Jew. They believed the Scriptures and were persuaded that according to their predications the messiah would come.

There is a degree still higher than this, and that is to be able to say with the apostle ‘This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ came into the world to save sinners [1 Tim. 1:15]. Now this may be termed the faith of John the Baptist, as it answers his dispensation and has for its object those truths of God which that greatest of the Old Testament prophets [John the Baptist] was appointed to promulgate, ‘Behold the Lamb of God’ saith he ‘that taketh away the sins of the world’ [John 1:29].

Now none of these can properly be called Christian faith—no, not even the last mentioned. For Christian faith takes in the death of Christ, and our Lord was not offered up till after the death of the Baptist. That alone can properly be called Christian faith which says to the victorious redeemer ‘My Lord and my God’ [Cf. John 20:28].

To the two last of these the precepts contained in my text principally belong, though not so as to exclude any who have a real measure of that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. [there is a line drawn here that likely denotes an ellipsis]

The words divide themselves into four parts: 1) walk worthy of the Lord, 2) unto all pleasing, 3) be fruitful in every good work, 4) increase in the knowledge of God.

[1.] Walk worthy of the Lord. The word ‘walk’ takes in all the motions of the body, all the actions of human life. It takes in also all the motions of the soul—all the thoughts, desires, intentions. In all these we are to walk worthy of the Lord. Let us not ask then which of these is *harmless*! Is this card playing, this dancing, this horse-racing, this cock-fighting harmless? Let us rather ask, Is it worthy of the Lord? This will on all occasions bring the matter to a short issue and leave us without doubt what we should avoid and what pursue.

[2.] It next follows ‘into all pleasing’. This should be our aim in all our thoughts, words, and actions, to consult the good pleasure of God. If any of you were in company with a friend you loved, you would strive in all things to make yourself agreeable to him. You would both do many things and omit many things in order to please him. And should we not, my dear brethren, do as much for God—the only true and all-sufficient friend—as we would do for any earthly friend? We are constantly in his presence. Let us then be most strictly careful, lest he see anything offensive or displeasing in our conduct. Let us sincerely and constantly endeavour to please him. And even though our endeavours should be mixed with much infirmity and error, he will nevertheless graciously accept of them. In the family where I was educated it was always the custom that when anything was done with an intention to please, though the

thing itself should be amiss, the child was commended. And so will the gracious Father of all act towards us—if we aim at pleasing him, he cannot help being pleased with us. I will only instance that celebrated man of whom no doubt many of you have read, the Marquis de Renty. He was bred a papist and through false notions of mortification constantly wore an iron girdle. Now I make not the smallest doubt but that this well-meant error was acceptable to God, and that by this means he had more grace than he otherwise would. So that we may lay it down as an invariable rule that though our best conceived schemes to please man may (yea probably will) prove unsuccessful, yet our weakest endeavours to please the Most High cannot fail of success if they only come recommended by sincerity.

[Treatment of the last two points is missing: 3) be fruitful in every good work, 4) increase in the knowledge of God. The manuscript is titled ‘Part of a sermon preached by Mr. Wesley’]

Alexander Knox(?) (June 2, 1778 in Londonderry)

[E.M. Forster Collection, The Archives of King’s College, Cambridge EMF/23/18.¹²]

Colossians 3:1

[‘If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.’]

He began with observing that no truth of the gospel is revealed merely for speculation. This and the following verses may be considered as the proper inferences from the doctrine of the resurrection. He expounded each part.

[1] To be *risen with Christ* implies: to have believed in him, to have been conformed to his death in dying to sin and to his resurrection in rising with him to newness of life, experiencing as great a change in our hearts as was effected in his body when he arose from the dead.

[2] Such are either described that they *seek the things which are above* or exhorted to seek them, as not having yet sought them enough the things: which are above, which come from above, and which lead upwards, [giving] pardon, peace, holiness, and communion with God.

The original word is ambiguous and may be either rendered ‘seek’ or ‘ye do seek’ and contains both the character and the duty of those who are risen with Christ. Something of these privileges we have already known, but much more remains, to have our hearts always impressed with the love and presence of God. How much might we see, did not sin and sense interrupt our view.

John Newton (March 27, 1758 in Liverpool)

[Gordon, *Instrument*, 177–78.]

¹²This is a manuscript book that once belonged to John Jebb (1775–1833), Bishop of Limerick; longtime friend of Alexander Knox (1757–1831). Jebb gave the book to a nephew, Rev. Charles Forster (1789–1871), grandfather of E.M. Forster. It seems likely that Knox made the transcription, and later gifted it to Jebb. Ryan Danker drew this manuscript to our attention.

Colossians 3:3–4

[‘For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.’]

[Newton: ‘But not having wrote so soon as I could wish, I find I cannot set down anything very particular of his discourse that was striking or peculiarly his. Though in the delivery I thought it not inferior to any I have heard from him.’]

The sum is that the believer is dead to sin and the world, [and] dead in himself, as to any power of acting from himself. Yet he has a life, an eternal life, hidden from the observation of the world and the assaults of enemies; hidden with Christ in God! What is contained in these great expressions! Yet great as they are they fall below the thing, for Christ himself is the believer’s life.

He appeared on earth to expiate his sins, [and] he appears in heaven as his advocate.

He has appeared in his heart as a Sun of righteousness with healing on his wings, and he shall appear hereafter in the time of trouble, in the hour of death and in the day of judgment. When he thus finally appears, not in the humble form he once wore, but in his great glory as Lord of heaven and earth and judge of [the] quick and the dead, then shall we also appear with him to behold his glory and partake of it.

John Newton (March 28, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 182–83.]

1 Thessalonians 5:19

[‘Quench not the Spirit’]

He advised us not to quench the Spirit; showing that those who had it, in that degree rejoiced evermore, prayed without ceasing, and gave thanks in everything.

Second, how we quenched it by despising prophesyings, and not holding fast all that’s good.

Third, not abstaining from all appearance of evil.

William Ripley (June 18, 1772 in Thirsk)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 40.]

1 Thessalonians 5:23

[‘And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.’]

He told us that the God of peace would sanctify us wholly and entirely. How welcome is the news of full salvation to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. He showed from Romans 3 what the law could not do, God by sending his Son, did effectually do by his precious death! And how the churches had rest after Paul’s conversion, Acts 9.

William Ripley (June 27, 1772 in York)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 42.]

1 Timothy 6:20

‘O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.’

He showed what were the things committed to Timothy, and then confined his discourse to the particular doctrines committed to the Methodists; and proved that the doctrine of Christian Perfection was the *one peculiar point they* were called to preach and practice, and that no other people under heaven did clearly insist on this, as a present and an instantaneous salvation. That they who did not preach it, or believe it, were no Methodists. Neither they who were not *now* preachers, and *now* hearers. All who were not *now* preachers he said were the devil’s preachers, and not sent of God, and he would have no such in connection, etc.

Hester Ann Roe (March 30, 1781 in Macclesfield)
[manuscript journal, p. 93; cf. Rogers, *Extracts*, 122–23.]

Hebrews 2:3

‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’

First, not lukewarmness.
Second, [not] desires.
Third, not escape sin.
Then, fourth, laying the blame on God.
And fifth, hell.

William Ripley (July 1, 1784 in Swinefleet)
[Ripley, *Memoirs*, 68.]

Hebrews 6:1¹³

[‘Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.’]

In the introduction he gave a judicious explanation of Matthew 7:6. [‘Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.’]

He considered.

1. What is meant by leaving the doctrines? Not to depart from them or give them up, but writing to those who had received the gospel, St. Paul directs them now [that] the foundation is laid, to advance the superstructure.

2. What is perfection? He observed that our ideas are often obscure and indistinct by being overloaded. The simple idea of perfection is *pure love*—the love of God and our neighbour according to the two great commandments [in] Matthew 22:37[–39], described more largely [in] 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, and still more particularly in Matthew 5 throughout. It’s properties are chiefly three, mentioned by St. Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

¹³See JW, ‘On Perfection’ (Dec. 6, 1784), *Works*, 3:70–87.

[Newton comment: 'I own this is a scriptural account of Christian perfection. But I do not find either from Scripture or the experience of Christians that [it] is attainable in the full and absolute sense in this life; and many who have pretended to it, have deceived both themselves and others. Yet I would rather pray for and press to nearer advances towards it, than fight and dispute against it. I am sure that to keep the commandments, to redeem time, to abstain from all the appearance of evil is the best way to maintain light and joy and communion with the Lord. Yet after all, I expect to be saved as a sinner, and not as a saint.]

3. [What are the means?] [Newton: 'I approve of the means he pointed out'] – desire, prayer, diligence, and dependence.

John Newton (April 8, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 182–83.]

Hebrews 9:13–14

[‘For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?’]

He first explained each verse separately and then showed their connection and the strength and certainty of the apostle’s inference *How much more*. The sacrifices of the Levitical law, the best and most solemn of them which seem to be especially hinted at, could effect no farther than to: the purifying the flesh, removing ceremonial uncleanness, and restoring those to the privileges of public ordinances, who had for a while been secluded there from.

But the blood of Christ is effectual to cleanse the conscience, that is to remove the guilt and to subdue the power of sin, to put a stop to dead works even in their very root and spring and give us a desire and ability to serve and please the living God. And if the former could and did effect its intended end, no wonder the latter should be so much more sure and powerful in its effects – for what proportion [is there] between the blood of bulls and the blood of Christ.

He concluded with a lively and solemn address, chiefly to those who made profession of religion but were strangers to its real influence.

John Newton (March 24, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 164–65.]

Hebrews 10:36

[‘For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.’]

He spoke, I, Of the patience of which we have need:

1. Towards God. To submit our understandings and our wills to all his dispensations, so as to believe he acts wisely when we cannot assign one reason for what he does. And to confess him gracious and good: when he strikes at our choicest comforts, when perhaps he brings that very trial upon us which we most fear, or when he takes that very blessing from us which we most earnestly wish spared.

2. Towards men in general. To bear reproaches, scorn and injuries in a manner suitable to our calling.

3. Towards our brethren. For so it is through remaining weakness, darkness and pride [that] we are more apt to disagree with one another than with the world and our resentments are usual[ly] more fierce and abiding.

4. Towards ourselves. This in two respects. 1) With regard to our pursuit after holiness. This we should do earnestly, constantly, steadily but still with submission and be willing [to continue] in the Lord's way till the Lord's time shall come. 2) In case of a fall into sin. We ought indeed to mourn and to walk more humbly and cautiously than before. But there is a carnal slavish impatient sorrow [that] we are apt to give into at such a time which does more harm than good. If a man should fall through inadvertence in a race, he ought to recover himself and press forward with double diligence and not lie idly helpless, beating himself upon the ground.

II. Of the will of God which [we] are to do. Some he says are ready to persuade themselves that when they are converted all is done. On the contrary, we cannot till then so much as begin to work in the Lord's vineyard. It is the will of God that we should: believe in, trust him, love him above all, [and] that we love our brethren and all humankind, [and] that we abound in good works. 1) Of piety. 2) Of mercy, praying to him, praising him and declaring his goodness. [Also] that we should warn the unruly, instruct the ignorant, confirm the doubtful, strengthen the feeble minded, comfort those that mourn, visit the sick, relieve the necessitous and be faithful in our callings.

III. Of the promise it consists: 1. Of grace continually increasing here. 2. Of never ending happiness hereafter. This he spoke of 1) negatively—in being freed forever from sin and its attendant sorrow, [and] from all sickness, pain, infirmity and loss; 2) positively. In the company of saints and angels, but above all in the unclouded sight, the unlimited enjoyment of the blessed God and a perfect conformity to him, so far as the utmost extent of our created capacities can admit.

John Newton (May 2, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 104–06.]

Hebrews 12:28–29

[‘Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.’]

Where he observed there is an important advice pressed upon believers, from two powerful, though different considerations.

The *first* is: That *our God is a consuming fire*. This metaphor is perhaps borrowed from the usual appearances of the Lord to the patriarchs and prophets of old. Fire may imperfectly represent several of the divine attributes.

Its activity, force, and energy may shadow forth God's power. As it is, and often has been, used to punish atrocious crimes, it may remind us of the inflexibility and the severity of his justice.

As fire is the source of light, it may be an emblem of his knowledge.

And as it melts, softens, and changes the hardest bodies it exhibits the transforming, softening efficacy of his love.

The *second* argument is: We [are] *receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken*. This he showed is the kingdom of God in the soul, the divine image comprised in one word *love*, leading us upward to God and downwards to our fellow creatures. The proper evidence of this love is keeping the commandments and the inseparable reward [of] joy and peace in the Holy Ghost.

The advice urged here from is *to serve God* not merely in prayer and ordinances but by yielding ourselves [as] a sacrifice in all the actions and relations we are concerned in. This is the grand secret,

which like the pretended alchemist' stone turns all to gold, and renders the commonest transactions of our life, in their season, no less acceptable to God than our most solemn and enlarged devotions.

When we have an eye and wish to the promoting his glory in all we do, he in great condescension accounts it really so. Thus to *love* no circumstance is indifferent, [and] a single and sincere intention will stamp a value upon what seems most trifling.

This service must be performed:

First with *reverence* or as the word [εὐλάβης] may be rendered 'with shame'; with a humble sense of our infirmities, such as may cover us as it were with blushes, even in our best performances.

Second with *godly fear*, with an awe of his majesty and a fear of our own frailty, lest sin and Satan get within our guard and tempt us to grieve and offend the good Spirit of God. For in proportion as he leaves us, our comfort and our strength will immediately decline and wither.

John Newton (March 25, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 63–65.]

James 2:22

[‘Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?]

He began with mentioning the time and occasion of writing the epistle, and the seeming different assertions of Paul and this apostle respecting justification, which many learned men had laboured in vain to reconcile. And some deeming it impossible, have ventured to advise us to determine by that which [epistle] was wrote last, which was probably this of James to oppose the error of Simon Magus and others who like our modern antinomians thought a nominal faith sufficient to salvation. But the apostles may be understood in perfect harmony if we consider that they did not speak of the same faith, the same works, nor the same justification.

1. Not of the same faith. The one treats of living [faith], the other dead faith.
2. Not of the same works. Those which the one supposes insufficient to justify are works performed before and in opposition to faith. The other speaks of a work done by Abraham many years after he was in a justified state.

3. Not the same justification.

[Newton comments: *Here indeed we differed. Mr. Wesley seemed to think that it appeared from this text that Abraham was justified, that is as he explained [meant] made just, righteous or perfect by that one act of obedience, not with respect to his state, but his habit. Whereas it seems easier and more agreeable to scripture and experience to suppose that it is only meant [that] his faith was hereby justified, that is cleared and manifested to be of the right sort. However in applying this instance to general experience I think we agreed pretty well. And I am sure I have great need to be concerned in the subject which he comprised in two heads.*]

- 1) That faith works together with and in our works and that we can do nothing right or acceptable, but in the exercise of faith.

- 2) That faith is strengthened and perfected by good works and that it is for want of abounding in these, there are so many complaints of weak and languishing faith. If we did readily and zealously act up to the measure we have already received, our faith and hope would increase [in] proportion and should be endued with power from on high to perform still more and better.

John Newton (April 29, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 86–87.]

1 Peter 1:12–13

[‘Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.’]

Which he enlarged on in a way of paraphrase, showing from the former the nature and excellency of the gospel; from the latter, the proper influence and effect it should have on us.

John Newton (April 13, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 283.]

1 Peter 2:11

[‘Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.’]

[JW gave] a sweet discourse ... showing the great danger of every earthly gratification. This lesson, he said, might be learned even from the body. As often as we take down food, we swallow so many seeds of death, by causing so many more particles of earth to adhere to and clog our vessels, and so hasten our dissolution. And without great watchfulness so it would be with our souls. If we were not on our guard, human comforts received would also bring the soul nearer to death instead of being a step to life. It is truly said of worldly joy, ‘It does with powerful charm hold down the mind and sensualize the soul’

Mary Bosanquet (June 6, 1777 in Bradford, Yorkshire¹⁴)
[Moore, *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, 120.]

1 Peter 4:7

[‘But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.’]

A correspondent says that he takes a pleasure in informing the public that Mr. John Wesley preached in the parish church of Bradford [Yorkshire], on Sunday the 4th instant, to the most numerous and respectable congregation that ever appeared in that place. His text was, ‘The end of all things is at hand: be sober and watch unto prayer.’ He enforced this awful doctrine with uncommon energy, assuring his audience, that it appeared from the book of Revelation that the world would be at an end in the year 1836. So it seems in the short space of *forty-eight* years we must part with our mother earth, and all the various blessings with which a good being has furnished it for our accommodation and comfort. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*¹⁵ — But he endeavoured to console us for our loss by intimating that a new world would succeed the old one, far better and infinitely more enlightened; in which there would be no false

¹⁴Moore cites Aug. 1777 as the date, but JW was in the Bradford vicinity only in June.

¹⁵‘Thus passes away the glory of this world’.

teachers, no hypocrites, but universal holiness and angelic purity, because all the inhabitants would be Methodists. In his conversation with the *elect*, he expressed much satisfaction at the late rapid increase of Methodism in these parts, which he observed was no longer confined to tabernacles and meeting houses but, by the blessing of God and their own honest endeavours, had got possession of a large proportion of the *churches* in the West Riding. He exhorted the brethren to assist one another, with unceasing diligence, in procuring curacies, establishments, etc.; and above all, to multiply as much as possible the *Sunday schools*, as the most certain and expeditious method of improving the next generation, and making Methodism overspread the land, as the waters cover the sea. Our correspondent adds that he means no reflection on the Sunday schools, which he is convinced are of great national utility, but wishes the rational part of the clergy to consider how eager the Methodists are to get them into *their* hands, and what fruits under their cultivation they are likely to produce.

[*Leeds Intelligencer* (May 20, 1788), p. 3 (and reprinted in other newspapers)]

[a slight correction later]

A correspondent observes that the account of Mr. Wesley's sermon at Bradford, as stated in this paper of last week, was far from being accurate, neither did it do justice to that gentleman. Mr. Wesley did not prophecy *himself*, but informed his audience that a pious and learned German had foretold, from the book of Revelation, that the world would end in 1836; but that, previous to its dissolution, a very important event would take place in the Christian church, tending much to the improvement of mankind in piety and true holiness.¹⁶ Mr. Wesley appealed to the candour and impartiality of every man who heard him whether this great event was not *the propagation of Methodism*, which for the last fifty years (by the joint labours of himself and brother) had made a progress in the world as astonishing as it was beneficial to mankind. And he intimated that, as the latter part of the prophecy had been so completely fulfilled, no doubt could be reasonably entertained that the accomplishment of the former was drawing near. Our correspondent says he is at a loss which to admire most—the ingenuity or the modesty of Mr. Wesley in his interpretation of this singular prophecy.

[*Leeds Intelligencer* (May 27, 1788), p. 3.]

2 Peter 1:4

[‘Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.’]

He observed that this epistle, in subject and manner, so nearly resembles the former [1 Peter] that if persons had their spiritual senses duly exercised, its genuineness could not have been doubted.

He proposed a various [i.e. variant] reading in the verse which I find received into the text by Bengelius as supported by the greatest number of the best copies. By the glorious power of God, there are given unto us *precious and exceeding great promises*.¹⁷

¹⁶What Johan Bengel taught, and JW repeated, was that in 1836 the beast (i.e., the papacy) would come to an end and the earth would enter a millennium of peace and justice. See JW's notes (drawn from Bengel) on Rev. 20:1–2 in *NT Notes*.

¹⁷Johann Bengel, *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (Tübingen: I.G. Cott, 1734), 332; argued for switching the order of ‘precious’ and ‘exceeding great’ from that in the AV.

He considered the latter clause of the verse first, taking notice of the different sense the word *lusts* now bears, from the meaning affixed to it when the Bible was first translated. It was then equivalent to *desire* and should be thus rendered at present.

Desire is a source of innumerable corruptions. He descanted upon 1 John 2:16. The desire of the flesh [is] whatever is agreeable to our outward senses; the desire of the eye, curiosity, variety, pomp, novelty, all that pleases the imagination; the pride of life or the desire of honour, praise and distinctions. These are so many fountains from whence disorder and sin perpetually flow into our hearts and lives.

When grace changes the inclination, the fountains are cut off and the streams fail, the desires awakened after God, [and these together] disentangle us from all our low pursuits. He mentioned a late writer's division of the soul's sense into five *which I think worth noting*.

[1] The external or what we call bodily sensation,

[2] the internal or imagination,

[3] the public or social,

[4] the moral and

[5] the sense of honour.¹⁸

The third and fourth, if duly regulated are perhaps that love of God and man which the Scripture requires. But the other three, which answer to those mentioned by John, have debased, vitiated, and in a manner inverted them.

On the other clause, he observed the promises are exceeding precious and great to those who know their extent and necessity.

The promise of pardon is precious news to a guilty sinner who sees him[self] ready to perish.

The promise of strength is precious to the poor sinner who has often been borne down by his infirmities.

The promise is precious, but especially the accomplishment.

The promise of complete deliverance should be welcome and precious seeing we are still groaning and burdened.

John Newton (April 12, 1761 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 278–80.]

2 Peter 3:9–11

[‘The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.’]

He *first* paraphrased in brief the preceding part of the chapter in which he showed great judgment, learning, eloquence, and criticism.

Secondly he enlarged on the verses he read and from them gave a lively description of the terrors of the Lord in his great day. The present day he observed may be called ours, but the Lord's day is

¹⁸Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (London: John Smith & William Bruce, 1728), 5–6.

coming, as a thief in the night. It will be sudden, unexpected and unwelcome to sinners.

The heavens (not merely, perhaps the air) shall pass [away], shall flee away with a great noise, a most awful crash. The elements shall be melted. The very first principles of things shall be changed, dissolved and dissipated.

And the earth with all the works that are therein shall be burnt up. All the works of art, all the works of nature, the lofty palaces and the more lofty towering extended mountains, shall be involved in one equal common ruin. He established this upon principles of reason, as well as revelation, against some modern would-be philosophers who are ready to speak in the words of verse 4 and to say Where is the probability of such an event?

He showed that we are on all hands exposed to fire.

The earth abounds with fire in its central and cavernous parts, as is evident from the volcanoes in different parts of the globe.

The air and all terrestrial bodies are likewise full of fire (as appears from the modern electrical experiments) which stand restrained at present in a secret chain. But if disengaged by the almighty word, and left to act with freedom, is sufficient to destroy the creation at a blow.

But were there neither of these at hand, there is still more formidable artillery in the magazines of God. The comets for instance which are known to be so enormous in their bulk, so rapid their motions, so intensely heated in their substance, as would in one moment utterly demolish this earth or any of the planets. Should they interfere in their respective paths, which is indeed expected or greatly feared by many of the wise and the learned, will be nearly the case this very year.¹⁹

Thirdly, from hence he enlarged on the inference in verse 11, ‘What manner [of] persons ought we to be’ in such circumstances? The answer is easy.

We should be such now as we shall wish we had been when that day comes. And so much the rather as we see it approaching, as we see some of the signs of the latter times already fulfilling.

We should speak and act and think under the impression of such a scene.

We should wean our affections from a perishing world and lay up our treasures beyond the reach of the various accidents this state of things is liable to.

He observed how comfortable it must be to the believer to know his calling and acceptance at that hour. To be able to stand with confidence before his judge when not only the great and mighty of the earth, but the earth itself, and the very heavens shall flee from his wrathful presence. From hence he took occasion to preach [about] the means of this blessing: salvation by the blood of Christ.

John Newton (April 24, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 58–60.]

¹⁹Cf. Craig B Waff, ‘Comet Halley’s First Expected Return: English Public Apprehensions, 1755–1758’, *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 17 (1986), 1–37.

1 John 5:7²⁰

['For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one']

In preaching on the Trinity, he observed it was our duty to believe according to the Word of God. But we were not called to comprehend; that was impossible. Bring me, he said, a worm that can comprehend a man; I will show you a man that can comprehend God. He observed that if three candles were burning in a room, the light was but one.

Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher (March 30, 1788 in Madeley)
[Moore, *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, 251–52.]

1 John 5:19

['And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.']

We know that we are of God. He observed that if this is true of the Christian church in general, it must be true of some particulars in it, for a general without particulars is nonsense. His enquiry was what is the evidence of a person being of God; either by himself or to others? It consists of:

I. The testimony of the Spirit, which he proved and confirmed from Scripture and freed from the charge of enthusiasm. It is the Spirit of adoption, enabling and emboldening us to come unto God by prayer as our father.

II. The fruits of the Spirit. He enlarged on five: Love, peace, joy, meekness, and power over sin.

[Newton adds, p. 69: *Though I think he aimed the matter rather too high and proposed a perfection which I believe hardly attainable in this life, as a test of our profession. For he observed if we boast of the witness of the Spirit, without having the fruits of the Spirit to produce, we deceive ourselves and no one is bound to believe us. However, it is a perfection to which I ought to be continually pressing [toward] and of which I fall lamentably short.*]

Love of God, he described as a temper disposing us to be always happy, and for his sake to love all our brethren universally, so as not to be hindered, either by their sins, errors, or prejudices.

Peace [he said was] to consist in an entire complacency to all the divine appointments, to be ready and will[ing] to suffer want, distress, and reproach and quite reconciled to the thoughts of death.

[Newton adds: *In like manner, he spoke of them all in the highest pitch. For myself the Lord knows that I have not thus attained, yet I trust I have an evidence that I am his, which he will not suffer me to be disputed out of.*]

He closed with a moving address to the audience.

John Newton (April 27, 1757 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 77–79.]

²⁰See JW, *On the Trinity* (1775), *Works*, 2:373–86.

Revelation 2:23

[‘And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.’]

First, he considered what were the works. Secondly, What the reward.

The works, he said, were three-fold. 1. What the man is. 2. What he does. 3. What he suffers.

1. All he is that is right shall have its reward: all the fruits of the spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, meekness, patience, faith, self-denial, fortitude. All these are the works of God and all received through Christ. Above all, love, which is the image of God.

2. All he does, all his works of piety and mercy, all that is wrought in faith. Nay, the most common labours of his daily business, if done in a spirit of the apostle, for sacrifice, shall not be forgotten. For it is said of servants by the apostle, for their encouragement, that when they ‘obey and serve men, with singleness of heart, they serve the Lord Jesus Christ’.

3. All he suffers. Not one cross taken up in obedience to the will of God but it shall have its reward.

But what is the reward? First, the very nature of each grace necessarily brings its reward. The more faith, patience, courage, and perseverance, the more holiness will be brought into the soul; and consequently, the soul will be rendered more like God, and more capable of *fellowship with him*. And in proportion to our fellowship with God must be our happiness. But, besides these, there is a reward of infinite free mercy (over and above what flows from inherent holiness) bestowed on each grace, and on each action done for God, and each cross borne for his sake

Mary Bosanquet (June 12, 1777 in Daw Green)

[Moore, *Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher*, 120–21.]

Revelation 14:1ff

(May 3, 1788 in Bradford, Yorkshire²¹)

He alarmed some weak minds, by reading Bengelius’s opinion, not that the world would then end, but that the millennium reign of Christ would be in the year 1836.

[*Gentleman’s Magazine* 58 (1788), 557.]

He enforced this awful doctrine with uncommon energy, assuring his audience *that the world would be at an end in the year 1836*. But he intimated that *a new world* would succeed the *old one*, far better and infinitely more enlightened, in which there would be *no more false teachers – no hypocrites, but universal holiness and angelic purity*.

[*Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal* (May 31, 1788), p. 1]

²¹See JW responds to these reports in a letter to Christopher Hopper, June 3, 1788, *Works*, 30:691–92.

Revelation 20:12

[‘And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.’]

Mr. Wesley bore his testimony against the horrible Calvinian opinions of absolute necessity and unconditional predestination, which make the holy God and judge of all the author of sin, and renders the death of Christ a needless thing. Mr. Wesley earnestly warned his hearers against such diabolical creeds, and called upon all the ministers of the gospel of Christ and of the Church of England to preach against necessity, Calvinism, and antinomianism, the horrible tenets of our day.

(January 28, 1776; charity sermon at All Hallows church, Lombard Street, London)
[*London Packet; or New Lloyd's Journal* (Jan. 29–31, 1776), p. 4.]

Revelation 22:17

[‘And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.’]

His method was directed by the clauses of the verse and I cannot easily connect what I remember. The Spirit says *come*, outwardly by the preaching of the gospel, [and] inwardly by secret motions on the heart, which though lost to the careless and thoughtless, cannot be overlooked by those who examine what passes within themselves. Whenever we are checked for or restrained from the commission of evil; whenever we feel any desires after holiness or happiness after God or Christ; whenever we obtain the smallest view of the things that make for our peace, then the Spirit is working in us, and calling upon us *Come*.

To this echoes the voice of the bride, of the whole church, and each individual in proportion to their attainments in grace. Everyone that hears this powerful voice is desirous [that] others should hear it too and is, at least should be, industrious to propagate the joyful sound.

Though he observed that there is too often a strange and sinful indifference in this respect, utterly unbecoming any who have themselves tasted that the Lord is gracious. Sloth, shame, fear or some species of unbelief prevail with them to hide their light and bury their talent.

The invitation is to him that *thirsteth*. He who has that earnest desire after Christ, which can be satisfied with nothing short of him, fitly set forth by the metaphor of thirst, which nothing but drink can allay and neither riches or honours can either assuage or divert. To all such, the graces and fruits of the Spirit, copious, penetrating, cleansing, refreshing and fertilizing as streams of living water shall be imparted and that freely without money and without price.

John Newton (March 19, 1758 in Liverpool)
[Gordon, *Instrument*, 134–35.]

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