

John Wesley

In the year 1743 Mr. Wesley published a small pamphlet under the title of "Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life". It was afterwards superseded by the tract now before the reader; which embodies the principal sentiments contained in the former publication. [Editor]

3. And yet we must not forget what the Apostle subjoins in the following verses: "I say to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them, if they abide even as I. Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife. But if thou marry, thou hast not sinned. Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh. I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he that is married careth for the things of the world, how he may please his wife. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit that you may attend upon the Lord without distraction." (I Cor. 7:8, 27, 28, 32-35)

4. But though it is good for a man not to touch a woman (verse 1), yet this is not a universal rule. "I would", indeed, says the Apostle, "that all men were as myself (verse 7)." But that cannot be; for "every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, the other after that." "If", then, "they cannot contain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn". (Verse 9) "To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." Exactly agreeable to this are the words of our Lord. When the Apostles said, "If the case be so, it is good not to marry"; he said unto them, "all men cannot receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, who were so born from their mother's womb; there are some, who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it let him receive it." (Matt. 19:10-12)

5. But who is able to "receive this saying," –to abstain from marriage, and yet not burn? It behoves every one here to judge for himself; none is called to judge for another. In general, I believe every man is able to receive it when he is first justified. I believe every one then receives this gift; but

with most it does not continue long. This much is clear; it is a plain matter of fact, which no man can deny. It is not so clear, whether God withdraws it of his own good pleasure, or for any fault of ours. I incline to think it is not withdrawn without some fault on our part. But, be that as it may, I have now only to do with those who are still able to "receive this saying."

6. To this happy few I say, Know the advantages you enjoy, many of which are pointed out by the Apostle himself. You may be without carefulness. You are under no necessity of "caring for things of the world." You have only to "care for the things of the Lord, how you may please the Lord." One care alone lies upon you, how you "may be holy both in body and spirit."

You enjoy a blessed liberty from the "trouble in the flesh," which must more or less attend a married state, from a thousand nameless domestic trials which are found, sooner or later, in every family. You are exempt from numberless occasions of sorrow and anxiety, with which heads of families are entangled; especially those who have sickly, or weak, or unhappy, or disobedient children. If your servants are wicked, you may put them away, and your relation to them ceases. But what could you do with a wicked son or daughter? How could you dissolve that relation?

Above all, you are at liberty from the greatest of all entanglements, the loving one creature above all others. It is possible to do this without sin, without any impeachment of our love to God. But how inconceivably difficult! To give God our whole heart, while a creature has so large a share of it! How much more easily may we do this, when the heart is, tenderly indeed, but equally attached to more than one; or, at least, without any great inequality! What angelic wisdom does it require to give enough of our affection, and not too much, to so near a relation!

7. You have leisure to improve yourself in every kind, to wait upon God in public and private, and to do good to your neighbor in various ways, as Christian prudence shall suggest; whereas those who are married are necessarily taken up with the things of the world. You may give all your time to God without interruption, and need ask leave of none but yourself so to do. You may employ every hour in what you judge to be the most excellent way. But if you were married, you may ask leave of your companion; otherwise what complaints or disgust would follow! And how

hard is it even to know (how much more to act suitably to that knowledge) how far you ought to give way, for peace's sake, and where to stop! What wisdom is requisite, in order to know how far you can recede from what is most excellent, particularly with regard to conversation that is not "to the use of edifying", in order to please your good natured or ill natured partner, without displeasing God!

8. You may give all your worldly substance to God; nothing need hinder. You have no increasing family, you have no wife or children to provide for, which right occasion a thousand doubts, (without any extraordinary measure of divine light,) whether you had done either too much or too little for them. You may "make yourself friends of" all "the mammon of unrighteousness" which God entrusts you with; having none that has any right to complain, or to charge you with unkindness for so doing. You may lay out all your talents of every kind entirely for the glory of God; as you have none else to please, none to regard, but Him that lived and died for you.

9. I say, secondly, prize the advantages you enjoy; know the value of them. Esteem them as highly while you have them, as others do after they have lost them. Pray constantly and fervently for this very thing, that God would teach you to set a due value upon them. And let it be matter of daily thanksgiving to God, that he has made you a partaker of these benefits. Indeed, the more full and explicit you are herein, the more sensible you will be of the cause you have to be thankful; the more lively conviction you will have of the greatness of the blessing.

10. If you know and duly prize the advantages you enjoy, then, be careful to keep them. But this (as easy as it may seem) it is impossible you should do by your own strength; so various, so frequent, and so strong, are the temptations which you will meet with to cast them away. Not only the children of the world, but the children of God, will undoubtedly tempt you thereto; and that partly by the most plausible reasons, partly by most artful persuasions. Meantime, the old deceiver will not be wanting to give an edge to all those reasons and persuasions, and to recall the temptation again and again, and press it close upon your heart. You have need therefore to use every help: And the First of these is earnest prayer. Let no day pass without this, without praying for this very thing, that God would work what with men is impossible; that he would vouchsafe to preserve his

own gift, and that you may not suffer any loss this day, either by the subtlety of power of devils or men, or the deceitfulness of your own heart.

11. A second help may be the conversing frequently and freely with those of your own sex who are like-minded. It may be of infinite service to disclose to these the very secrets of your hearts; especially the weaknesses springing from your natural constitution, or education, or long-contracted habit, and the temptations which, from time to time, most easily beset you. Advise with them on every circumstance that occurs; open your heart without reserve. By this means a thousand devices of Satan will be brought to nought; innumerable snares will be prevented; or you will pass through them without being hurt. Yea, and if at some time you should have suffered a little, the wound will speedily be healed.

12. I say, of your own sex; for, in the third place, it will be highly expedient to avoid all needless conversation, much more all intimacy, with those of the other sex; so expedient, that unless you observe this, you will surely cast away the gift of God.

Say not, "But they have much grace and much understanding." So much the greater is the danger. There would be less fear of your receiving hurt from them, if they had less grace or less understanding. And whenever any of these are thrown in your way, "make a covenant with your eyes," your ears, your hands, that you do not indulge yourself in any that are called innocent freedoms. Above all, "keep your heart with all diligence." Check the first risings of desire. Watch against every sally of imagination, particularly if it be pleasing. If it is darted in, whether you will or no, yet, let no "vain thought lodge within you". Cry out, "my God and my all, I am thine, thine alone! I will be thine forever! O save me from setting up an idol in my heart! Save me from taking any step toward it. Still bring my every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

13. "But how shall I attain to, or how preserve, this strength and firmness of spirit?" In order to do this, I advise you, fourthly, (need I say, to avoid the sin of Onan, seeing Satan will not cast out Satan? Or rather) avoid with the utmost care, all softness and effeminacy; remembering the express denunciation of an inspired writer, the soft or effeminate; whether poor or rich, (the Apostle does not make any difference upon that account,) "shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Avoid all delicacy, first in spirit, then in

apparel, food, lodging, and a thousand nameless things; and this the more speedily and the more resolutely, if you have been long accustomed thereto. Avoid all needless self indulgence, as well as delicacy and softness. All these tend to breed or cherish those appetites and passions which you have renounced for Christ's sake. They either create or increase those desires which, "for the kingdom of heaven's sake," you are determined not to gratify.

Avoid all sloth, inactivity, indolence. Sleep no more than nature requires. Be never idle; and use as much bodily exercise as your strength will allow. I dare not add Monsieur Pascal's rule, avoid all pleasure. It is not possible to avoid all pleasure, even of sense, without destroying the body. Neither doth God require it at our hands; it is not his will concerning us. On the contrary, he "giveth us all things to enjoy", so we enjoy them to his glory. But I say, avoid all that pleasure which any way hinders you from enjoying him; yea, all such pleasure as does not prepare you for taking pleasure in God. Add to this constant and continued course of universal self denial, the taking up your cross daily, the enduring "hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Remember, "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." This is the way; walk therein; think not of a smoother path. Add to your other exercises constant and prudent fasting, and the Lord will uphold you with his hand.

14. I advise you, lastly, if you desire to keep them, use all the advantages you enjoy. Indeed, without this, it is utterly impossible to keep them; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken the word which cannot be broken, which must be fulfilled with regard to all the good gifts of God: "To him that hath." Would you therefore retain what you now have, what God hath already given? If so, "giving all diligence," use it to the uttermost. "Stand fast in" every instance of "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free." Be not "entangled" again in the "cares of this life;" but "cast all your care on Him that careth for you. Be careful for nothing, but in everything make your requests known unto God with thanksgiving."

See that you "wait upon the Lord without distraction:" Let nothing move you from your centre. "One thing is needful": to see, love, follow Christ, in every thought, word, and work.

Flee the "sorrow of this world": it "worketh death." Let not your heart be troubled. In all circumstances, let your soul magnify the Lord, and your spirit rejoice in God your Saviour. Preserve a constant serenity of mind, an even cheerfulness of spirit. Keep at the utmost distance from foolish desires, from desiring any happiness but in God. Still let all you "desire be to him, and to the remembrance of his name."

Make full use of all the leisure you have; never be unemployed, never triflingly employed; let every hour turn to some good account. Let not a scrap of time be squandered away; "gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost." Give all your time to God; lay out the whole as you judge will be most to his glory. In particular, act that you waste no part of it in unprofitable conversation; but let all your discourse "be seasoned with salt, and meet to minister grace to the bearers."

Give all your money to God. You have no pretense for laying up treasure upon earth. While you "gain all you can," and "save all you can," "give all you can," that is, all you have.

Lay out your talents of every kind in doing all good to all men; knowing that "every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor."

15. Upon the whole, without disputing whether the married or single life be the more perfect state, (an idle dispute; since perfection does not consist in any outward state whatever, but in an absolute devotion of all our heart and all our life to God,) we may safely say, Blessed are "they who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake;" who abstain from things lawful in themselves, in order to be more devoted to God. Let these never forget those remarkable words: "Peter said, Lo, we have left all and followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you," (a preface denoting both the certainty and importance of what is spoken.) "There is no man that hath left" (either by giving them up, or by not accepting them) "house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time; and in the world to come eternal life." (Mark 10:28 30)