

*Essays on the
Distinguishing Traits
of Christian Character*

Part One



Gardiner Spring

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This little work was first published in 1813. In the view of the Author, it was exceedingly doubtful whether the principal part of the edition would not lie upon the shelf of the Bookseller. But through the favour of a kind Providence, it has passed through several editions; and as he has reason to believe, been made in some instances, the power of God to salvation. This has emboldened him, amidst an unusual pressure of labour, to make some alterations and additions to the work, and commit it to the public in somewhat a different form. Imploring the Divine favour, that it may be “a sweet savour unto God in them that are saved,” he solicits for it the kind indulgence and serious attention of the reader.

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Essay 1. Visible Morality

In what consists those fruits of the Spirit, which evince to ourselves and others, that we are born of God?

This inquiry is of the most practical kind, as it brings every man to sit in judgment on his character. “Know thyself,” is an injunction which comes to us under the combined sanction both of reason and

revelation; and which, though not without difficulty in its impartial fulfilment, may, and must be fulfilled, if we would discharge our duty, or enjoy the full measure of comfort which the religion of Jesus imparts. It must be conceded, that men have no right to mistake their own moral character. There is a wide and essential difference between holy and unholy affections. God has given them all proper and necessary means to assist them in an acquaintance with their own hearts; he has expressly forbidden them to mistake the nature of their religious affections and to deceive themselves in respect to their spiritual state; and it is impossible they should make the mistake, unless they are under the influence of some selfish and sinful motive, with which they have no right to comply. The Holy Spirit would not so often have urged the sentiment, “Be not deceived”—“Let no man deceive himself”—“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of”—“Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves?”—if there were any necessity for self-deception.

There are some things which neither prove nor disprove the existence of grace in the soul; there are others that prove the existence of it; and that may be safely relied on as furnishing conclusive testimony that we have passed from death unto life. It is no less important to examine the *inconclusive* than the *conclusive* testimony; and it is to the former that we solicit your attention for several of the earlier essays in this booklet.

There is no certain evidence that a man is the friend of God, resulting from his visible morality.

There is much apparent religion in the world, which consists in mere *visible morality*. “Man looketh on the outward appearance.” When you see a person of unblemished moral character, you involuntarily adjudge him worthy of your esteem and confidence. There are such multitudes, in this apostate and wayward world, who are dishonest, idle, faithless, intemperate, unfriendly and unkind; that when you meet a man who is honest, industrious, faithful to his promises and punctual in his engagements, and who, to these laudable qualities, adds a friendly, humane, generous and amiable spirit, and urbane demeanour; you are tempted to believe that such a man is a pattern of rectitude, and that there is no higher standard of excellence. It is quite natural, that such a man should not only secure

the esteem and confidence of his fellow-men, but command his own. Though he may confess he is not so good as he ought to be, yet is he very apt to imagine himself much better than he really is. He cherishes a high degree of satisfaction in the contemplation of his own excellencies, if not of exultation, in the comparison of his own with those of the multitude around him. Can it be necessary to say, there are *thousands* who rest their hopes for eternity on this sandy foundation? Melancholy view! Melancholy proof that the heart is deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked. Yet, thousands, who on no other foundation than this, are persuaded that their mountain stands strong, and who, because they see nothing to shake their hopes or alarm their fears, are environed by all the impenetrability of an unyielding self-righteousness, and allured by a confidence that is “as the spider’s web.”

We would not be understood as vindicating the claims of immoral men. Nothing is more preposterous, than to yield the honours of the Christian character to vice and immorality. Vital religion is in its very nature operative. The spirit of piety lives in the heart, and lives in the life. Whatever may be the pretensions of the immoral and vicious, God forbid that they should be invested with the sacred name of *Christian*. Nor would we, on the other hand, deny to a reproachless morality the merit to which it is legitimately entitled. A man who possesses these excellencies, must not be denounced as the veriest monster of human depravity. In its kind, and as far as it goes, his character is in a high degree, praiseworthy. To the eye of one who sees not as God sees, there is much that is comparatively illustrious in the character and conduct of such men. But while we cheerfully make these concessions, we may not substitute a *mere visible morality*, however exemplary, however vivid and useful, for *true holiness*. It is easy to conceive all the virtues of an unexceptionable moral deportment, concentrated in men, who are at heart strangers to the spirit of Jesus Christ. A person of the character to which we refer, may, for example, be a professed disbeliever in the truths and doctrines of the Gospel. There are not wanting even infidels, who rarely disregard the laws of good neighbourhood and civil society. *David Hume* would have blushed at the imputation of moral dishonesty; and yet could boldly deny his God and Saviour. *Seneca* and *Socrates* inculcated by their writings and sustained by

their conduct, a morality which, though not faultless, did honour to the Pagan world; but they were pagans still. There are not wanting men in these Christian lands, who from the peculiarity of their condition, from the restraints of education and habit, from high notions of honour, from a nice sense of propriety and gentlemanly deportment, or from motives of mere ambition and personal aggrandizement, would seldom be detected in an immoral action; who at the same time, disclaim every principle of revealed religion, and disavow the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

The morality of which we speak, with all its excellencies, is subjected to a lamentable defect. It regards only a part of the divine law. A merely moral man may be very scrupulous in the performance of duties he owes to his fellow-men, while the infinitely important duties he owes to God, are kept entirely out of sight. Of loving and serving God he knows nothing. Whatever he does, or whatever he leaves undone, he does nothing for God. He is honest in his dealings with all except God; he robs none but God; he is thankless and faithless to none but God; he feels contemptuously, and speaks reproachfully of none but God. A just perception of the relations he sustains to God constitutes no part of his principles, and the duties which result from those relations constitute no part of his piety. He may not only disbelieve the Scriptures, but may never read them; may not only disregard the divine authority, but every form of divine worship, and live and die as though he had no concern with God, and God had no concern with him. The character of the young man, in the Gospel, presents a painful and affecting view of the deficiencies of external morality. (see Matt. 19:16-22) He was not dishonest, nor untrue; he was not impure nor malignant; and not a few of the divine commands he had externally observed. Nay, he says, "All these have I kept." Nor was his a mere evanescent goodness, but steady and uniform. He had performed these services "from his youth up." Nor was this all. He professed a willingness to become acquainted with his whole duty. "What lack I yet?" And yet, when brought to the test, this poor youth saw, that with all his boasted morality, he could not deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ.

I said that mere morality regarded only a *part* of the divine law; but, to speak more correctly, it disregards the whole of it. The sum

and soul of obedience to the divine law, consists in love to God. But the persons whom we describe, though they may have some knowledge of God, and may confess his worthiness to be loved, love almost every thing else more than him. They have no supreme delight and complacency in his excellence; it is no source of gratulation to them, that he is what he is, and that he sways the empire of the universe: and if they ever fix their thoughts upon God, their contemplations of his holiness, justice, and sovereignty, are rather the sources of suspicion, alarm and uneasiness, than of tranquillity, confidence, and holy pleasure. Men of this description therefore, are wholly destitute of the radical and essential principle of conformity to the law of God. However, they may have the appearance of rectitude, they fail in all the essential parts of holy obedience.

Nor is there in such a character any conformity to the requisitions of the Gospel. Repentance, faith, humility, submission, hope and joy, are acts of a mind that delights in God. There is a wide distinction between *moral virtues* and *Christian graces*. Christian graces spring from holy love, and have their origin in holy motives. They regard chiefly the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom, and then govern the intercourse of men with their fellow men, as God has required. Moral virtues spring from supreme selfishness. They have their origin in motives that are never recognized by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They have no regard for the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom; and go just so far as a well regulated self interest leads the way, and there they stop.

We may also remark, that all mere morality is perfectly consistent with a heart of unsubdued and unyielding enmity to God. "He that is not with me," says our blessed Lord, "is against me." Who possessed a fairer character, or were held in higher estimation in their own view and in the view of the world, than the Scribes and Pharisees? And who were more bitter or unrelenting enemies to Christ? You may sooth the self-righteousness, flatter the pride, and inflate the expectations of moral men; and their enmity to God will repose in indifference and stupidity: But let them think enough of God to excite any sensibility toward his character; let them become acquainted with the great design which God is carrying on in the world; let them perceive how totally opposed it is to all the selfish

designs of men; let them feel how certainly every other interest is subjugated to the advancement of God's glory and kingdom; and they will see that it is impossible for them to act a neutral part, and that if they are not at heart the friends of God, they must be his enemies.

There is then no true holiness in mere morality. Much as there is in such a character that is highly esteemed among men, there is nothing that is right in the sight of God. The principle and motive of such a character is at a great remove [distance] from all that God requires and loves. "As a man thinketh in *his heart*, so is he." The moral quality of actions lies in the disposition of heart with which they are performed. A man may be very moral, but if the disposition of heart with which the acts of morality are performed, be not such as God requires and approves, though he may believe he is going to heaven, he is in the broad way to hell. Mere morality never aims at the heart, and would never touch it if it should. It may lop off the luxuriances of human depravity, but it never strikes at the root. It may not sink into the baseness of degeneracy, but it never soars to the purity of holiness. It is a fascinating picture, but it is cold and spiritless as the canvass on which it is delineated. It is like the twinkling glowworm, which borrows all its light from the putrescent and earthy substances of which it is composed; but sustains no relation to the luminary which imparts light and heat to the universe. However fair this exterior, and however accordant with the expectations of the world, it falls far short of what you [man] must be, to become either holy or happy. If men were not accountable, if they were creatures of time merely, and not directing their course to the judgment seat of Christ, and destined to the retributions of an ulterior existence; there would be some apology for substituting visible morality for heart religion. Tell me, will such a morality be of any avail in the hour that tries the spirits of men, "To the law and to the testimony?"—Does not every page of the Word of God flash conviction on the conscience, that such a spurious morality is of no account in the sight of God?

Essay 2. Speculative Knowledge

Nor is it conclusive evidence of true religion, *that a man is well instructed in the doctrines of the Gospel*. No man is warranted to

believe himself a Christian who is profoundly ignorant of the truths revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. There can be no spiritual knowledge where there is no speculative knowledge. God cannot be loved where he is not known; sin cannot be detested where its nature is not discerned; Christ cannot be confided in where his character and sacrifice are not perceived; duty cannot be performed where the mind does not apprehend its nature and obligations. Truth is both the instrument of gracious affections when produced in the soul, and the aliment [nourishment] of them in all their subsequent growth and enlargement.

But while there is no spiritual knowledge, where there is no speculative knowledge, there may be much speculative knowledge, where there is no spiritual. Speculative knowledge has its seat in the head; spiritual knowledge has its seat in the heart. It is obvious there is no moral goodness in the simple assent of the understanding to truth. We receive, compound, and compare ideas, whether we wish to do it or not. When we see the evidence of a religious doctrine to be clear and convincing, we cannot withhold our assent from it; while, at the same time, we may hate what we believe, and love what we reject.

Besides, who does not see that there is nothing in the nature of speculative knowledge, to produce gracious affections! The twilight of reason and conscience, and the clear sunshine of the gospel are of themselves, alike unadapted to the causation of holiness. Should all the light of the Last Day break in upon the understanding of the natural man, it could not originate one holy emotion. Follow the enemies of God through every possible degree of instruction, and though their heads will be better, their hearts will be worse. The more they see, the more they will hate; the more they understand, the more will they complain and object; the more they are convinced, will they the more murmur and rebel. It is not impossible, therefore, for the understanding to be illuminated, where the heart is not sanctified.

But, theory apart: what is the language of experience and observation? Need we but open our eyes to discern the fact, that the minds of wicked men are often richly furnished with doctrinal knowledge, and that they are not infrequently very orthodox in their sentiments? Jesus told the unbelieving Jews, that they had both *seen*

and hated both him and his Father (John 15:24). The apostle tells us of some, who, when “*they knew God*, glorified him not as God” (Rom. 1:21). He also addresses this pointed reproof to the Pharisee: “Behold thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, *and knowest his will*, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being *instructed* out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a *guide of the blind*, a *light* of them which are in darkness, an *instructor* of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the *form of knowledge* and truth in the law” (Rom. 2:17-20). And yet, of these very men our Lord says, they are “serpents, a generation of vipers,” and “cannot escape the damnation of hell” (Matt. 23:33).

And what does the holy apostle say of the vilest reprobates in perdition. “Thou believest there is one God: thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble” (James 2:19). That foul spirit himself was once an angel of light. There is no more studious observer of the character, designs and truth of God than that malicious fiend. There is no greater proficient in theological truth, than the father of lies. There is no want [lack] of orthodoxy, even in hell. And why should it not be so? Bad men, as well as good, are endued with perception, reason, and conscience; and are as capable of applying these faculties, in reflecting upon moral objects as upon natural objects. There is indeed *something* in the doctrines of the gospel which the wicked do not perceive; and this is their *beauty and loveliness*. But this is a perception of the heart, and not of the understanding; and of this the wicked are destitute. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). But because he does not love the truth, it is no evidence that he does not understand it. It is said of *Voltaire*, that he was better acquainted with the Bible, than any other man in France; and he confessed that the reason why he made himself familiar with it was, that he might write against it the more successfully. How many persons have you seen, who were thoroughly versed in the sacred volume—who comprehended the symmetry and connexion of the entire system of revealed truth, and who themselves were distinguished champions of the faith; who, lamentable to confess, were strangers to the religion of the heart?

Something beside the illumination of the natural understanding, therefore, is indispensable to the possession of Christian character. Alas! how many have gone loaded with knowledge, down to hell!

Essay 3. Form of Religion

Nor can *the mere form of religion* be relied on as conclusive testimony that a man is born of God. The religion of the Bible possesses a body and a soul; it has an appearance and a reality; it is endued with a form and a power. The body, the appearance, the form, is a very different thing from the soul, the reality, and the power. Now a moment's reflection, will convince any man that, while the power of religion cannot exist without the form, it is very possible for the form to exist without the power. The Scriptures speak expressly of those who, "having the form of godliness, but deny the power thereof" (2 Tim. 3:5). They present very many painful instances of this character, and criminate and condemn them. The foolish virgins put on the form of religion. They took their lamps, and thus made a profession of religion before the world. They had oil in their lamps also, though the event proved that it was not such as would burn a great while. They went with the wise virgins; their profession was not an idle profession; they frequented the worship of God, and the ordinances of the temple; and performed many of the duties which befitted their standing in the visible church. And when the cry was heard, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh!" they arose and trimmed their lamps, and went forth to meet him. But, bitter result! their lamps had gone out, and the door of the kingdom was shut! (Matt. 25:1-12).

There was a period when the great body of the Israelites possessed only the form of religion. God says of them, "They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me, the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God" (Isa. 58:2). They were also much engaged in the more extraordinary duties of devotion. "Wherefore have we *fasted*," say they, "and thou seest not?" (Isa. 58:3). And yet God reproveth and condemns all this, as the merest hypocrisy.

Our Saviour said of the Pharisees, that they outwardly appeared righteous unto men, but within, were full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Would to God, my brethren, this evil were confined to other days! No doubt there are those who are rigid in their observance of all the external duties of piety; who read the Scriptures, and pray in secret, in private, and in public; who profess to be on the Lord's side; who give up their children to God in baptism; who come to the sacramental table, and engage habitually in the public commemorations of the death and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; who, notwithstanding this, are at heart as ignorant of true religion, as the prayerless and profane.

Nor is it difficult to account for this, from considerations which fall far short of the operation of grace on the heart. Multitudes are formalists from the *force of education*. They have been brought up in the regular performance of the external services of piety, and are as much attached to them as the worshippers of dumb idols are to their deities of wood and stone.

Multitudes are formalists from the *force of example*. They have no wish to be singular in any thing, and consent to float along with the current, though the tide issues from the waters of the sanctuary. Multitudes are formalists from the force of *public opinion*. A due regard to the institutions of piety is too creditable a thing to secure the esteem and confidence of a virtuous society without it.

Multitudes are formalists from the influence of *erroneous teachers*. There have been from the beginning, and still are, false teachers, who lie in wait to deceive; and there is reason to believe that they are too frequently successful in their soul-destroying purpose. Those who are deceived themselves, take the most pains to deceive others, and are more likely to succeed in spreading their pernicious and false sentiments. And there is no point of instruction on which the world are more willing to place implicit confidence in their teachers, and more willing to be deceived, than when they are taught that the form of religion supersedes the necessity of the power. In the Church of England, in the Church of Scotland, in the Church of Holland, and in very many of the churches of these United States, the sentiment is taught that it is the duty of all men to put on the form of religion, though they may be entirely destitute of every holy exercise of heart.

Multitudes put on the form of godliness from the *force of natural conscience*. When the mind is awake to the perception of its

obligations, there can be no semblance of compromise with conscience short of external godliness. Multitudes put on the form of godliness from the *force of fear*. They cannot bear to abandon their hopes; and yet they know they must abandon them, if once they are made to feel there is no religion in their external services. And there are not wanting [lacking] those who substitute the shadow for the substance from the *love of error*. It is a common and just maxim, that men easily believe that to be right, which they *wish* to be right. That true religion consists in mere external forms is a very agreeable sentiment to a wicked heart; and it is not strange that multitudes should mistake error for truth, and the way of death for the way of life.

There are very many, who, from some of these causes, or all of them combined, carry the form of godliness to every possible extent, and are nothing more than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. It is an easy thing to make clean the *outside* of the cup and platter; but to what purpose is it done?—God cannot be mocked. To what purpose is the multitude of such sacrifices!—No, God cannot be mocked. Bring no more vain oblations. Thy corrupt heart corrupts all the fair forms of thy devotion, and thou art still in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. Beware how you flatter yourselves in your own eyes, till your iniquity be found to be hateful. Beware of a hope, that will at last bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder,

Essay 4. Eminent Gifts

It is by no means conclusive evidence that men are born of God, because *they are endued with eminent gifts*. Some persons are very retired in their habits, and very diffident of their powers, and especially in the public exercises of religion, who at the same time, possess at heart the true grace of the Gospel; while others of a less embarrassed and more obtrusive turn of mind, possess peculiar facilities both of thought and expression, and seldom engage in the public acts of devotion, without profit to those around them; who at the same time, may be deceivers or deceived. Gifts are one thing and true grace is another. The gift of prayer is one thing, and the grace of prayer is another. The gift of spiritual conversation is one thing, and the grace of spiritual conversation is another.

Balaam and Saul were among the prophets, but they were both the

enemies of all righteousness. Judas was a public preacher, and yet he was an accursed traitor. Many at the last day shall say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils," to whom the king shall answer, "I know you not, depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22, 23). The eminent gifts and distinguished usefulness of many professing Christians, are no doubt often imparted to them for the benefit of the church of God, while they themselves are reserved to be cast away. A man may converse on the subject of religion as though his lips were touched with a coal from off the altar, and yet be at heart ignorant of those things in which he is the instructor of others. Oh, it is a lamentable thought, but it is nevertheless true, that "a man may preach like an apostle and pray like an angel, and yet have the heart of a fiend."

Essay 5. Conviction of Sin

It is no certain evidence that a person has been born of God, because he *has been the subject of deep convictions for sin*. Some degree of conviction for sin is absolutely necessary to the existence of religion in the soul. If I were to describe the lowest degree of conviction that is consistent with the possession of gracious affections, I should be willing to affirm, that *no man can be a child of God who has not seen his heart to be so sinful as to need regenerating grace; his sins so great as to deserve everlasting condemnation; and his helplessness so complete, as to need an Almighty Saviour*. And yet many a man has this view of himself who is not a true penitent. It is difficult for persons who hear the Gospel, always to remain unaffected and thoughtless; and their solemn impressions often continue for considerable time. They are frequently made to see their own sinfulness, and to feel that they are under the dominion of a carnal mind that is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). The law of God in all the reasonableness of its precept and equity of its sanctions, in all its extent and spirituality, comes home to their consciences, and brings with it the knowledge of sin and the impression of guilt. They see that in them there dwelleth no good thing; that it is in vain they search for the least holiness or a single duty in any thing they have done; and that all they have ever thought, or felt, or performed, is in direct opposition to the law of

God. Sometimes it is the burden of some particular sin which lies heavy on their consciences, and sometimes it is a life of sin, which fills them with distress and trembling. Not infrequently they are awfully miserable. They feel wretched and forlorn; exiled from the favour of God, bound over to the execution of the final sentence; abandoned to despair, and already beginning to sink into the eternal pit. To aggravate their misery, persons in this state of mind, very frequently also have lively impressions of their ill desert. They deeply feel that they deserve to suffer the weight of God's holy and everlasting indignation. They are stripped of all their excuses, and know that it would be just, if the penalty of the law should fall upon them to the uttermost.

Impressions like these, also frequently lead men to make very humble confession of their sins. Nor is this all. They frequently lead them to forsake external sins, and commence the work of actual reformation. They are for a time afraid of sinning, and are restrained and deterred from it by the severity of their apprehensions.

Now there is not, necessarily, any religion in all this. A man may be sensible that he is a sinner, and a great sinner, and never become a penitent. The consciousness of sin is a very different thing from repentance for sin. I have seen living men and dying men, deeply impressed with a view of their sinfulness, who at the same time had no heart to turn to God, as self-abased and humbled penitents. No doubt the reprobate at the bar of judgment, as well as the damned in hell, possess a keen conviction of their personal sinfulness. We are informed that when the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, that he *will convince* all that are ungodly among them, of *all* their *ungodly* deeds, which they have ungodly committed (Jude 14, 15). So that the mere conviction of ungodliness, cannot be evidence of godliness.

Equally certain is it, that no apprehension of the coming wrath constitutes vital piety. There can be no holiness in being afraid of hell. Felix trembled under the preaching of Paul, and yet remained wedded to his idols. The devils also tremble, and remain devils still. So a man may be sensible of his ill-desert, and yet continue in his sins. The man without the wedding garment, was speechless. At the last day, the whole world will feel guilty before God; and through interminable ages, the victims of the final curse, will be made to

acknowledge that their condemnation is righteous.

Nor is there necessarily, any religion in confessing our sins. It is right to confess them, when that confession proceeds from a right heart. But there is many a confession that is extorted by fear. Pharaoh confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord." Saul confessed, "Behold, I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly" (1 Sam. 26:21). Seamen in a storm, and landsmen in distress and sickness, will confess the sins of their whole life, and promise amendment; but, as soon as the storm is over, and health and mercy return, they forget their vows, and become ten-fold more the children of hell than before.

Nor is it less obvious, that men may partially forsake their sins, and yet hold fast the love of sinning. They may abandon their open sins, and yet practice their secret sins; they may abandon disreputable sins, and yet cleave to those that are reputable; they may abandon sins that are hurtful, and yet practice those that are apparently harmless; they may abandon one course of sinning, for the sake of entering upon another; and they may abandon all outward sins, and yet retain all their inward sinfulness. And the very love of sinning, in the mind of a convinced sinner, may be restrained and suppressed, and yet never altered, or changed to holiness.

No degree of conviction for sin, therefore, is conclusive evidence of having been born of God. If you impartially examine the character of a convinced sinner, you will find no evidence of genuine holiness—no evidence of one Christian grace—nothing more than multitudes have felt, who have gone to the pit in their blood. If a man never has been convinced of sin, he may be confident he has never been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Still, it does not of course follow, because he has been convinced, that he has experienced this saving change. Impressions of sin and danger do not slay the enmity of the heart, Purposes of amendment do not slay the enmity of the heart. The conscience may be convinced, while the heart is not renewed. It is infinitely dangerous, therefore, to rest in conviction of sin as a substitute for sound conversion.

Essay 6. Confidence in good Estate

No man may certainly conclude that he is born of God, merely

because he indulges *strong confidence in his own good estate*. If to be strongly persuaded that we are Christians would make us Christians, there would be no such thing as being deceived by false hopes and delusive presumption. A man may be persuaded that he is a child of God, because he discerns in himself the spirit of Jesus Christ; and in such a persuasion, he has reason to place confidence. But there is a persuasion of our acceptance with God, that does not differ from the hope of the hypocrite and self-deceived. Some men hope to be saved, because they think they do not deserve to be damned. Others hope to be saved, because if they do deserve to be damned, they believe God is too merciful to damn them. Others hope to be saved, because they have never done any harm. Others hope to be saved, because they have done a great deal of good. Others hope to be saved, because they believe they possess the spirit of piety. And others hope to be saved, for no other reason than that they believe they will be saved.

Now most of these are, and all of them may be, mere delusion. There is no man saved, except by grace in Jesus Christ; and, therefore, there is no man who does not deserve to be damned. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God. Neither is God too merciful to damn men who deserve to be damned; for while he saves thousands who deserve to perish, he demands, “How can ye escape, who neglect so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3). As to those who feel that they have never done any harm, or have done a great deal of good, the Scriptures declare, that they are vile enough to make it necessary for the Son of God to die for their salvation, and for the Spirit of God to effectuate an entire change in their character, without which, it is impossible for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3, 5). Men, too, may believe they possess the true spirit of piety, and yet not possess it. They may suppose that piety consists in something which falls far short of piety; and even if they suppose it to consist in that in which the Scriptures represent it to consist, they may not possess it. There is a love, a repentance, a faith, a hope, a joy, a self-denial, which is of mere human origin and spurious. The religious affections of many men are founded in supreme selfishness. They are willing to love and serve God, just so far as they believe he is willing to love and serve them, and no farther; and this is “making him to serve with

their sins” (Isa. 43:24). The religion of such men consists in being very anxious about their own welfare, but very little concerned for the honour and glory of God. It is easy to say, “pardon is mine; grace is mine; Christ and all his blessings are mine: God has freely loved me; Christ has graciously died for me; and the Holy Ghost will assuredly sanctify me in the belief of these precious truths.” It is no Herculean task for an ardent mind and an unsanctified, enthusiastic heart, to make these discoveries. This is a kind of confidence which the subtle deceiver is interested to cherish. And the joys and sorrows, the zeal and devotion, which spring from this delusion, constitute a sort of religion, which the blindness and deceit, the self-flattery and pride of the carnal heart very easily substitute for true godliness. And what if a man firmly believes he will be saved? What if he imagines he has the assistance of the Spirit of God in “*working out* this faith in himself?” The faith of the Gospel does not consist in *believing that he shall be saved*. There is a difference between faith in Jesus Christ, and believing that he shall be saved; between being actually interested in his salvation, and the persuasion of our minds that we are thus interested. Men may have strong persuasions of their spiritual safety, who spoil themselves with their own deceivings, and might well say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” A man may have strong hopes, who has no religion. What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?

Essay 7. The Time of your Supposed Conversion

It is no certain evidence that a man is born of God, *because he can specify the particular time when he believes he was converted*. I have no doubt that there are those who can tell the period of time when they passed from death unto life. And this may be deemed a happy circumstance in their religious experience. When the love of God is so sensibly shed abroad in the soul, and the light of his countenance so sensibly descends upon the heart, and the glory of God so sensibly fills the mind, that the time of its influence can be distinctly discerned, it may well be the source of grateful rejoicing. But this is by no means the experience, even of the great body of God’s people. So far as I have been able to form any estimate of this subject, by far the greater part of real Christians, are the subjects of

gracious affection, before they themselves are aware of any change having taken place. The Holy Spirit does not always shine upon the work he has wrought in the heart immediately upon changing it; and the reflex act of the mind that discerns the change, not unfrequently is reserved for a period considerably subsequent to the change itself. It is no proof that a man is not a Christian, that he cannot tell when he was converted; nor is it any proof that he is a Christian, that he can tell the time of his supposed conversion; because it is a very possible thing that the conversion, the date of which he is so ready to specify, may be delusive and spurious. *The time and manner of conversion, can never decide either the genuineness or spuriousness of the work.* The most that the great body of Christians can say as to these is, "I cannot tell how the work was accomplished. All I know is, that a sensible change has taken place in the course of my affections, and that whereas I was once blind, I now see." Let none suppose, that by this I mean to say, that a change of heart is attended with no visible effect. There are effects which cannot be concealed, and which lie open to the inspection of every eye. All I wish to say is that it is not a certain and infallible effect that the subjects of it should be ascertained of the exact time when it took place. "It is as true of religious affections as of any other, that 'the tree is known by its fruits.'"

Examine yourself, therefore, and see whether you be in the faith. There is a hope that is as an anchor to the soul, and there is a hope that perisheth when God taketh the soul away. I would not wound you, but I am jealous for you even with an anxious jealousy. You have been converted to the profession of religion, but have you been converted to the grace of religion? Who runs so as to obtain? Who fights not uncertainly, and as one that beateth the air? Who is, not almost, but altogether a Christian? See to it, that you build not your hope upon the sand. You may rest satisfied with the mere name to live; but if it be so, the time will come when you will be confounded with disappointment, and sink in despair. Alas! that there should be any who think themselves vessels of mercy, when they are only the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. O! I charge you before God and his holy angels, to be faithful in this concern. I shall endeavour to present you with a few considerations hereafter, that may enable you to decide with greater accuracy whether you are building on the

Rock, than any of those negative evidences which have been presented in the preceding pages, and which may perhaps distress you. But I would rather see your hopes die now, than your souls die hereafter. I would rather see the mask rent asunder now, than torn off by the hand of discriminating righteousness hereafter. I would rather see you weep now than weep and wail for ever.

Essay 8. Love to God

In the preceding Essays I have adverted to several things which neither prove nor disprove the existence of true religion in the soul. A man may be unexceptionable in his moral deportment; he may be well instructed in all the doctrines of the Gospel; he may put on the form of religion; he may be endued with eminent gifts; he may have been the subject of deep convictions; he may himself be persuaded that he is a converted man, and be able to specify the particular time when he supposes he was converted: and still it is possible this very man may be in the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity. We do not affirm that this is any evidence against his conversion; and only affirm, that it is not convincing evidence that he is converted. The view we have taken therefore, is only a negative view, and decides nothing. We are still left in darkness and embarrassment as to the great question. Upon the detail of the positive and satisfactory evidences of the new birth, it is our purpose now to enter.

Among the most convincing of these is LOVE TO GOD. Love to God involves a conviction of his excellence, a complacency in his nature, a benevolence toward his interest, and gratitude for his favours. The man who possesses this sublime affection, has reason to believe that his character differs from what it was by nature. The carnal mind is enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). Though unrenewed men may possess some true knowledge both of the natural and moral perfections of the Deity; and though they cannot contemplate his greatness and goodness without discerning his excellence; still they take no delight in his excellence, they feel no benevolence toward his interests, no true gratitude for his favours.

But this deep rooted disaffection toward God is superseded in the renewed mind, by holy love. As the first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thine understanding;" (Luke 10:27), so the love of

God is the first and highest affection of the renovated heart. It belongs to true love always to have correct perceptions of its object. The new born soul does not clothe the Divine Being with such attributes, and such only, as suit a depraved taste, and then fall down and worship him; but he loves the true character of God as it is revealed in the Scriptures; for to love a false character of God, you perceive would be to hate his true character. The cause of love to God, is the agency of the Holy Spirit; the foundation and motive of love to God is his intrinsic excellence. When Moses exclaimed, "Who is like unto thee O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders;" (Exod. 15:11), he discovered an excellence and glory in the divine nature, which filled his mind with esteem and complacency [inward delight]. Love to God does not differ in its nature from love to any other object. If you love your friend, unless your love be base and mercenary, it is because you see something in the character of your friend, that is amiable and lovely. "In the exercise of true love to any object, there is pleasure taken in the object itself." Thus the excellence of God is the foundation of all sincere love to him. True love to God essentially consists in being pleased that he is what he is; and the men of love, love him because he is just such a being as he is. Is his wisdom unerring? his power irresistible? his purity unblemished? his goodness universal and disinterested? his justice inflexible? his grace infinite? Are his designs all eternal and immutable? These are excellencies which fill the new born soul with pleasure and admiration. On such a Being the mind can rest as its chief happiness; and the favour of such a Being, it can prefer to every other enjoyment.

There is a vast difference between such an affection, and that selfish and unhallowed friendship to God, which terminates on our own happiness as its supreme motive and end. If a man, in his supposed love to God, has no ultimate regard except to his own happiness; if he delights in God, not for what *he is*, but for what he is *to him*; in such a sentiment, there is no moral virtue. There is indeed great love of self, but no true love to God. But where the enmity of the carnal mind is slain, the soul is reconciled to the Divine character as it is. God himself, in the fulness of his manifested glory, becomes the object of devout and delighted

contemplation. In his more favoured hours, the views of a good man are in a great measure diverted from himself: as his thoughts glance toward the varied excellence of the Deity, he scarcely stops to inquire whether the Being whose character fills his mind, and in comparison of whose dignity and beauty, all things are atoms and vanity, will extend his mercy to him. It is enough for him, that he supremely regards his own glory. So long as God is brought into view, he feels that it were impossible for him to be miserable. His soul cleaves to God; and in the warmth and fervour of devout affection, he can often say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on the earth that I desire beside thee. As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee O God!” (Psa. 73:25; 42:1).

Nor is it less obvious, that with this sentiment of delight in the divine excellence, there is combined a benevolent regard toward him and the interests of his kingdom. It is the ardent desire, the highest wish of every sanctified mind, that in all his works and all his designs, by all his creatures in all places of his dominion, God should be glorified. Benevolence toward God is a constituent part of love to him. The infinite Being who is capable of enjoying an infinitely brighter degree of happiness than all other beings beside, necessarily shares largely in the benevolent affections of every devout mind.

Nor does the view we have given exclude the idea of gratitude to God. While the first exercise of love to God is, and must be antecedent to the persuasion that God loves us, no man who loves God for the excellence of his character, can refrain from loving him for his communicated goodness. That the God of heaven should uphold, and bless, and sanctify, and pardon, and save a wretch like him, angels have no such cause for gratitude as this!

Such is the nature of this sublime affection. And it is important to remark, that wherever it exists in the soul, it bears predominant sway. It is *supreme love*. “He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:37). God neither requires, nor will accept of a divided heart. He is a jealous God; and no rival may participate in the affection due to him. I do not say, that love to God is never intermitted by a baser affection; for the best of men have their seasons of declension and sin, as well as of advancement and

spiritual vigour. Still, when the love of God actually exists in the soul, every other love is a subordinate affection.

Here then, have we one very obvious characteristic of true religion. Do my readers know by experience what it is to love the infinitely great and ever blessed God? You must be conscious of your love to God, before you have scriptural evidence of his love to you. You have just as much right to call in question God's love to you, as you have a right to call in question your love to him. Is then thy heart right with God? Do you love God for what you imagine him to be, or for what he is? Are you *pleased* with his character, and do you love every part of it? Do you love his holiness as well as his grace, and his justice as well as his mercy? Do you love him merely on account of his love to you, or do you love him because he is in himself lovely? Do you love him merely because you hope he will save you, or do you think you should love him if you supposed he would damn you? Is your love to God supreme? Whom do you love more than God? In whose character do you behold more beauty? Whose blessedness is the object of warmer desire, or more vigorous exertion? To whom are you more grateful? It can be no difficult matter for you to reply to these inquiries. There may be danger, but surely there can be no necessity of being deceived in a case so plain. Supreme love to God is decisive evidence of the renewed heart. When the soul is ushered from the darkness of sin into God's marvellous light, it beholds God in an infinitely different light from what it ever beheld him before. God is every where. There is an inexpressible beauty, a mild glory in almost every object, because it is the work of his hand, and reflects the excellence of his nature. Think how excellent a being God is, and how exalted would be the happiness to enjoy him to perfection, and to be swallowed up in him for ever. To see and to love that which is in finitely lovely, to behold and to adore that which is supremely adorable, is the character and the blessedness of the heavenly world. The early dawn of this spiritual light, the first glow of this pure affection, is the glimmering of that sacred fire which will burn with a purer and a brighter flame throughout interminable ages. Do you then *love God*? If so, the question as to your own good estate is at rest. If you are a friend to God, God will be an everlasting friend to you. Nothing shall separate you from his love. *Neither angels, nor principalities, nor powers,*

nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus your Lord (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Essay 9. Repentance for Sin

A mere glance at the ruin and recovery of man, is enough to convince us, that of the religion of fallen beings, *repentance* forms an essential part. It is alike significant of the character, and indispensable to the happiness of a *converted sinner*, to be penitent.

In the order of gracious exercises, repentance follows love to God. An affectionate view of God prepares the mind to take a just view of sin. As it is impossible to repent of having sinned against a God that we hate; so it is impossible not to repent of having sinned against a God that we love. When the heart has been renewed; when the soul, enlightened by the Divine Spirit, sees the beauty, the *loveliness* of the Divine character—it cannot seriously reflect upon a life of sin, without unfeigned grief.

True repentance is “to abhor sin as committed against God; to abhor ourselves for sin, and to reform.” Repentance, like every other grace, is the gift of God, and the reasonable and indispensable duty of men; and there are considerations which the mind of man perceives, and which the Spirit of God makes use of in the production and exercise of this grace, which give it a peculiar character. The leading thought which influences the soul in all godly sorrow, is *the intrinsic turpitude [vileness] of sin*. It is not enough to feel and acknowledge that we are sinners; the mind must be imbued with a deep and settled conviction of the great evil of sin, as committed against God, and as a wanton and wicked violation of his most holy law. The very definition of sin is that it is a “transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). In this you discover its true nature, and appropriate malignity. It is a violation of all law; a wilful disregard of all authority; and a consequent hostility to all the holiness and happiness which a conformity to law would necessarily secure.

We cannot now speak of the pernicious consequences of sin, and tell how a view of these opens the sources of godly sorrow in the soul. The capital [main] thought that affects the mind of the penitent is, that he has *sinned against God!* Sin is contrary to every attribute of the divine nature, and is the abominable thing which God’s soul

hateth. And the penitent sinner feels that *he is the perpetrator* of this foul deed! He has been sinning against the great God; he has been rising up in rebellion against his legitimate authority; he has done what he could to pour contempt upon his infinite majesty and excellence, to trample upon his goodness and forbearance, to despise his grace, and diminish and destroy his influence in the world. He has not only done this, but he has done it with a calm and deliberate purpose, and in defiance to the strongest inducements to an opposite course of conduct. He sees also, that he has sinned always; that he has been cherishing a totally depraved heart, which has never intermitted its iniquity, and never ceased from its unprovoked and ungrateful disobedience.

Now when a mind that has been renewed by the Spirit of God, makes these internal discoveries, it is not surprising that it should be filled with utter abhorrence of all iniquity. To such a mind, sin appears in its native odiousness: it is vile, it is utterly detestable; it is exceedingly sinful. He abhors it, as committed against God. The thought which most deeply affects him is, "*Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned.*" (Psa. 51:4). Nor is it enough that he abhors his sins; he abhors himself for sin. He is sensible that he is a vile transgressor; that he has no excuse for his iniquity, and is altogether criminal; that the evil of his transgression is chargeable upon himself alone; that he deserves to be blamed, rather than pitied, and that he might well bear the blame as well as endure the curse of his iniquities to all eternity. There are seasons when his views of sin are comparatively languid; and there are also seasons when they are deep and thorough—when they pierce and rend the heart, and fill it with the bitterness of ingenuous sorrow. O, he feels that his transgressions are multiplied, and that his iniquities testify against him! His laughter is turned into mourning, and his joy into heaviness. His heart is heavy, and he goes bowed down to the earth. He is abased before God. He loathes himself in his own sight for his iniquities and abominations. It breaks his spirit to look back and survey the multitude of his transgressions. If you could follow him to his closet, I doubt not you would often hear him cry with the bemoaning prophet, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God; for mine iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown up unto the heavens (Ezra 9:6).

An essential part of true repentance also consists in *actual reformation*. It exhibits itself in real life. The penitent feels the force of considerations which restrain from sin. He is afraid of sin, and dreads its aggravated guilt. *How shall I commit this great wickedness, and sin against God!* Though a *sinner* still, he cannot remain a sinner in the sense in which he was a sinner once. He manifests a desire to honour the God he has so long dishonoured; to undo what he has done against the interest of His kingdom, and repair the injury he has caused to the souls of men. *There is no genuine repentance where there is no forsaking of sin.* Still to go on in sin, to practice iniquity with greediness, with constancy, and with perseverance, is incompatible with the nature of that sorrow which is unto salvation.

Such is true repentance. This is that “godly sorrow” of which the scriptures speak “that worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of” (2 Cor. 7:10). But before you apply these thoughts in the examination of your own character, allow me to advise you, that there is a false and spurious repentance,—a “sorrow of the world that worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10). Saul and Esau, Ahithophel and Judas were penitents: but their repentance needed to be repented of. The damned in hell are weeping and mourning, and must weep and mourn without end; but they are not the subjects of godly sorrow. A child will weep under the rod, and often grieve and afflict his heart because he expects to be punished; while he is at a great remove [way off] from ingenuous sorrow for his fault. Is there not reason to fear there is no small degree of repentance which arises from the fear of punishment, without hating sin?

It is one thing to mourn for sin because it exposes us to hell; and another to mourn for it because it is an infinite evil. It is one thing to mourn for it because it is injurious to ourselves; another, to mourn for it because it is offensive to God. It is one thing to be terrified; another to be humbled. A man may tremble at the apprehension of Divine wrath, while he has no sense of the intrinsic turpitude of sin, and no true contrition of soul on account of it.

There is also the sorrow which arises merely from the hope of forgiveness. Such is the mercenary repentance of the hypocrite and the self-deceived. Many, it is to be feared, have eagerly cherished the expectation of eternal life, and here begun and ended their

religion. Many, it is to be feared, have eagerly cherished the hope of mercy, and here begun their repentance, who have *mourned at the last*. In all this there is nothing that is ingenuous; no godly sorrow arising from a sense of the intrinsic turpitude of sin.

With this illustration of the nature of true repentance, we think you may decide the point as to your own good estate. Those who are true penitents are born of God. Suffer me then to inquire, Do you know any thing of ingenuous [genuine], godly sorrow for sin! Retire into your own bosom, and ask yourself questions like these: Do I possess any settled conviction of the evil of sin? Does sin appear to me, as the *evil and bitter thing*? Does a conviction of the evil of it increase? There are moments when heaven and hell lie out of sight: How does sin appear then? Do you hate it *merely* because it is ruinous to your soul, or because it is offensive to God! Do you hate it because it *is sin*? Is your repentance deep and sincere? Is sin your *greatest grief*? Which grieve you most, your sins, or your misfortunes? What sacrifices are you willing to make, to be delivered from your sins? Do your sins appear many and aggravated? Do you discover sin in a thousand forms, and new expressions, which you never discovered before? Do you mourn over *the sins of the heart*? Do you abase yourself for your innate depravity, as one that was *shaped in iniquity, and conceived in sin*? Do you mourn over your vain thoughts and carnal affections; over a life of sin, ingratitude, and profligacy; over your unprofitableness and unfaithfulness? Does it grieve you that you are worldly, proud, and selfish; that you *have lifted up your soul unto vanity, and panted after the dust of the earth*?

Does it grieve you to the heart, to call to mind that you have sinned *against God*? When your eyes *behold the King, the Lord of Hosts*, are you constrained to exclaim, "*Woe is me!*" When you *look on Him whom you have pierced*, are you constrained to cry out, "*I am undone.*"

The *degree* of godly sorrow is by no means to be overlooked in your self-examination. When God touches, he *breaks* the heart. Where he pours out the spirit of grace, they are not a few transient sighs that agitate the breast; they are heart-rending pangs of sorrow. Is the reader experimentally acquainted with such godly sorrow? Can no solitary hour, no sequestered spot bear testimony to the

bitterness of your grief? Does any thing grieve you more than that you have ten thousand times pierced the heart of redeeming love? Do you abhor sin and turn from it! Are you conscious of being afraid of sin, as well as of an increasing tenderness of conscience whenever you are tempted to go astray? If so, then have you testimony that the work of grace is begun within you—testimony just as infallible as the sincerity of your repentance? Whoso “covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

Essay 10. Faith in Christ

There are errors on the subject of faith in Christ, which it is nowhere more important to observe and avoid, than when we consider it as a test of Christian character. There are those who affirm, that the faith of the Gospel is nothing more than a general assent to the doctrines of revelation, unaccompanied by love to them, or a dependence on Christ for salvation. It is not necessary to animadvert [remark critically] upon this description of faith, for every man who reads the bible must perceive, that faith in Christ is there described as a holy act. But if it is nothing more than the assent of the understanding to the doctrines of the Gospel, then is it possessed by some of the vilest men on the earth, as well as by the fallen spirits in hell (James 2:19).

There are also, those who teach, that the faith of the Gospel consists in a strong persuasion of our personal piety. If a man believes that he is one of God’s elect people; that Christ loved him from eternity; that he died for him in particular; and that he is a regenerated, pardoned sinner; this persuasion is by many supposed to constitute him *a believer* in the scriptural acceptation of the term. Hence the stronger a man’s persuasion of his own interest in Christ, and the blessings of his salvation, the stronger *his faith!* And hence the sentiment has obtained that unbelief consists in not believing, or doubting that we are Christians; and all those fears which disturb the peace of good men, and all those apprehensions lest they should be deceived in their hopes, and fail of everlasting life, are stigmatised as unbelief. Now, that these cannot be either the faith or unbelief of the Gospel is abundantly evident from a number of considerations, on which we cannot enlarge, and will merely suggest.

Nothing can be the object of saving faith, except what is revealed in the scriptures. *Now it is nowhere revealed in the scriptures, that any one of us in particular, is pardoned and justified and individually interested in Christ's redemption;* and if any one imagines that this revelation has been made to him in particular, he deceives himself and the truth is not in him. Besides, The scriptures always represent faith as terminating on something without us; namely, on Christ and the truths concerning him; but if it consist in a persuasion of our being in a state of salvation, it must terminate principally on something within us, namely, the work of grace in our hearts: and how inferior is such an object of faith to the all-sufficiency and glory of the great Redeemer?

It is not easy to give a definition of faith, that comprehends all its properties. In its most general character, it is *reliance upon the testimony of God's word*. It is *receiving the truth in the love of it*. The apostle Paul uses the phrase, "*received not the love of the truth*" as synonymous with the phrase, "*believed not the truth.*" Faith, however, when viewed as an evangelical grace, possesses altogether a peculiar character. It is not simply reliance upon the divine testimony, but *particularly upon the truth of God revealed in the scriptures concerning Jesus Christ*. So the scriptures themselves represent it. "These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life in his name" (John 20:31). "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

I cannot better describe this grace, than by adverting to the state of mind, which precedes and exercises it. When, by the operations of the Holy Spirit, a man is made sensible that he has sinned against the Holy God, he deeply feels that he is fallen, guilty, condemned and undone. He sees that he lies at the *mere mercy* of that God whom he has offended, who is under no obligation to pity him, and may most righteously destroy him for ever. Under the righteous sentence of a holy law, he does not see how God can be just, and yet extend pardoning mercy to a wretch like him, until he becomes acquainted with that soul-reviving truth, that he so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16). In this wonderful

expedient, he discovers a remedy which vindicates the authority of the divine law in the dispensations of pardoning mercy, and relieves his soul from the oppressive apprehension that there is no forgiveness with God. Through this Redeemer, he ascertains that he is invited and commanded to return to God, with the hope and assurance of mercy; and is confirmed in the belief that whosoever cometh to Jesus Christ, he will in no wise cast out (John 6:37). And he is emboldened to go. The good deeds, the religious performances, which once used to encourage him, afford him no encouragement now: but renouncing them all, he returns to God with an implicit, active, and exclusive reliance on Jesus Christ and his redemption, as God's appointed way of saving sinners. He approves of this method of salvation; he delights in it; he chooses it as his only refuge. He no longer rejects the mystery of the cross, or stumbles at the cornerstone which is laid in Zion, but glories in the cross of Christ, and is happy to adventure his all for immortality on this sure foundation: and thus does he "receive," and rest on Christ alone for salvation as he is offered in the Gospel. And this is faith in Christ.

This heavenly grace, is one of the fruits of the spirit, and evidences of regeneration. "He that *believeth* shall be saved" (John 3:36). "No man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3). "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God" (1 John 5:1). Do you possess this heaven inspired grace: What do you know of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners? What glory have you ever discovered in that great moral wonder, "God manifest in the flesh," as the Prophet, the Priest, the King in Sion? Have you from the heart, received the record, that God has given of his Son? Have you discovered any thing in Christ, that qualifies him to be your Saviour, and that can encourage guilty, miserable men to trust in his grace? Is he precious to you, as to those who believe? Is it your happiness to commit your cause to better hands than your own; to relinquish all your self-righteous confidences, and cast yourself into the arms of Jesus? What things were gain to you, do you count loss for Christ? Is every thing you are, and have done, and can perform, in your own view, nothing, that you may win Christ, and be found in him, not having your own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith! (Phil. 3:8, 9).

In a word, with a just view of the character, and a supreme attachment to the person of Christ, can you yield yourself into his hands *as a full and complete Saviour*? Can you look to him to be sanctified by his Spirit; to be governed by his laws; to be protected by his power; to be saved by his death; to be disposed of at his pleasure, and to be the means of promoting his glory? If you can, all is well! In the comprehensive promise of that covenant to which *faith* makes you a party, lie concealed the life and immortality of the Gospel. Life and death, earth and heaven, things present and things to come, joys high, immeasurable, immortal—what shall I say? All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1 Cor. 3:22, 23).

Essay 11. Evangelical Humility

Evangelical humility consists in a just view of our own character, and in a disposition to abase ourselves as low as the vileness of our character requires us to lie. The pride of the human heart casts a veil over the character of men, and aims to conceal their worthlessness as creatures, and their ill desert as sinners; while the humility of the Gospel throws aside the veil, and discovers that native worthlessness which ought to sink the creature in the dust, and that moral deformity which ought to fill the sinner with self-abasement. The natural spirit of men is an independent, haughty and proud spirit; and nothing is more certain, than that this spirit is in a measure subdued in every regenerated mind.

It is no unwelcome sentiment to a good man that he is absolutely dependent on God. There are seasons when he feels that he is “a worm and no man.” Not more readily does a little child hang upon the care and kindness of its parent, or the abject poor depend on the daily bounty of their fellow men, than the humble child of God, the daily pensioner upon the divine bounty, conscious of his dependence, waits only upon God as the source and sustainer of his every expectation.

Nor is he less sensible of his unworthiness, than of his dependence. At best, he feels as an unprofitable servant. The habitual emotions of his soul are those of the returning prodigal when he said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son!” (Luke 15:21).

The people of God also cherish quite as deep impressions of their

ill desert, as of their unworthiness. Most deeply do they feel that “it is of the Lord’s mercies they are not consumed” (Lam. 3:22). They do not complain of God, though he should sink them as low as they deserve to lie; but from the heart can they approve the justice that condemns, while they are allowed to admire and adore the grace that rescues from the condemnation.

Nor are sentiments like these the mere dictates of the understanding, but inwoven with their habitual experience and conduct, and manifested both toward God and man. How is the humble and contrite sinner, when in the more immediate presence of God, borne down under the impression of his inexcusable deficiencies! How does a view of his moral corruption keep him near to the earth! How is he ashamed and abased that he is no more holy! How does he desire to be divested of all his pride, to empty himself and feel less than nothing and vanity. His more happy moments are those in which he is enabled to lie abased before God, and in which he has increasing desires to be kept humble to the end of his days. This humble temper also naturally expresses itself in his intercourse with his fellow men. It is indeed no part of his character to make whining pretences to humility; but if he truly desires more to be humble, than to *appear* humble, this unobtrusive and modest spirit will evince itself in his walk and conversation. “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me,” saith our Lord Jesus, “for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29). A man of an ungovernable and ungoverned spirit, surely bears little resemblance to the character of Christ. It is not denied that some good men have vastly more native haughtiness, vastly more of the over bearing spirit of the carnal man to struggle with, than others; but notwithstanding this, real Christians are humble; and their humility will necessarily express itself in the modesty and meekness of their habitual deportment. “*Let nothing,*” says the Apostle, “*be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves*” (Phil. 2:3). The spirit of Christianity is congenial with its precepts, though it is not in the present life perfectly conformed to them. There is such a thing as *in honour preferring one another*. There is such a spirit, and however those who indulge the hope of their good estate may be disposed to shrink from the test, such is the spirit of all *Christians*.

Divine “charity,” saith the Apostle, “vaunteth, not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly” (1 Cor. 13:4). It is only when, as the elect of God, good men put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, that they exhibit the power and sweetness of genuine religion (Col. 3:12). It is only when seated in the lowest place and clothed with humility, that they exhibit the amiableness of their gracious character. Well may we call humility a heaven-born grace. She is indeed the daughter of the skies, the “meek-eyed child of Jesus,” and dwells only with him, who like herself is born from above.

Does the reader possess this humble spirit? Does he know any thing of this child-like, Christ-like disposition and conduct? Has he ever been truly abased before God? Has he ever sunk down to that abyss of self-abasement to which his guilt might sink him? Has he degraded himself as low as his sin has degraded him? Has he ever taken the place which belongs to him as a sinner against God? What would he think of God, if he should abase him as low as guilt and the curse require him to lie? And as it respects your intercourse with your fellow men, and the world, do you evince any thing like this meekness and lowliness of demeanour? You recollect the reproof our Lord gave his disciples, when he took a little child and set it in the midst of them, and said, “Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye can in no wise enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 18:3). Have you been assimilated to this sweet spirit? Tell me, reader, do you love the praise of men more than the praise of God? If so, can you be a Christian? “How *can ye believe*, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only” (John 5:44). “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him” (Prov. 26:12).

Essay 12. Self-denial

Another evidence of Christian character, is the spirit and practice of *self-denial*. Self-denial consists in *the voluntary renunciation of every thing which is inconsistent with the glory of God, and the highest good of our fellow-men*. It does not imply the voluntary renunciation of good, or the voluntary toleration of evil, as being desirable *in themselves considered*; though it does imply both as being desirable, all things considered. There is no absurdity in the

proposition, that a thing may be very unpleasant in its own nature, but taking all things into view, may be very desirable. Neither does self-denial imply the renunciation of all regard to one's self, for desire of happiness and aversion to misery are inseparable from human nature. The natural principle of self-love does not constitute the sin of selfishness, for there is no moral turpitude in being influenced by the anticipation of good, or the apprehension of evil, provided I am not influenced by these considerations supremely; nor is there sin in regarding my own interest, provided I do not put a higher estimate upon it than it demands.

Self-denial is diametrically opposite to supreme selfishness. Selfishness, is the making a man's self his own centre, the beginning and end of all that he doth. It is difficult, with the Bible in our hands, or upon the principles of sound philosophy, not to acknowledge the distinction between affections that are supremely selfish, and truly disinterested, to be both plain and important. There is no need of the aid of metaphysical discussion to establish the proposition, that no man ought to regard his own happiness more than every thing else, and that the man who does so regard it, possesses none of the spirit of the Gospel.

The affections of men must be placed on some one object that is paramount to every other. Two objects of supreme delight there cannot be. Two paramount principles of action there cannot be. There is no intermediate object between God and self, that can draw forth the highest and strongest affections of the soul. As there is "no such thing as a creature's going out of himself, without rising as high as the glory of God;" so there is no such thing as a creature going out of God, without descending as low as himself. Other objects may be loved; but if they are not loved merely as the means of self-gratification, they are not loved supremely. Affections that do not terminate on God, terminate on self. Men who do not *seek the things that are Jesus Christ's, seek their own*. Inordinate self-love is the ruling passion of their hearts, and the governing principle of their lives. They love themselves, not as they ought to love themselves, but supremely. They set up their own private good as the highest object of desire and pursuit. Their affections operate in a very narrow circle. They have no ultimate regard but to themselves. They have but one interest, and that is their own. A supreme regard to

their own happiness is the main spring of all that they do for God, of all that they do for themselves, and all that they do for their fellow men.

It is needless to say, that with this spirit, Christian self-denial has no communion. This heavenly grace is the result of a supreme attachment to a higher interest than our own. It terminates on nothing short of the highest good; and in pursuing this, terminates on an object large enough to gratify the strongest desires of the most benevolent mind. He who is not a stranger to the spirit of self-denial, has learned to make his own interest bend to the interest of God's kingdom, and that from supreme regard to the interests of God's kingdom, not from supreme regard to himself. Once he denied Christ for himself; now he denies himself for Christ. Once he lived to himself; now he lives to God. No duty is so hard, that he is not willing and resolved to perform; no sin so sweet, that he is not willing and resolved to forsake. Nothing is too dear to give to Christ; nothing too great to be cheerfully sacrificed for the promotion of his glory. He knows he is but a point in the universe of God, "an atom in the sum of being," a single member of Christ's mystical body; and is willing that God should lift him up, or cast him down at his pleasure. His own advancement is as a feather, when put in the balance against the honour of Christ and the good of his kingdom.

Such is the spirit of self-denial. It is the result of a calm, deliberate, invincible attachment to the highest good, flowing forth in the voluntary renunciation of every thing that is inconsistent with the glory of God, and the good of our fellow men.

That this is the scriptural idea of self-denial, it would be easy to illustrate by a multitude of examples. This is the elevated spirit that prompted the father of the faithful to offer up the son of promise; that bore the three worthies of Babylon to the burning fiery furnace; and that led the apostles and martyrs to glory in tribulation. It has borne the test of ridicule and reproach; stood undaunted before the scourge and the prison; triumphed amidst the light of the fagot, and smiled at the point of the sword. This is the spirit which shone with such signal lustre in the sufferings and death of our Blessed Lord. It was eminently the characteristic of this divine personage, that in all he did and suffered, *he pleased not himself*. He sought not his own glory, but the glory of the Father who sent him. "*Though he was*

rich, yet for YOUR SAKES he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

He often anticipated the day of his death, and in itself considered, earnestly desired to be delivered from that fatal hour. He knew the malice of his enemies, and expected to feel the weight of it in his last sufferings. He foresaw all the circumstances that would add poignancy to his anguish, and foresaw them with distress and agony. But does he shrink from the dreadful undertaking? You see him steadfastly setting his face to go to Jerusalem; you hear him telling his disciples that he *must* go; he *must* suffer; he *must* be killed; but do you hear him complain? Go to Gethsemane, and there behold the Son of God under the most clear and awful view of his approaching crucifixion, and learn what it is to deny yourself for the sake of advancing the Father’s glory. Listen to the language of a heart already broken with grief: *“I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. This body sweats as it were great drops of blood. The hidings of my Father’s face are enough to bury me in eternal darkness. The guilt of this falling world will sink my feeble frame to the grave. O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! But now is my soul troubled. The hour is come, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour! But for this cause came I to this hour. Father, GLORIFY THY NAME!”* This was carrying self-denial to its highest pitch.

So pure was the disinterestedness of the Saviour that the sweetest feelings of his heart would have remained for ever ungratified, without the privilege of expiring on the cross.

This too is the spirit which is no less strongly enforced by precept than example. How often are believers exhorted, *NOT to seek THEIR OWN; NOT to live unto THEMSELVES; and whether they live, to live UNTO THE LORD; or whether they die, to die UNTO THE LORD?* That *charity* which the apostle represents as the distinguishing characteristic of believers, is self-denying; it *SEEKETH NOT her own* (1 Cor. 13:5). *“If any man,”* saith the divine Saviour, *“will come after me, let him DENY HIMSELF, and take up his cross, and follow me. Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it”* (Matt. 16:24, 25).

One would think it difficult, after such an explication, to be long

in doubt as to the nature of one of the most decisive evidences of real religion. We can hardly turn to a page in the Bible, without being convinced, that the grand distinction between true religion and false, is that the one is disinterested [self-denying], the other is supremely selfish. *“For whether we be beside ourselves,”* says the apostle to the Corinthians, *“it is TO GOD; or whether we be sober, it is for YOUR CAUSE. For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should NOT henceforth live UNTO THEMSELVES, but unto HIM WHICH DIED FOR THEM AND ROSE AGAIN”* (2 Cor. 5:13-15). Those who are in the flesh, live unto themselves; those who are in the spirit, live unto Christ. There are but two moral characters that are essentially different, and this is the radical difference between them.

Here then you have another criterion of Christian character. It is not supposed that in the present state, we shall find self-denial unalloyed with selfishness. Still, in the affections and conduct of every child of God, the spirit of self-denial is the prominent feature. He who possesses most of this spirit, possesses most of the spirit of his divine Master. In the same proportion in which the glory of God and the welfare of his kingdom take the place of personal advancement, does vital religion predominate in the soul.

The question has often been put, *“How far must a man deny himself for the good of others and the glory of God?”* The thoughts already suggested appear to us to give a satisfactory reply to this inquiry: But if they do not, I answer, *just as far as the good of others and the glory of God require him to deny himself.* So long as this is the criterion, it is impossible that self-denial can be carried too far, either in this world, or the world to come. *But must it be carried so far, as to make a man willing to be damned for the glory of God?* I cannot express my whole soul on this point, better than by quoting an anecdote, which the great Witherspoon introduces as expressive of his own views on this interesting subject. “A man in an eminent station, who had been a great profligate, afterward became a great penitent. He composed a little piece of poetry after his conversion, the leading sentiment of which was in his own language, to the following purpose:

“Great God, thy judgments are full of righteousness; thou takest

pleasure in the exercise of mercy, but I have sinned to such a height that justice demands my destruction, and mercy itself seems to solicit my perdition. Disdain my tears, strike the blow, and execute thy judgment. I am willing to submit, and adore even in perishing, the equity of thy procedure—but on what place will the stroke fall, that is not covered with the blood of Christ?’ ”

The monastery and the cloister, are not the only evidences that there is much of the show of self-denial where there is none of its spirit. Men may deny themselves in a thousand instances, from no other motive than that they expect to be the gainers by it. You cannot know whether your self-denial is genuine, or whether it is spurious, without knowing whether it is founded upon a supreme attachment to the glory of God. To deny yourself from a supreme regard to a higher interest than your own, is to possess the spirit of the Gospel. Is this then the principle which regulates your conduct both toward God and toward man? Which do you pursue most, your interest or your duty. Which do you think of most, your interest or your duty? Can you renounce your ease, your profit, your honour, when they come in competition with your duty? Can you renounce every thing which is inconsistent with the glory of God, and the highest good of your fellow-men? Are these the natural breathings of your heart—*“Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done!?”* Is the highest interest of this kingdom identified with the object of your highest wish, and your most vigorous exertion? Is the cause of Christ, your concern? the dishonour of Christ, your affliction? the cross of Christ, your glory! If so, you are not strangers to the spirit of self-denial. You are not without conclusive evidence, that you are born from above. The more you forget yourselves in a supreme regard for God’s glory, the more will you advance your own interest, both in this world and that which is to come. But the more you seek a selfish, private, separate interest, in opposition to the glory of God, the more are you seeking an interest, which God has determined to destroy.

The first of two booklets.

