

Manuscript Sermon on John 4:41 [Samuel Shaw]¹

As mentioned in the introduction to the long version of his sermon on 1 Kings 18:21, Charles Wesley preached “three or four times” at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight, while the ship carrying him and his brother John took refuge there from bad weather for three weeks, starting November 20, 1735.² CW’s first Sunday in the pulpit at Cowes, on November 23, 1735, he preached from a copy he had made of a sermon by his brother John on Luke 10:42.³ The next Sunday, November 30, CW preached his sermon on 1 Kings 18:21. But what about Sunday, December 7? This was most likely the occasion behind a manuscript in CW’s hand that survives in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (MA 1977/608/3), with the heading “Serm[on] III.”⁴ If this manuscript was among those Sarah Wesley Jr. conveyed to Joseph Benson for publication, it was *not* included in the 1816 collection. This might be explained by a secondary hand that noted at the top right corner of the manuscript “No date” / “and not finished.” This may also be the person who struck out the heading.

If this was the sermon that CW preached on December 7, 1735, then (like with his first sermon in Cowes) he was reading from the pulpit the work of another writer. In this instance CW’s main source was an extract from a book by Samuel Shaw.⁵ The initial draft of this extract abridged Shaw’s original text a bit. CW then struck out a few further phrases (on occasion inserting an alternative word or transition), reducing the length of the sermon further.⁶

The transcription which follows focuses on the final text after CW’s revisions, and indicates the page transitions (in **red** font) of the original manuscript.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: Sept. 27, 2024.

²See JW, *Journal*, Nov. 20, 1735, *Works*, 18:140.

³See JW, *Works*, 4:351–59. The only surviving text of this sermon is CW’s longhand copy (MARC, DDCW 8/13). CW’s notation of preaching on this date is on p. [34] of the copy.

⁴This heading was struck out by a later hand, which also added at the top right corner the comments: “No date” and “and not finished.”

⁵The longhand manuscript is an extract of Samuel Shaw, *Immanuel: or, A Discourse of True Religion* (London: s.n., 1667), Chap. 3, pp. 70–104. JW recorded in his Oxford Diary that he and CW read this text together on Feb. 3–6, 1735. CW’s personal copy survives (with his inscription); MARC, MAW CW9.

⁶Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 259–67 records these changes to the original draft. But Newport failed to recognize the dependence upon Shaw, presenting the sermon as CW’s creation.

John 4:41

“But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.”

From the nature of religion I proceed to speak of its properties, contained under the phrase “springing up into everlasting life.” From which words I shall only take notice of those two properties of true religion, its freeness and activity. In my following discourse I shall confine myself to the former and

- I. Explain the freeness and unconstrainedness of religion.
- II. I shall enquire into the nature, causes and properties of forced devotion.

And I. As to the freeness and unconstrainedness of religion. It is a principle, and it flows and acts freely in the soul, after the manner of a fountain, and in the day of its power, makes the people a willing people, a free-will offering unto God. The King of souls obtains an amicable conquest over the hearts of his elect, and so overpowers them [p. 2] that they love to be his servants and to obey him. Therefore propagation of this people is called their *flowing* unto the Lord. (Isa. 2:2, “the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established, and all nations shall flow unto it.” And again, Jer. 31:12, “they shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord.”) Now this freeness of Christians may be explained by considering both their outward and inward acts.

1. As to the outward acts of service which the true Christian performs, he is freely carried out towards them, without any constraint or force. If he keeps himself from the evils of the place and age and company he lives in, it is not merely by a restraint from without, but by a principle of holy temperance planted in his soul. It is the seed of God abiding in him that preserves him from the commission of sin (1 John 3:9). He is not kept back from it as a horse by a bridle, but by an inward and spiritual change made in his nature.

On the other hand, if he employ himself in any external acts [p. 3] of moral or instituted duty, he does it freely, not of necessity. In acts of charity he gives from a principle of love to God, and man for God’s sake, and so cheerfully, not grudgingly. His alms are not wrung out of him, but proceed from him, as a stream from its fountain—therefore is he called a deviser of liberal things.¹ In acts of righteousness or temperance he is not compelled by laws, but acted upon by the power of that law which is written upon his mind. In acts of worship he is also free, as to any constraint. Prayer is not his task, or penance, but the natural cry of the newborn soul. Neither does he take it up to bribe God’s justice, to quiet his own clamorous conscience, or to purchase favour with God or man. But he prays because he wants, and loves, and believes; he wants the fuller presence of that God whom he loves, he loves that presence which he wants, he believes that he that loves him will not suffer him to want any good thing he prays for. [p. 4] And therefore he does not limit himself penuriously to a morning and evening sacrifice, but his loving and longing soul is continually aspiring after God.

¹See Isa. 32:8; the source is cited in Shaw.

In observing Sabbaths, he is not tied up merely by the force of a national law, no nor yet by the authority of the fourth commandment. As he is not content with barely resting from work, but presses after intimacy with God in the duties of his worship, so neither can he be content with one Sabbath in a week, nor think himself absolved any day from heavenly meditations; but labours to make every day a Sabbath by keeping up his heart in a holy frame, and by maintaining a constant communion with God.

As to fasts, he keeps them not merely by virtue of a civil, no nor a divine institution, but from a principle of godly sorrow afflicts his soul for sin, and daily endeavours more and more to be emptied of himself, which is the most excellent fasting in the world. As to thanksgiving, he does not give thanks by [p. 5] laws and ordinances, but having in himself a law of thankfulness and an ordinance of love engraven upon his soul, he delights to live unto God, which is the most divine way of thank-offering, the hallelujah which the angels sing continually.

2. The Christian is free from any constraint in his inward acts. Love to God is one principal act of the gracious soul, whereby it is carried out freely and with an ardent desire toward an object infinitely lovely. Love is an affection that cannot be extorted, like fear, and “if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned” (Cant. 8:7).² It is not begotten by the influences, of even the divine law, as a law, but as holy, just, and good. The spirit of love and of power more influences that godly man in his pursuit of God than any law without him; (this is as a wing to the soul, whereas outward commandments are but as guides in his way, or at most, but as goads in his side).

The same may be said of holy delight in God or love grown up to its full age and stature, of faith and hope, which are ingenuous [p. 6] and natural acts of the religious soul, whereby it hastens into the divine embraces, as the eagle hasteneth to the prey. These are all the genuine offspring of religion, and in their nature utterly incapable of force.

[3.] Now a little farther to explain this excellent property of true religion, we may consider the author and the object of it.

The author of this free principle is God himself, the free agent, the fountain of his own acts, who hath made it a partaker of his own nature. The uncreated life and liberty hath given this privilege to the religious soul, in some sense to have life and liberty in itself. In nothing does the soul more resemble the divine essence than in this noble freedom, which may therefore justly claim the free Spirit for its author (Ps. 51:12; 2 Cor. 3:17); or the Son of God for its original, according to that of St. John (8:36), “If the Son shall make you free, then shall ye be free indeed.”

Nor does a good man so properly love God and holiness by virtue of a command so to do, as by virtue of a new nature [p. 7] put into him. Being reconciled to the nature of God, he embraces all his laws, not because commanded but because they are in themselves to be desired. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul and strength is not only a duty,³ but likewise the highest privilege, honour, and happiness of the soul—which therefore, with David, “chooses the way of truth.”⁴ What our blessed Saviour says concerning himself is also

²I.e., Song of Sol. 8:7.

³See Matt. 22:37, etc.

⁴Cf. Ps. 119:20.

true of every Christian. It is his meat and drink to do the will of his father.⁵ Now as men do not eat and drink because physicians prescribe it as a means to preserve life, but the sensual appetite is carried out toward food because it is good and suitable; so is the spiritual appetite carried out toward spiritual food not so much by an external precept as by the attractive power of that higher good, which it finds suitable and sufficient for it.

As for the object of this free and generous spirit, it is no other than God himself ultimately, and other things only as they are subservient to the enjoyment of him. The soul eyes God [p. 8] as the perfect and absolute good, attainable through Christ, and therefore fixes upon him as upon its own centre, its proper and adequate object. It is overpowered indeed, but it is only with the infinite goodness of God exercising its sovereignty over all the faculties of the soul, which overpowering is so far from straitening that it makes it truly free and generous in its motions. Religion wings the soul, and makes it take a flight freely and swiftly towards God and eternal life. In a word, the godly soul, being loosened from self-love, emptied of self-fulness, beaten out of all self-satisfaction, and delivered from all self-confining lusts, wills, interests, and ends, and being mightily overcome with a sense of a higher and more excellent good, goes after that freely, centres upon it firmly, grasps after it continually, and had rather be that than what itself is, as seeing the nature of that supreme good is infinitely more excellent and desirable [p. 9] than its own.

[4.] It must indeed be granted that some things without the soul may be motives or encouragements to quicken it; that grace, though an inward principle and free from any constraint, may yet be stirred up by the means God has appointed, such as prayer, meditation, reading, and the like. It must likewise be confessed that God ordinarily uses afflictions to make good men better, and bad men good. These may be as weights to hasten the soul's motions towards God, but they do not principally beget such motions. Thus again, temporal prosperity may be as oil to the wheels, and ought to encourage to the study of powerful godliness. But they are not the spring of the soul's motions. They ought to be as dew upon the grass, to refresh and make fruitful, but it is the root which properly gives life and growth.

[5.] Secondly, it may be granted that there is a kind of constraint and necessity lying upon the godly soul in its most excellent motions—according to that of the apostle (2 Cor. 5:14) [p. 10] “the love of Christ constraineth us,” and again (1 Cor. 9:16) “necessity is laid upon me” to preach the gospel. But yet it holds good that grace is a most free principle (in the soul) and *where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*.⁶ For the constraint the apostle speaks of is not opposed to freedom of soul, but to not acting. Now although the soul, so principled and spirited, cannot but act, yet it acts freely. Those things that are according to nature, though they be done necessarily, yet are they done with the greatest freedom. The water flows and the fire burns necessarily, yet freely. Religion is a new nature in the soul, which being touched effectually with the sense and impressed with the influences of divine goodness, fullness, and perfection, is carried indeed necessarily towards God as its proper centre; and yet its motions are pure, free, generous, and with the greatest delight imaginable. The Christian cannot but love God as his chief good, yet he delights in this necessity, and is exceeding [p. 11] glad that he finds his heart framed and enlarged to love him. I say enlarged, because God is such an object as does not contract and straiten the soul, like all created objects. The sinful soul, the more it spends itself

⁵See John 4:34.

⁶See 2 Cor. 3:17.

upon the creature, the more is it contracted, and its native freedom debased and destroyed. But grace establishes the freedom of the soul, and restores it to its primitive perfection. So that it is never more large, and more at liberty, than when it finds itself delivered from all self-confining creature-loves and desires, and under the most powerful influences and constraint of infinite love and goodness.

By what has been said of the free spirit of true religion, we shall be enabled

II. To enquire into the nature of forced devotion: 1. into the causes, 2. into the properties of it.

1. The cause may be men themselves, other men, or the providences of God. [p. 12]

And 1) a formal and unprincipled Christian may force himself not only to perform some external duties, such as hearing, praying, giving alms, and the like, but even to imitate the more spiritual part of religion, and as it were to act over the very temper and disposition of a son of God. Three things there seem to be which do especially force this show of devotion from him: conscience of guilt, self-love, and false apprehensions of God. First, there is in all men a natural conscience of guilt, which though in some more quick, in others more languid, is not utterly extinguished in any, but disturbs their security, and embitters their pleasures, fastening its stings in their very souls, filling them with agony and anguish, and haunting them with dreadful apprehensions, which they can no more be rid of than they can run away from themselves. This foundation of hell is laid in the bowels of sin itself as a preface to eternal [p. 13] horror. Now although some more desperate wretches force their way through these briars, yet others are so caught in them that they cannot escape without making a composition, and entering into terms to live less scandalously. Conscience having discovered the certain reward and wages of sin, self-love will easily prompt a man to do something or other to escape it. But what shall they⁷ do? Why religion is the only expedient, and therefore they begin to think how they may become friends with God. They will up and be doing. But how come they to run into so great mistakes about religion? Why their gross and false apprehensions of God drive them from him, in the way of superstition and hypocrisy, instead of leading them to him in the way of sincere love and self-resignation. Self being the great Diana of every natural man,⁸ and the only standard by which he measures [p. 14] all things. He knows not how to judge of God himself but by this. Thus he comes to fancy him as an austere, revengeful majesty, and so something must be done to appease him. But yet he imagines this angry deity to be of an impotent, mercenary temper like himself, and that consequently some cheap services and specious oblations will engage and make him a friend—a sheep, or a goat, or a bullock under the Old Testament; a prayer, or a sacrament, or an alms under the New. For it is reconciliation with an angry God he aims at, not union with a good God. He seeks to be reconciled to God, not united to him; though indeed these two can never be divided.

2) Sometimes men may be forced by others to put on a vizard of holiness. And this constraint they may lay upon them by their tongues, hands, and eyes. *By their tongues*; [p. 15] that is, by frequent and ardent exhortation, and inculcating things divine and heavenly. And thus one who fears not God may yet be overcome by the importunity of his father, friend, or minister

⁷CW later tried (unevenly) to change the plurals to singulars; since he was inconsistent, we have left as plurals.

⁸See Acts 19:28.

to do some righteous acts. This seems to have been the case of Joash, the head spring of whose religion was no higher than the instructions of his tutor and guardian Jehoiada.⁹ *By their hands*; that is, either by executing penal laws upon them, or by the holy example they continually set before them. *By their eyes*; that is, by continual observing and watching their behaviour. When many eyes are upon men, they must do something to satisfy the expectations of others and purchase a reputation to themselves.

It may be said that 3) sometimes God lays an external force upon men; as particularly by his severe judgments or thwartings, awakening, humbling, and constraining them to some kind [p. 16] of worship and religion. Such a forced devotion as this was the humiliation of Ahab, and the supplication of Saul. For God himself, acting upon men only from without, is far from producing a living principle of religion in the soul.

[2.] I proceed secondly to describe this forced religion by its properties.

And 1) It is for the most part dry and spiritless. Fancy indeed may sometimes raise the mind into a kind of rapture, and in the outward acts of religion the mechanical Christian may rise higher than the true. This seems exemplified in Jehu, whose religious actions (as he would fain have them esteemed) were rather fury than zeal. But commonly this artificial devotion is barren and dry, void of zeal and warmth, and drives on heavily in pursuit of God, as Pharaoh when his chariot wheels were taken off.¹⁰

2) It is penurious and needy; something the slavish-spirited Christian must do to appease an angry God, or a clamorous conscience. But it shall be as little as may be. He grudges God so much of his time and strength, and asks with those in the prophet, when will the Sabbath be past and the new moon gone?¹¹ Not but this kind of religion [p. 17] may be very liberal and expensive too, and run out much into the branches of external duties, as is the manner of many trees that bear no fruit. For so did the base spirit of the Pharisees, whose often fasting and long praying is recorded by our Saviour in the gospel, but not with approbation. ... But in the great things of the law—in the grand duties of mortification, self denial, and resignation—here this forced religion is always very stingy and penurious. ... The soul that is free as to liberty, is free also as to liberality and expenses, and that not only in external but internal and spiritual obedience and compliance with the will of God. He gives himself wholly up to God, knows no interest of his own, keeps no reserve for himself, or for the creature.

3) This forced religion is uneven, as depending upon inconstant causes. It is like land-floods, that have no spring within themselves vary their motions, are swift¹² [p. 18] and slow, high and low, according as they are supplied with rain.

4) It is not permanent. The meteors will sink down again and be choked in the earth, whence they arose. Take away the weight, and the motion ceases; take away Jehoiada, and Joash stands still.

⁹See 2 Chron. 23–24.

¹⁰See Exod. 14:25.

¹¹See Amos 8:5.

¹²Page 17 is missing from CW's manuscript. The lacunae has been filled above (in blue font) by abridging the relevant portion of Shaw's chapter in a manner similar to how CW abridged earlier portions.

[[From all that has been said it will sadly appear how little we poor sinful creatures naturally know of God, or the way to serve and praise him. We talk of righteousness and pretend unto it. But alas how few are there that know and consider what it means? How easily do we mistake the affections of our nature and issues of self-love for those divine graces which alone can render us acceptable in the sight of God. It may justly grieve us to consider that we should have wandered so long and contented ourselves so often with vain shadows and false images of piety and devotion. Yet ought we to acknowledge and adore the divine goodness if it has been pleased in some measure to open our eyes and let us see what we ought to aim at. We should rejoice to consider what mighty improvements our nature is capable of, and what a divine temper of spirit shines in those whom God is pleased to choose, and causes to approach unto himself.]]¹³

Source: Methodist Archive and Research Centre, MA 1977/608/3.

¹³This closing, written in shorthand, is CW's slight rephrasing of the prayer that closes Part I of Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (London: Smith and Jacob, 1677), 35–37.