

Susanna Wesley Letter to Suky

Epworth, January 13, 1709/10

Dear Suky,

Since our misfortunes have separated us from each other, and we can no longer enjoy the opportunities we once had of conversing together, I can no other way discharge the duty of a parent or comply with my inclination of doing you all the good I can, but by writing. You know very well how I love you. I love your body and do earnestly beseech Almighty God to bless it with health and all things necessary for its comfort and support in this world. But my tenderest regard is for your immortal soul and for its eternal happiness; which regard I cannot better express than by endeavouring to instil into your mind those principles of knowledge and virtue that are absolutely necessary in order to your leading a good life here, which is the only thing that can infallibly secure your happiness hereafter.

The main thing which is now to be done is to lay a good foundation, that you may act upon principles and be always able to satisfy yourself and give a reason to others of the faith that is in you. For any one which makes a profession of religion only because 'tis the custom of the country in which they live or because their parents do so or their worldly interest is thereby secured or advanced will never be able to stand in the day of temptation, nor shall they ever enter into the kingdom of heaven. And though perhaps you cannot at present fully comprehend all I shall say, yet keep this

Letter by you, and as you grow in years, your reason and judgment will improve, and you will obtain a more clear understanding in all things.

You have already been instructed in some of the first principles of religion—that there is one, and but one, God; that in the unity of the Godhead there are three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that this God ought to be worshiped. And you have learnt some prayers, your Creed and Catechism, in which is briefly comprehended your duty to God, yourself, and your neighbour. But, Suky, 'tis not learning these things by rote, nor the saying a few prayers morning and evening, that will bring you to heaven; you must understand what you say, and you must practice what you know. And since knowledge is requisite in order to practice, I shall endeavour, after as plain a manner as I can, to instruct you in some of those fundamental points which are most necessary to be known and most easy to be understood. And I earnestly beseech the great Father of spirits' to guide your mind into the way of truth.

Though, it hath been generally acknowledged that the being and perfections of God, and a great part of man's duty towards him, as that we should love him and pray to him for what we want and praise him for what we enjoy, etc., as likewise much of our duty towards ourselves and neighbour are discoverable by the light of nature, that is, by that understanding and reason which are natural to all men; yet considering the present state of mankind, it was absolutely necessary that we should have some revelation from God to make known to us those truths upon the knowledge of which our salvation depends and which unassisted reason could never have discovered. For all the duties of natural religion and all the hopes of happiness which result from the performance of them are all concluded within the present life. Nor could we have had any certainty of the future state, of the being of spirits, of the immortality of the soul or of a judgment to come.

And though we may perceive that all men have by nature a strong bent or bias towards evil and a great averseness from God and goodness, that our understandings, wills, and affections, etc. are extremely corrupted and depraved, yet how could we have known by what means "we became so or how sin and death entered into the world? Since we are assured that whatever is absolutely perfect, as God is, could never be the author of evil. And we are as sure that whatever is corrupt or impure must necessarily be offensive and displeasing to the most holy God, there being nothing more opposite than good and evil. Nay further, sin is not only displeasing to God, as it is contrary to the purity of his divine nature, but 'tis the highest affront and indignity to his sacred Majesty imaginable.

By it his most wise and holy laws are contemned and violated and his honour most injuriously treated; and therefore he is in justice obliged to punish such contempt and to vindicate the honour of his own laws, nor can he, without derogating from his infinite perfections, pardon such offenders or remit the punishment they deserve without full satisfaction made to his justice. Now I would fain know which way his justice could be satisfied, since 'tis impossible for a finite being as man is to do it; or how the nature of man should be renewed and he again be admitted into favour with God; or how reason could suggest that our weak endeavours or penitences should be accepted instead of perfect obedience, unless some other were substituted in our stead that would undergo the punishment we have deserved and thereby satisfy divine justice and purchase pardon and favour from God, the merit of whose perfect obedience should atone for the imperfection of ours, and so obtain for us a title to those glorious rewards, to that eternal happiness, which we must acknowledge ourselves utterly unworthy of, and of which we must have despaired without such a Saviour? But what knowledge could we have had of a Saviour? Or how should we have had any certainty of our salvation unless God had revealed these things unto us? The soul is immortal

and must survive all time, even to eternity, and consequently it must have been miserable to the utmost extent of its duration, had we not had that sacred treasure of knowledge which is contained in the books of the Old and New Testament. A treasure infinitely more valuable than the whole world, because therein we find all things necessary for our salvation. There also we learn many truths which though we cannot say 'tis absolutely necessary that we should know them, since 'tis possible to be saved without that knowledge, yet 'tis highly convenient that we should, because they give us great light into those things which are necessary to be known and solve, many doubts which could not otherwise be cleared.

Thus we collect from many passages of scripture that before God created this visible world or ever he made man, he created a higher rank of intellectual beings which we call angels or spirits; and these were those bright morning stars mentioned in Job, which sang together, those sons of God which shouted for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid. And to these he gave a law or rule of action, as he did afterwards to the rest of his creation, and they being free agents, having a principle of liberty of choosing or refusing, and of acting accordingly, as they must have, or they could not properly be called either good or evil. For upon this principle of freedom or liberty the principle of election or choice is founded; and upon the choosing good or evil depends the being virtuous or vicious, since liberty is the formal essence of moral virtue, that is, 'tis the free choice of a rational being that makes them either good or bad: nor could any one that acts by necessity be ever capable of rewards or punishments.

The angels, I say, being free agents, must I think necessarily be put upon some trial of their obedience; and so consequently were at first only placed in a state of probation or trial. Those that made a good use of their liberty and chose to obey the law of their creation and acquiesced in the order of the divine Wisdom, which had dis-

posed them into several ranks and orders subservient to each other, were by the almighty fiat confirmed in their state of blessedness, nor are they now capable of any defection. But those accursed spirits that rebelled against their Maker and aspired above the rank in which his providence had placed them, were for their presumption justly excluded the celestial paradise and condemned to perpetual torments, which were the necessary consequences of their apostasy.

After the fall of the angels, and perhaps to supply their defects, it pleased the eternal Goodness to create Adam, who was the first general head of mankind, and in him was virtually included the whole species of human nature. He was somewhat inferior to the angels, being composed of two different natures, body and soul. The former was material, or matter made of the earth; the latter immaterial or a spiritual substance created after the image of God. And as man "was also a rational free agent like the angels, so it was agreeable to the eternal Wisdom to place him likewise in a state of probation; and the trial of his obedience was not eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the penalty of his disobedience was death.

And this trial was suited to the double or mixed nature of man. The beauty, scent, and taste of the fruit was the trial of their senses or appetites, and the virtue of it, it being not only "good for food," but also "to be desired to make one wise," was the trial of their minds. And by this God made proof of our first parents, to see whether they would deny their sensual appetites and keep the body in a due subjection to the mind, or whether they would prefer the pleasures of sense and thereby dethrone their reason, break the covenant of their obedience, and forfeit the favour of God and eternal happiness. And whether they would humbly be content with that measure of knowledge and understanding which God thought best for them, or boldly pry into those things that he had forbidden them to search after.

Now the devil, envying the happiness of our first parents, being grieved that any less perfect beings should possess the place he had lost, took occasion from the reasonable trial God had proposed to Adam to attack the woman by a subtle question, "Yea, hath God said that ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Hath he created this beauteous world, this great variety of creatures for your use and enjoyment and made these delicious fruits which he himself hath pronounced good and yet forbidden you to taste of them? To which she replied, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch of it, lest ye die." Upon which the malicious tempter boldly presumed to give the lie to his Maker. "Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat," etc.

Thus pride and sensuality ruined our first parents, and brought them and their posterity into a state of mortality. Thus sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and thus was human nature corrupted in its fountain. And as a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, so of consequence the children of guilty Adam must be corrupted and depraved. And anyone that will but make the least reflection on their own mind may soon be convinced of this great truth, that not only the body is weak and infirm, subject to divers diseases, liable to many ill accidents and even to death itself, but also the superior powers of the soul are weakened and corrupted and, as the apostle expresses it, "at enmity with God."

The understanding, which was designed chiefly to be exercised in the knowledge and contemplation of the supreme Being, is darkened; nor can it, without the divine

assistance, discern the radiant glories of the Deity. And though it should naturally press after truth, as being its proper object, yet it seldom, and not without great difficulty, attains to the knowledge of it, but is subject to ignorance, which is the sin of the understanding (because it generally proceeds from our natural indisposition to search after truth), as error is the sin or defect of the judgment, mistaking one thing for another, not having just and clear and distinct apprehensions of things, for which reason it is so frequently guilty of making wrong determinations. Not choosing or not inclining to good or adhering to and preferring evil before it, is the sin of the will. A readiness in receiving vain, impure, corrupt ideas or images and a backwardness in receiving good and useful ideas, is the sin of the imagination or fancy. And a facility in retaining evil or vain ideas and a neglect of, or a readiness to let slip those which are good, is the sin or defect of the memory.

Loving, hating, desiring, fearing, etc. what we should not love, hate, desire, etc. at all in the least degree, or, when the object of such passions are lawful, to love, hate, desire, etc. more than reason requires, or else not loving, hating, desiring, etc. what we ought to love, hate, etc, in short any error either in defect or excess, either too much or too little, is the vice or sin of the passions or affections of the soul.

Now if we consider the infinite, boundless, incomprehensible perfections of the ever blessed God! we may easily conceive that evil, that sin, is the greatest contradiction imaginable to his most holy nature, and that no evil, no disease, pain, or natural uncleanness whatever is so hateful, so loathsome to us as the corruptions and impurities of the soul are to him. He is infinite purity! absolutely separated from all moral imperfection. The divine intellect is all brightness, all perfect! was never, and can never be, capable of the least ignorance! He is truth! Nor can he be weary or indisposed in contemplating that great attribute of his most perfect nature, but has a constant steady view of truth. And as he fully comprehends at once all things past, present, and

to come, so all objects appear to him simple, naked, undisguised in their natures, properties, relations, and ends, truly as they are; nor is it possible he should be guilty of error or mistake, of making any false judgment or wrong determination.

He is goodness! And his most holy will cannot swerve or decline from what is so. He always wills what is absolutely best, nor can he possibly be deceived or deceive anyone. The ideas of the divine mind are amiable, clear, holy, just, good, useful, and he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity! His love, desire, etc., though boundless, immense, and infinite! are yet regular, immutable, always under the direction of his unerring wisdom, his unlimited goodness, and his impartial justice.

But who can "by searching find out God," who can "find out the Almighty to perfection?" What Angel is worthy to speak his praise, who dwelleth in that inaccessible light, "which no man can approach unto?" And though he is always surrounded with thousands and ten thousands of those pure and happy spirits, yet are they represented to us as veiling their faces, as if conscious of too much imperfection and weakness to behold his glory. And if he chargeth his angels with folly, and those "stars are not pure in his sight," "how much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm?"

And as we are thus corrupt and impure by nature, so are we likewise "the children of wrath" and in a state of damnation. For it was not only a temporal death with which God threatened our first parents if they were disobedient, but it was also a spiritual death, an eternal separation from him that is our life, the consequence of which separation is our eternal misery.

But the infinite goodness of God, who delighteth that his mercy should triumph over his justice, though he provided no remedy for the fallen angels, yet man being a more simple kind of creature, who perhaps did not sin so maliciously against so much knowledge as those apostate spirits did, he would not suffer the whole race of

mankind should be thus ruined and destroyed by the fraud and subtilty of Satan. But he "laid help upon one that is mighty," that is able and willing to save to the uttermost all such as shall come unto God through him. And this Saviour is that seed of the woman, that was promised should bruise the head of the serpent, break the power of the devil, and bring mankind again into a salvable condition. And upon a view of that "satisfaction" which Christ would make "for the sins of the whole world" was the penalty of Adam's disobedience suspended, and he admitted to a second trial; and God renewed his covenant with man, not on the former condition of perfect obedience, but on condition of faith in Christ Jesus and a sincere though imperfect obedience of the laws of God. I'll speak something of these two branches of our duty distinctly.

By faith in Christ is to be understood an assent to whatever is recorded of him in holy Scripture or is said to be delivered by him, either immediately by himself or mediately by his prophets and apostles or whatsoever may by just inferences or natural consequences be collected from their writings. But because the greater part of mankind either want leisure or capacity to collect the several articles of faith, which lie scattered up and down throughout the sacred writ, the wisdom of the church hath thought fit to sum them up in a short form of words, commonly called the Apostles Creed. Which, because it comprehends the main of what a Christian ought to believe, I shall briefly expound unto you. And though I have not time at present to bring all the arguments I could to prove the being of God, his divine attributes, and the truth of revealed religion, yet this short paraphrase may inform you what you should intend when you make the solemn confession of our most holy faith; and may withal teach you that it is not to be said after a formal customary manner, but seriously as in the presence of the all-seeing God, who observes whether the heart join with the tongue, and whether your mind do truly assent to what you profess when you say,

I believe in God— I do truly and heartily assent to the being of a God, one supreme independent power, who is a spirit infinitely wise, holy, good, just, true, unchangeable. I do believe that this God is a necessary self-existent being; necessary in that he could not but be, because he derives his existence from no other than himself, but he alone is the Father—And having all life, all being in himself, all creatures must derive their existence from him, whence he is properly styled **the Father** of all things, more especially of all spiritual natures, angels and souls of men. And since he is the great Parent of the universe, it naturally follows that he is **Almighty**—And this glorious attribute of his omnipotence is conspicuous in that he hath a right of making anything which he willeth, after that manner which best pleaseth him, according to the absolute freedom of his own will, and a right of possessing all things so made by him, by virtue of direct dominion, as likewise a right of disposing of all things as he pleaseth.⁸⁵ Nor can his almighty infinite power admit of any weakness, dependence or limitation, but it extendeth to all things, is boundless, incomprehensible, and eternal. And though we cannot fully comprehend or have any adequate conceptions of what so far surpassed! the reach of human understanding, yet it is plainly demonstrable that he is omnipotent from his being the **Maker of Heaven and Earth**—"of all things visible and invisible." Nor could anything less than almighty power produce the smallest most inconsiderable thing out of nothing. Not the least spire of grass or most despicable insect but bears the divine signature and carries in its existence a clear demonstration of the deity. For could we admit of such a wild supposition as that anything could make itself, it must necessarily follow that a thing had being before it had a being, that it could act before it was, which is a palpable contradiction. From whence among other reasons we conclude that this beauteous world, that celestial arch over our heads, and all those glorious heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars, etc. in fine, the whole system of the universe, were in the beginning made or created out of nothing by the eternal

power, wisdom, and goodness of the ever blessed God according to "the counsel of his own will" or, as St. Paul better expresses it, Colossians 1:16, "By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him." 89

And in Jesus—Jesus signifies a Saviour, and by that name he was called by the angel Gabriel before his birth, to show us that he came into the world to save us from our sins, and the punishment they justly deserve. And to repair the damage human nature had sustained by the fall of Adam. That, as in Adam all died, so in Christ all should be made alive. And so he became the second general head of all mankind. And as he was promised to our parents in paradise, so was his coming signified by various types and sacrifices under the law and foretold by the prophets long before he appeared in the world. And this Saviour, this Jesus, was the promised messiah, who was so long the hope and expectation of the Jews, the Christ—which in the original signifies anointed. Now among the Jews it was a custom to anoint three sorts of persons: prophets, priests, and kings. Which anointing did not only show their designation to those offices, but was also usually attended with a special influence or inspiration of the Holy Spirit to prepare and qualify them for the execution of such offices.

Our blessed Lord, who was by his almighty Father sanctified and sent into the world, was also anointed, not with material oil, but by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him, to signify to us that he was our prophet, priest, and king. And that he should first, as our prophet, fully, clearly reveal the will of God for our salvation, which accordingly he did.⁹⁴ And though the Jews had long before received the law by Moses, yet a great part of that law was purely typical and ceremonial, and all of it that was so was necessarily vacated by the coming of our Saviour, and that part which was moral, and consequently of perpetual obligation, they had so corrupted by their misinterpretations and various traditions, that it was not pure and undefiled, as God deliv-

ered it on Mount Sinai. Which occasioned the words of our Lord, "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." To accomplish the predictions of the prophets concerning himself and to rescue the moral law from those false glosses they had put on it. And though the rest of the world were not altogether without some precepts of morality, yet they lay scattered up and down in the writings of a few wiser and better than the rest, but morality was never collected into a complete system, till the coming of our Saviour, nor was life and immortality ever fully brought to light till the preaching of the gospel.

He was also our priest in that he offered up himself a sacrifice to divine justice in our stead, and by the perfect satisfaction he made, he did atone the displeasure of God, and purchase eternal life for us, which was forfeited by the first man's disobedience.

And as he is our prophet and priest, so likewise he is our king and hath an undoubted right to govern those he hath redeemed by his blood. And as such he will conquer for us all our spiritual enemies: sin and death and all the powers of the kingdom of darkness. And when he hath perfectly subdued them, he will actually confer upon us eternal happiness. This satisfaction and purchase that Christ hath made for us is a clear proof of his divinity, since no mere man is capable of meriting anything good from God; and therefore we are obliged to consider him in a state of equality with the Father, being **his only Son**—Though we are all children of the almighty Father, yet hath he one only Son by an eternal and incomprehensible generation, which only Son is Jesus the Saviour. Being equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead, but inferior to the Father as touching his manhood. "God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made." And this only Son of God we acknowledge to be **Our Lord**—In that he is co-equal and co-essential with the Father, and "by him all things were made." Therefore, since we are his creatures, we must with the apostle St. Thomas,

confess him to be "our Lord and our God." But besides this right to our allegiance, which he hath by creation, he hath redeemed us from death and hell, he hath purchased us with his own blood, so that upon a double account we justly style him Lord, namely, that of creation and purchase.

And as the infinite condescension of the eternal Son of God in assuming our nature was mysterious and incomprehensible, surpassing the wit of men or angels to conceive how such a thing might be! So it was requisite and agreeable to the majesty of God, that the conception of his sacred person should be after a manner altogether differing from ordinary generations; accordingly it was he **which was conceived by the Holy Ghost**—whose miraculous conception was foretold by the angel when his blessed mother questioned how she which was a virgin could conceive. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the son of God." And as all the sacrifices which represented our Saviour under the law were to be without spot or blemish, so likewise Christ, the great Christian sacrifice, was not only infinitely pure and holy in his divine, but also in his human nature he was perfectly immaculate, having none but God for his Father, being **Born of the Virgin Mary**—whose spotless purity no age of the catholic church hath presumed to question. That the promised messiah should be born of a virgin is plain from that of Jeremiah 31:22: "The Lord hath created a new thing on the earth; a woman shall compass a man." And from Isaiah 7:14: "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel." And this seed of the woman must necessarily have assumed our nature, or he could never have been our Jesus, the Saviour of the world. For the divine nature of the Son of God is infinitely happy, utterly incapable of any grief, pain or sense of misery. Nor could its union with humanity any way defile or pollute it or dero-

gate the least from its infinite perfections; so it was only as man that he **Suffered** those infirmities and calamities incident to human nature.

What transactions passed between the Almighty Father and his eternal Son concerning redemption of the world we know not, but we are sure that by a certain and express agreement betwixt them, he was from eternity decreed to suffer for mankind. And in several places of the Old Testament "it was written of the Son of Man that he must suffer many things." And the Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ¹¹⁵—particularly in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah we have a "sad, but clear description" of the sufferings of the Messiah. And indeed his whole life was one continued scene of misery. No sooner was he born, but he was persecuted by Herod and forced to fly into Egypt in the arms of a weak virgin under the protection of a poor foster father. And when returned into his own country, he for thirty years lived in a low condition, probably employed in the mean trade of a carpenter, which made him in the eyes of the world despicable, of no reputation. And when after so long an obscurity he appeared unto men, he entered upon his ministry with the severity of forty days abstinence.

Behold the eternal Lord of nature transported into a wild and desolate wilderness, exposed to the inclemency of the air, tempted by the apostate spirits! The Almighty Being that justly claims a right to the whole creation was himself hungry and athirst, often wearied with painful travelling from place to place; and though he "went about doing good," and never sent any away from him that sought relief without healing their diseases and casting out those evil spirits that afflicted them, yet was he "despised and rejected of men." The possessor of heaven and earth, the sovereign Disposer of all things, from whose bounty all creatures receive what they enjoy of the necessary accommodations of life, was reduced to such a mean estate that though "the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, yet the Son of man had

nowhere to lay his head." And though all his life he was "a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief," yet his greatest sufferings were **under Pontius Pilate**—who was at that time the Roman governor of Judea under Tiberias then emperor of Rome. His office was that of a procurator, whose business it was not only to take an account of the tribute due to the emperor and to order arid dispose of the same for his advantage, but by reason of the seditious and rebellious temper of the Jews, they were further entrusted with some part of the supreme power amongst them, a power of life and death, which was a signal instance of divine providence and a clear proof of the truth of those predictions of the prophets, which had long before foretold that the Messiah should "suffer after a manner that was not prescribed by the law of Moses." And this circumstance of time is mentioned to confirm the truth of our Saviour's history.

And now behold a mysterious scene of wonders indeed! The immaculate Lamb of God, that came to save the world from misery, under the greatest most amazing apprehensions of his approaching passion! "He began to be sorrowful," saith St. Matthew; "to be sore amazed and very heavy," says St. Mark. His soul was pressed with fear, horror and dejection of mind! Tormented with anxiety and disquietude of spirit, which he expressed to his disciples in those sad words, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" See him retire to a solitary garden at a still, melancholy hour of night; behold him prostrate on the ground, conflicting with the wrath of his Almighty Father! He perfectly knew what God is, the severe purity of the deity, and was absolutely conformed to his will. He knew the evil of sin in its nature and consequences, the perfect justice, wisdom and goodness of the divine laws; he understood the inexpressible misery man had brought upon himself by the violation of them; and how intolerable it would be for man to sustain the vengeance of an angry God, and perhaps was moved with extreme concern and pity when he foresaw that, notwithstanding all

he had already done and was about to suffer for his salvation, there would be so many that would obstinately perish. He had a full prospect of all he had yet to undergo, that the combat was not over, but the dregs of that bitter cup still remained; that he must be forsaken of his father in the midst of his torments, which made him thrice so earnestly repeat his petition that "if it were possible, that cup might pass from him." But the full complement of his sufferings we may suppose to be he did at that time actually sustain the whole weight of that grief and sorrow which is due to the justice of God for the sins of the whole world. And this we may believe occasioned that inconceivable agony when "his sweat was as great drops of blood falling to the ground." And though his torments were so inexpressibly great, yet "the Son of man must suffer many things." He must be betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and forsaken of all, that, as he had suffered in his soul by the most intense grief and anguish, so he might likewise suffer in his body the greatest bitterness of corporeal pains, which the malice and rage of his enemies could inflict upon it.

And now the sovereign Lord and judge of all men is haled before the tribunal of his sinful creatures. The pure and unspotted Son of God, who could do no wrong, "neither was guile found in his mouth," accused by his presumptuous slaves of no less a crime than blasphemy. And though the witnesses could by no means agree together, and he was so often declared innocent by Pilate, an infidel judge, yet still the rude and barbarous rabble, being instigated by the envy and malice of the chief priest and elders, persist in demanding that he should be condemned. And when in compliance with their usual custom of having a malefactor released at their feast, Pilate, in order to save him, proposed his release instead of Barabbas, who was a seditious murderer, yet they persisted in their fury and preferred the murderer before the Prince of Life, nor would they be satisfied till he **was crucified**—to which ignominious death the Romans commonly condemned their greatest malefactors, and it was accounted so vile

and shameful amongst them that it was esteemed a very high crime to put any free-man to death after such a dishonourable manner. And as the shame was great, so it was usually accompanied •with many previous pains. They were first cruelly scourged and then compelled to bear their cross on their bleeding wounds to the place of crucifixion. All which the meek and patient Jesus cheerfully underwent for the love he bore towards mankind. "The plowers plowed on his back and made long their furrows." But there was other painful circumstances attended and increased the sufferings of our Saviour. They had not only accused him of blasphemy, but of treason and sedition. "We found this fellow perverting the nation and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself was Christ, a king," which, as it moved Pilate to condemn him, so it caused the rude soldiers to insult him by those mock ensigns of royalty. They arrayed him in a purple robe and put a reed in his right hand, and they bowed the knee before him saying, "Hail, king of the Jews." And that crown of thorns they platted and put on his head not only expressed the scorn of his tormentors, but did by the piercing his sacred temples cause most exquisite pain. That blessed face, which angels rejoice to behold,¹⁵⁸ they buffeted and spit upon, nor was any circumstance of cruelty which their witty malice could suggest might torment him omitted by those inhumane rebels till, wearied "with their own barbarity and impatient of his living any longer, they put his own clothes on again and led him away to crucify him.

And now let us by faith attend our Lord to his last scene of misery, let us ascend with him to the top of Calvary and see with what cruel pleasure they nail his hands and feet to the infamous wood, which, having done, they raise him from the earth, the whole weight of his body being sustained only by those four wounds. But though his corporal pains, occasioned by the thorns, the scourging, by the piercing those nervous and most sensible¹⁶¹ parts of his sacred body, were wrought up to an inexpressible degree of torture, yet they were infinitely surpassed by the anguish of his soul,

when there was, but after what manner we cannot conceive, but it is certain that there was, a sensible withdrawing of the comfortable presence of the Deity, which caused that loud and passionate exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

And now "it is finished" –The measure of his sufferings is completed; and he that could not die but by his own voluntary act of resigning gave up his pure and spotless soul into the hands of his Almighty Father. And though stupid man could insensibly look on this mysterious passion of his blessed Redeemer, yet nature could not so behold her dying Lord, but by strong commotions expressed her sympathy. The sun, as if ashamed and astonished at the barbarous inhumanity and ingratitude of men, withdrew his influence, nor would he display the brightness of his beams when the great Son of God lay under the eclipse of death. The foundations of the solid earth were shaken, the rocks rent, the graves were open—"and the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom," signifying that all, both Jews and gentiles, have free admission into the holy of holies in the heaven of presence through the blood of Jesus. Which extorted a confession of his divinity even from his enemies, for "when the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus saw the earthquake and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

Now though crucifixion doth not so necessarily involve in it a certain death, but that if a person be taken from the cross he may live, yet since it is evident that the messiah was to die, and for that reason he was born and came into the world, that he by the grace of God should suffer death for every man, so we are bound to believe that he was truly **dead**—that there was an actual, real separation of his soul and body. And for a confirmation of this article it is added **And Buried**— And as his death, was foretold, so likewise his burial was typified by the prophet Jonah. For as he was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so was the Son of man to be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. And though by the Roman law those which were

crucified were not allowed the favour of a grave, but were to remain on the cross exposed to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field, yet it was in the power of the magistrate to permit a burial; and the providence of God had so ordered it that those very persons who had caused him to be crucified should petition for his being taken down from the cross. For the law of Moses required that "if a man have committed a sin worthy of death...and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day." And therefore they begged of Pilate that the body should be taken from the cross, and this was the first step towards our Saviour's burial. And "when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor which also waited for the kingdom of God, came and went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus."178 And "he gave the body unto Joseph, and he bought fine linen...and wrapped him in the linen and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, wherein never man before was laid," and "rolled a stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed."

And as our Saviour was really dead and buried, so likewise **He Descended into Hell**—That our Lord did actually descend into hell seems very plain from St.Peter's exposition of that text in the Psalms, "Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, neither shalt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption." When having mentioned this passage he thus explains it—"He (that is David) seeing this before (namely the incarnation of the Son of God) spake of his resurrection, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption." Which is clear proof that his soul did really descend into hell after it was separated from his body. But though he underwent the condition of a sinner in this world and suffered and died as a sinner, yet being perfectly holy and having by virtue of the union of the Deity to his human nature fully satisfied the strictest demands of divine justice, we are not to suppose that he either could or did suffer the

torment of the damned. Therefore we may reasonably believe that his descent into hell was not to suffer, but to triumph over principalities and powers, over the rulers of the kingdom of darkness in their own sad regions of horror and despair. And for this reason and in this sense we believe he descended into hell.

And as "his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption." But having by his own almighty power loosed the pains of death, because it was impossible that he should be holden of it, **The third day he arose again from the dead**—Friday, on which he suffered, and the first day of the week, on the which he rose, being included in the number of the three days. And this first day of the week the apostles and primitive Christians in their time and all Christians ever since have observed as the sabbath.¹⁸⁹ That is, as the Jews, who will not believe any greater deliverance than that out of Egypt, still keep the seventh day, and the Turks the Friday, in memory of Mahomet's flight from Mecca, whom they esteem a greater prophet than Christ or Moses, so all Christians are distinguished from the rest of the world by their observation of the first day commemoration of our Saviour's rising from the dead and his finishing the great work of man's redemption on that day. Thus we believe that as Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures, so **He ascended into Heaven**—He had for forty days after his resurrection remained upon earth, during which time he appeared frequently to his disciples, ate and drank with them, showed them his hands and his feet, which visibly retained the marks of his crucifixion to convince them that it was the same body which was nailed¹⁹⁷ to the cross, that it was the same Jesus which suffered for our offenses that was raised¹⁹⁸ again for our justification. And that by his so doing we might have a "sure and certain hope" of our own resurrection from death. And when he had spoken to his disciples and blessed them, even while he blessed them he parted from them and ascended into the highest heaven, where he still remains, **And sitteth at the right hand of God**

the Father Almighty—God is a spirit, nor hath he any body, so cannot properly be said to have any parts, such as eyes, ears, hands, etc., as we see bodies have; therefore, we may suppose that the right hand of God signifieth his exceeding great and infinite power and glory. And that Christ is said to sit down on the right hand of God in regard of that absolute power and dominion which, he hath obtained in heaven, according as he told the Jews, "Hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power." After all the labour and sorrow, the shame, contempt and torments he suffered in this world, he resteth above in a permanent state of endless glory and unspeakable felicity. And **From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead**—all that shall be found alive at his coming, as well as all those that have died since Adam, shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ to be by him judged according to what they have done on earth, to be by him determined or sentenced and finally disposed to their eternal condition. Those that have done well, he shall receive into everlasting habitations to remain forever with him in eternal blessedness, and those that have done evil he shall condemn to the kingdom of darkness, there to remain in insupportable misery forever with the devil and his angels.

And as we must thus profess to believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ his only Son, so we must every one truly and heartily say, **I believe in the Holy Ghost**—that he is a person of a true and real subsistence, neither created nor begotten, but "proceeding from the Father and the Son," true and eternal God, who is essentially holy himself and the author of all holiness in us by sanctifying our natures, illuminating our minds, rectifying our wills and affections, who cooperateth with the word and sacraments and whatever else is a means of conveying grace into the soul. He it was that "spake by the prophets" and apostles, and 'tis he that leadeth us into all truth. He helpeth our infirmities, assures us of our adoption and will be with **the Holy Catholic Church** to the end of the world.

The catholic church is composed of all congregations of men whatever who bold the faith of Jesus Christ and are obedient to his laws, wherein the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered by such ministers as are regularly consecrated and set apart for such offices according to Christ's institution.

And this church is called holy in respect to its author, Jesus Christ; end, the glory of God and the salvation of souls; institution of the ministry, administration of the sacraments, preaching of the pure word of God; and of the members of this church which are renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit and united to Christ, the supreme Head and Governor of the church. 'Tis styled catholic because it is not, like that of the Jews, confined to one place and people, but 'tis disseminated through all nations, extendeth throughout all ages, even to the end of the world. And as there is but one Head, so the members, though many, are but one body, being all firmly cemented and united together by the same Spirit. Principally by the three great Christian virtues, faith, hope and charity. For as we hold the same principles of faith, do all assent to the same truths "once delivered to the saints," so have we the same hopes and expectation of eternal life which is promised to all. And as our Lord gave the same mark of distinction to all his disciples, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you love one another," so this universal love which is diffused throughout the whole body of Christ is the union of charity; and the same ministry and the same orders in the church makes the unity of discipline. But since Christ hath appointed only one way to heaven, so we are not to expect salvation out of the church, which is also called catholic, in opposition to heretics and schismatics. And if an angel from heaven should preach any other doctrine than Christ and his apostles hath taught or appoint other sacraments than Christ hath already instituted, let him be accursed.

And as the mystical union between Christ and the church and the spiritual conjunction of the members to the head is the foundation of that union and communion

which the saints have with each other, as being all under the influence of the same head, so death, which only separates bodies for a time, cannot dissolve the union of minds, and therefore 'tis not only in relation to the saints on earth, but including also those in heaven that we profess to hold **The communion of saints**—And accordingly we believe that all saints, as well those on earth as those in heaven, have communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and with the blessed angels, who not only join in devotion with the church triumphant above, but are likewise sent forth to minister for those who are the heirs of salvation while they remain in this world. And perhaps we do not consider as we ought how much good we receive by the ministration of the holy angels, nor are we sufficiently grateful to those guardian spirits that so often put by ill accidents, watch over us when we sleep, defending us from the assaults of evil men and evil angels. And if they are so mindful of our preservation in this world, we may suppose them much more concerned for our eternal happiness. There is joy amongst the angels in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. They are present in our public assemblies where we in a more special manner hold communion with them. And 'tis there we join with all the company of the heavenly host in praying and admiring the supreme Being, whom we jointly adore.

What knowledge the saints in heaven have of things or persons in this world we cannot determine, nor after what manner we hold communion with them at present 'tis not easy to conceive. That we are all members of the same mystical body of Christ we are very sure and do all partake of the same vital influence from the same Head and so are united together, and though, we are not actually possessed of the happiness they enjoy yet "we have the Holy Spirit given unto us as an earnest of our eternal felicity with them hereafter. And though their faith is consummated by vision and their hope by present possession, yet the bond of Christian charity still remains. And as we

have a great joy and complacency in their felicity, so, no doubt, they desire and pray for ours.

With the saints on earth we hold communion by the word and sacraments, by praying with and for each other. And in all acts of public or private worship we act upon the same principles, upon the same motives, having the same promises and hopes of **The forgiveness of Sins** through Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, who gave his life a sacrifice by way of compensation and satisfaction to divine justice, by which God became reconciled to man and cancelled the obligation that every sinner lay under to suffer eternal punishment. And he hath appointed in his church "baptism for the first remission and repentance for the constant forgiveness of all following trespasses." And now have we confidence towards God, that not only our souls shall be freed from the guilt and punishment of sin by faith in Jesus, but likewise our bodies may rest in hope of **The Resurrection of the Body**. That the same almighty power which raised again our blessed Lord after he had lain three days in the grave shall also "quicken our mortal bodies," shall reproduce the same individual body that slept in the dust and vitally unite it to the same soul which informed it while on earth. "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good, to the resurrection of life and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation." St. John 5:28–29. "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell (that is, the grave) delivered up the dead that were in them." Revelation 20:13. There shall be a general rendezvous of every particular atom which composed the several bodies of men that ever lived in the world, and each shall be restored to its proper owner so as to make up the same numerical body, the same flesh and blood, etc, which was dissolved at death. And though the bodies of saints shall be glorified heavenly bodies, yet they shall be of the same consistence and figure, but only altered and changed in some properties. And

though at first view it may seem hard to conceive how those bodies which have suffered so many various transmutations, have been either buried in the earth, devoured by beasts, consumed by fire or swallowed up in the sea, have been dissolved into the smallest atoms and those atoms perhaps scattered throughout the world, have fructified the earth, fed the fishes and by that means have become the food of animals or other men and a part of their nourishment, till at last the same particles of matter belongs to several bodies, how, I say, the same numerical atoms should at last rally and meet again and be restored to the first owner, make up again the first body, which was so long since consumed, may seem difficult, if not altogether impossible to determine. But since God hath declared that he will raise the dead, we have no manner of reason to question whether he can do it, since omnipotence knows no difficulty. And that almighty power which at first made us of nothing, out of no preexisting matter, can very easily distinguish and preserve unmixed from other bodies our scattered atoms and can recollect and unite them again, how far soever they are dispersed asunder. He can observe the various changes they undergo in their passages through other bodies and can so order it that they shall never become any part of their nourishment, or if they should be adopted into other men, he can cause them to yield them up again before they die, that they may be restored to their right owners. And having collected these scattered particles, he can readily dispose them into the same order, rebuild the same beauteous fabric, consisting of the same flesh and bones, nerves, veins, blood, etc., and all the several parts it had before its dissolution and, by uniting it to the same soul, make the same living man.

But though the body shall be in substance the same after its resurrection it was before its death, yet it shall greatly differ in its qualities. "It was sown in corruption, it shall be raised incorruptible. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural, it is raised a spiritual body." They

shall not retain the same principles of corruption and mortality they had before, shall never die, but the bodies of the damned shall eternally remain in most inconceivable torments, while those of the blessed shall "meet the Lord in the air" when he comes to judgment and afterwards ascend with him into heaven, there to enjoy **The Life everlasting**. By everlasting life is not only meant that we shall die no more, for in this sense the damned shall have everlasting life as well as the saints: they shall always have a being, though in intolerable torments, which is infinitely worse than none at all. But we are to understand by it full and perfect enjoyment of solid inexpressible joy and felicity. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for those, that love him." The soul shall be perfectly renewed and sanctified, nor shall it be possible to sin any more. All its faculties shall be purified and exulted: the understanding shall be filled with the beatific vision of the adorable Trinity, shall be illuminated, enlarged and eternally employed and satisfied in the contemplation of the sublimest truths. Here we see as in a glass, have dark and imperfect perceptions of God, but there we shall behold him as he is, shall know as we are known. Not that we shall fully comprehend the divine nature as he doth ours—that is impossible, for he is infinite and incomprehensible and we, though in heaven, shall be finite still—but our apprehensions of his being and perfections shall be clear, just, true; we shall see him as he is, shall never be troubled with misapprehensions or false conceptions of him more. Those dark and mysterious methods of providence which here puzzle and often confound the wisest heads to reconcile them with his justice and goodness shall there be unriddled in a moment, and we shall clearly perceive that all the evils which befall good men in this life were the corrections of a merciful father. That "the furnace of affliction," which now seems so hot and terrible to nature, had nothing more than a lambent flame, which was not designed to consume us, but only to purge away our dross, to purify and prepare the mind for its abode amongst

those blessed ones that passed through the same trials before us to the celestial paradise. And we shall forever adore and praise that infinite wisdom, power, and goodness which safely steered and conducted the soul through the rough waves of this tempestuous ocean to the calm haven of peace and everlasting tranquility. Nor shall we have the same sentiments there which we had here, but shall clearly discern that our afflictions here were our choicest mercies. Our wills shall no more be averse from God's, but shall be forever lost in that of our blessed Creator. No conflicts with unruly passions, no pain or misery shall ever find admittance into that heavenly kingdom. "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." When "we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on us, nor any heat. For the lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed us and shall lead us unto living fountains of water."

Far be it from us to think that the grace of God can be purchased with anything less precious than the blood of Jesus; but if it could, who that has the lowest degree of faith, would not part with all things in this world to obtain that love for our dear Redeemer which we so long for and sigh after. Here we cannot watch one hour with Jesus without drowsiness and weariness, failure of spirits, dejection of mind, worldly regards which damps our devotions and pollutes the purity of our sacrifices. What Christian here does not often feel and bewail the weight of corrupt nature, the many infirmities which molest us in our way to glory? And how difficult is it to practice as we ought that great duty of self-denial, to take up the cross and follow the captain of our salvation without ever repining or murmuring. If shame or confusion could enter those blessed mansions, how would our souls be ashamed and confounded at the review of our imperfect services when we see them crowned with such an unproportionable reward? How shall we blush to behold that exceeding and eternal weight of glory that is

conferred upon us for that little (or rather nothing) which we have done or suffered for our God? That God that gave us being, that preserved us, that fed and clothed us in our passage through the world—and what is infinitely more—that gave his only Son to die for us and has by his grace purified and conducted us safe to his Glory! Oh blessed grace! Mysterious love! How shall we then adore and praise what we cannot here apprehend aright! How will love and joy work in the soul! But I cannot express it— I cannot conceive it—

I have purposely omitted many arguments for the being of God, the divine authority of scripture, the truth of revealed religion, a future judgment, and have left the last article very imperfect, because I intend to write on all these subjects for use of my children when I have more leisure. I shall only add a few words to prepare your mind for the second part of my discourse, "Obedience to the Laws of God," which I shall quickly send you.

As the defilement of our nature is the source and original of all our actual impurities and transgressions of the law of God, so the first regular step we can take towards amendment is to be deeply sensible of, grieved and humbled for, our original sin. And though (I believe) the damning guilt of that sin is washed away by baptism in those that die before they are capable of known and actual transgressions, yet experience shows us that the power of it does still survive in such as attain to riper years. And this is what the Apostle complains of in the seventh chapter of the epistle to the Romans. This is the carnal nature, that "law in our members which wars against the law of the mind, and brings us into captivity to the law of sin." And when the work of conversion or regeneration is begun by the Holy Spirit, yet still corrupt nature maintains a conflict with divine grace, nor shall this enemy be entirely conquered till "death shall be swallowed up in victory," till "this mortal shall put on immortality."

I cannot tell whether you have ever seriously considered the lost and miserable condition you are in by nature; if you have not, 'tis high time to begin to do it, and I shall earnestly beseech Almighty God to enlighten your mind, to renew and sanctify you by his Holy Spirit that you may be his child by adoption here and an heir of his blessed kingdom hereafter.

Epworth, January 13, 1709/10

S.W.