

*Essays on the
Distinguishing Traits
of Christian Character*

Part Two



Gardiner Spring

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Essay 13. Devotion to the Divine Honour and Glory

Intimately connected with the spirit of self-denial, is supreme devotion to the honour and glory of God. From the formation of the first angel of light down to the period when the heavens shall pass away as a scroll, the Creator of the ends of the earth had his eye steadfastly fixed on the same grand object. As all things are *of* him, so all will be to him (Rom. 11:36). He who made all things for himself, cannot fail to pursue the end for which he made them, and to obtain it at last. When the proceedings of the last day shall have been closed; when the assembled worlds shall have entered upon the unvarying retributions of eternity; when the heavens and the earth shall have passed away, and a new heaven and a new earth, the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, shall have come down from God out of heaven: *He that sitteth upon the throne shall say, "IT IS DONE; I am ALPHA and OMEGA, the beginning and the end!"* In the winding up of the scene, it will appear that God himself is the first and the last; not merely the efficient, but the final cause of all things. The vast plan, which has for its object nothing less than the brightest manifestation of the divine glory, has an unalienable right to the most unreserved devotedness of every intelligent being. To the advancement of this plan, God therefore requires every intelligent being to be voluntarily subservient.

All the strength and ardour of affection which we are capable of exercising, must be concentrated here. Every faculty, every thought, every volition, every design, must be devoted to this great cause.

The injunction is explicit: “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Cor. 10:31). Now the heart of depraved man is obstinately averse to such a course of feelings and conduct. Instead of being supremely attached to God, and the good of his kingdom, men are by nature *lovers of their own selves*. And here lies the controversy between man and his Maker. God requires men to regard his glory as the great end of their existence, but they disregard his requisitions, and prefer their own will and ends to his. This is the disposition of every natural heart; and hence the mortification of this spirit, and the supreme devotion of the heart and life to the service and glory of God, is evidence of a radical change of moral character.

It was the character of Jesus Christ, that “he went about doing good.” God is served and glorified by a life of active benevolence. Where the heart is seriously and intensely interested in the service of God, it cannot be satisfied without accomplishing something for the cause of God in the earth. Our Lord alludes to this evidence of discipleship when he says, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear *much* fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:8). The true Christian possesses such impressions of his absolute dependence, and has such views of God’s entire right to him, that he feels that all he is, and all that he has belongs to God. And hence his *heart* in the first place is devoted to the service of God. He has a sacred relish for the duties and designs which he knows every creature of God ought to accomplish. The service of God is no irksome employment, but one in which he feels heartily and cheerfully engaged. There is nothing to which his affections are so strongly attached and in which he takes so much delight, as in doing good. He loves the work of pleasing and glorifying his Redeemer, and of doing good to his fellow men. “My meat,” saith the Lord Jesus, “is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34). And the disciple, though far from coming up to the high standard of his Master’s example, is in this respect like his Lord. There is a pleasure, a satisfaction of soul he enjoys in the service of God, which no other employment can impart. No matter what station he may occupy in the world; he may be a minister of the Gospel, an officer in the church, or a private Christian; he may be a magistrate or a subject; he may be rich or poor; he may be a

legislator, a lawyer, or a physician; he may be a husbandman, a merchant, a mechanic, or day labourer; he may be a seaman or a landsman, a master or a servant; and if he is a child of God, his heart will be bound up in the work of doing good, and pleasing and serving God. With his heart, he will also give his *thoughts* to this interesting concern. This is the ultimate end which will absorb his attention. His thoughts are not indeed *always* immediately on this object; because this is impossible. He is like a man who sets out on a journey. The place of his destination is not in his thoughts every foot of ground he measures [passes] over; but it is the point to which his thoughts are perpetually recurring, and from which they are with difficulty diverted and toward which all his course maintains an habitual, if not an invariable tendency. The Christian habitually carries the great object of his existence into the whole course of human life. In seasons of relaxation and seasons of business, it rests upon his mind. He thinks, and studies, and contrives, and consults how he may, in the best manner and with the greatest success, accomplish his Master's work. With his thoughts, he will also consecrate his *time* to the service of God. All his time belongs to God, and though it may be his duty to devote the most of it to secular pursuits, he considers it all as consecrated time. No child of God can be habitually idle, or waste his time in empty relaxation and vain amusements. Show me the man who lives at his ease, and feels that he has time enough for any thing and yet devotes it to nothing, and if to any thing, to that which is foreign to the business of a creature who is the possessor only of one short life, and that redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and for which he is shortly to give up his last account; and I will show you a man who is a Christian only in name. The professed Christian who is the abettor [attender] of balls and assemblies and parties of pleasure; whose precious time is consumed and killed in the perusal of novels, romances, and plays: who is nowhere so happy as at the theatre, the horse race, or the card table; is a miserable deceiver, and more miserably deceived.

But it is not the mere omission of crimes of this aggravated sort that constitutes a Christian improvement of time. The state and growth of grace in his own soul, the spiritual condition of his family, his friends, his neighbours, the church and the world;

together with the ignorance, the immorality, the vice, the want and suffering of his fellow men; these will redeem his time from idleness, from amusements, and often from secular labour. There is one portion of time which every Christian holds dear. The Sabbath is his delight. He anticipates it, he enjoys it, he reflects upon it as the "sweetest day of all the seven." There are no hours of which he is more frugal, none which he turns to better account than the hours of the sacred Sabbath. With his time the true believer also devotes his *property* to God. If there be those who have no property to devote, they form an exception to this remark. But while I say this, I would not forget, that our Lord passed a high encomium [expression of praise] once upon a "poor widow," because she abetted [assisted] the cause of sacred charity, by throwing into his treasury "two mites," when it was literally "all her living." Even the poor may give to the Lord, and trust in him who has promised that those who love him "shall not want any good thing" (Psa. 34:10). But what shall be said of men who are blessed with competency, men who are blessed with abundance, and have nothing to spare for Christ; men who can behold a world lying in wickedness, and pagan and Christian lands famishing for the bread of life, and withhold the light of the great salvation; men who can see the woes and hear the lamentations of industrious and suffering poverty, without a liberal heart and a communicating hand; but that the love of God dwelleth not in them? Christian liberality is one of the indispensable characteristics of true religion; and wherever it is wanting, there is a mournful, if not an entire want of the love of God in the soul.

Professed Christians sometimes avoid the rigid application of this truth, by persuading themselves, that covetousness is their besetting sin. And has it come to this, that the child of God has any sin so besetting, that the love of duty does not gradually diminish and eventually subdue its power? What besetting sin ever bore such sway in the bosom of a child of God, as to exert an influence habitually paramount to the love of Christ? What would be thought of a professed Christian who should say, that the worship of idols is his besetting sin; or the lust of the flesh, or the love of wine, or malignity [extreme evilness] to his neighbour, or dishonesty, or theft is his besetting sin? Would this convince you that an idolater, an adulterer, a glutton, a drunkard, a sharper [swindler], a liar or a

thief is a Christian? No more is a man who makes an idol of his gold (Col. 3:5, 6). “Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matt. 6:24). The love of God and of duty in the mind of a regenerated man, obtains and habitually preserves the ascendancy. Where gold and not duty determines the choice and the conduct of men, the religion of the Gospel is too hard a master to be submitted to. And shall I not say, that with their heart, their thoughts, their time and property, the disciples of Christ consecrate their *influence and prayers* to God? Yes, the cause of God is with them the grand pursuit. If you would warm and animate their minds; if you would awaken their resolution, fortitude and zeal; if you would excite their souls to fervent importunity in prayer; it must be by presenting to their thoughts some concern that has a discernible connexion with the honour and glory of God. Whatever may be the life of others, theirs is devoted to him, who loved them and gave himself for them. Whatever may be the design of others, their purpose is to glorify God in their bodies and spirits, which are his. Whatever may be the enjoyment of others, they account not that to be living at all, which is not devoted to the great purpose for which life was bestowed.

As to the motive of such a life, it has been incidentally sufficiently developed. The deceiver thought that a man might be devoted to the service of God from motives of self-interest, and yet give no evidence of piety. “Doth Job serve God for nought?” (Job 1:9). “There is,” says Dr. Witherspoon, “certainly in every renewed heart, a sense of duty independent of (self) interest. Were this not the case, even supposing a desire of reward or fear of punishment should dispose to obedience, it would plainly be only a change of life, and not a change of heart. It is beyond all question indeed, that our true interest is inseparable from our duty, so that self-seeking is self-loosing; but still a sense of duty must have the precedency, otherwise it changes its nature, and is no duty at all.”

We entreat you then, in inquiring into the evidence of your good estate, to ask yourselves, whether you are supremely devoted to God? Is it the first and highest desire of your soul to honour God in the heart and serve him in the life? And is this a disinterested or a mercenary desire? Is it incited by the hope of reward, or the love of God and duty? Is the glory of God the end of your conduct? and do you pursue it, not from regard to yourself, but from regard to God?

Do you find your highest happiness in your duty?

Essay 14. Spirit of Prayer

Another evidence of regeneration is the spirit of prayer. When we say that the spirit of prayer is conclusive evidence of Christian character, we feel under obligation to point out wherein that spirit consists. We are not to forget that there is such a thing as *drawing nigh unto God with the mouth, and honouring him with the lips, while the heart is far from him* (Mark 7:6). The hearts of men may be as stupid and unfeeling, as proud and as self-righteous; they may be in the exercise of as sensible opposition to the character of the Most High, to the law and the Gospel, while offering up the most solemn expressions of homage, as they are when God is not in all their thoughts. But it is not so with the righteous. His prayers *goeth not forth out of feigned lips* (Psa. 17:1). With the spiritual worshipper, the heart feels what the lips express.

The spirit of prayer is *humble*. It flows from a broken and contrite heart. The publican *could not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, "but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!"* (Luke 18:13). Every sentiment of his heart constrains him to make the affecting confession, *"O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to thee, for my iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown up unto the heavens!"* (Ezra 9:6).

The spirit of prayer is also *believing*. Though the child of God has an impressive sense of personal unworthiness and ill-desert, yet he knows that *he has a great High Priest that has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who is touched with a feeling of his infirmities, and he therefore comes boldly to the throne of grace, that he "may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb. 4:14-16).

But the spirit of prayer is also *submissive*. The suppliant prefers the will of God to his own. He pours forth his heart with the affectionate confidence of a child, and the unconditional submission of a servant. He is prepared to be accepted, or to be rejected in his petitions. He approaches the mercy-seat with the desire that God would exercise his wisdom and grace in granting or denying his requests.

This is the spirit of prayer; sincere, humble, believing, submissive. Other prayer than this the Bible does not require, God will not accept. This is the spirit of genuine devotion; a spirit which you cannot be conscious of possessing, without the consciousness of your reconciliation to God. "*Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father*" (Gal. 4:6). It may not be amiss, while we are upon this subject, to spend a few minutes in looking at the question, "What evidence does the long-continued practice of the *external duty* of prayer afford of the existence of vital religion in the heart?" We do not mean, by this statement, necessarily to exclude the spirit from the form of prayer. If we did, the question would be at an end. What evidence does the long-continued practice of the *external form* afford of the existence of the *internal spirit*?

Men may pray much, and yet not be Christians. They may pray in public, and in their families, and still not be Christians. This they may do to gratify their pride; to be seen of men; to maintain the character of Christians in the view of the world: to silence the clamours of conscience, or to support a hypocritical hope. But whether men *persevere in the habitual practice of secret prayer* without good evidence of Christian character, is a question which I dare not answer in the negative. Neither would I venture to answer it unhesitatingly in the affirmative. This much the Bible will surely warrant us to say, *Men who are not Christians will be exceedingly apt to neglect, and in the end, wholly to neglect the practice of secret prayer.*

Job demands concerning the hypocrite, "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" (Job 27:10). Wherever you find the habitual performance of secret prayer for a long course of years, there is some reason to believe, you find the breathings of the new born soul. There you may hope there are hungerings and thirstings after righteousness. There you will usually discover a heart that is not in pursuit of hope merely, but grace; not safety only, but holiness. There you will usually, if not always, discover one not muttering over a few unmeaning sentences, as devoid of life as a loathsome carcass is of the life-giving spirit; but one whom the Spirit of God has taught to *pray*, because he is weak and needs strength; because he is tempted and needs support;

because he is in want and needs supply; because he is a sinner and needs mercy.

If these remarks are just, it is not impertinent to ask my readers, Whether they practise the duty of secret prayer? We do not ask whether you pray in secret now and then; whether you perform this duty on the Sabbath, or some occasional seasons of unusual alarm or solemnity? Is this your *habitual* practice? Has it been your habitual practice ever since you hoped you were brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light? No matter how punctual you are in other duties; no matter what evidence you have of your conversion from any other quarter; if you have not this, you may set all other down for nought. The want of this is decisive evidence against you, even if the possession of it is not decisive evidence in your favour. Prayer has been often styled the "Christian's breath." It is eminently so. A prayerless Christian! No, it cannot be. It is a mark of the highest delusion, of the grossest stupidity, to cherish the hope of having made your peace with God, and at the same time to live in the neglect of secret prayer... Who that has the least pretension to religion, can presume to live without seeking the favour, without deprecating the wrath, and without realizing the presence of Him in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being! To live without prayer, is emphatically to *live without God in the world*. (See the website sermon on this subject "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer." by Jonathan Edwards).

But I would give one caution to a certain class of my readers. There are not wanting those who live in constant doubt and trembling, because they do not enjoy the constant presence of God, and the uniform fervency of affection in their retirements. Real Christians have seasons of coldness which chill the spirit of devotion. Such is the power of indwelling sin; so great is the influence of the world, the flesh, and the devil; that even God's own children are sometimes carried far down the current. To the shame and guilt of God's people, we are constrained to make this affecting acknowledgment. Still, real Christians cannot live in the neglect of prayer; nay, more, those who do not possess the spirit, and live in the habitual performance of the duty, are *in the gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity*. The moment a man begins to live in the neglect of prayer, that moment he should take the alarm.

May it then be said of you as it was of Saul of Tarsus, “Behold he prayeth?” (Acts 9:11). If so, then you like him may be a *chosen vessel*. Maintain a constant and uniform intimacy with the throne of grace, and for the sake of our great High Priest, God will *put his fear into your hearts, and you shall not depart from him* (Jer. 32:40). “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8). Keep near to the fountain head, and *with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation* (Isa. 12:3).

Essay 15. Brotherly Love

Another evidence is *love to the brethren*.

The Gospel breathes the spirit of love. Love is the fulfilling of its precepts, the evidence of its power, the pledge of its joys, and the ripe fruit of the Spirit. “A *new commandment*,” saith our Lord to his disciples, “give I unto you, that ye love one another” (John 13:34). “And this is his commandment, that we should believe on his son Jesus Christ, and love one another” (1 John 3:23). This is emphatically a new commandment. It has a new object, not specified in the original law of love, and obviously a different affection from that which is required in the moral law. Brotherly love is an affection which is limited to particular characters. There can be no doubt but the children of God are kindly affectioned toward all men, because Christian benevolence runs parallel with rational being. Genuine love to our neighbour is extended to all, according to their character and circumstances. It *blesses those who curse us, and does good to those who hate us*. This, however, is not the distinguishing nature of brotherly love. Brotherly love differs materially from the love of benevolence. It is the love of good men, and for their goodness only, and extends only to the followers of Christ. It is an affection which is directed toward the excellence of religion, and consists in complacency [contentment] in holiness. “Every one that is of the truth,” every one that is born of God, of whatever condition, or nation under heaven, is to be loved with this affection.

There is something in the character of every child of God that reflects the image of his heavenly Father, and it is this that attracts the eye and wins the heart. There is something which is amiable and lovely, and it is this loveliness that gives a spring to the affections

and draws forth the hearts of God's people toward each other, as they are drawn forth toward God himself. The children of God are partakers of the divine nature. From bearing the *image of the earthly*, they now bear the *image of the heavenly*. God has imparted to them a portion of his own loveliness; he has formed them new creatures; of his free and distinguishing grace, he has made them, *more excellent than their neighbours*; and hence they are lovely. They are *the excellent of the earth*. God loves them; Christ loves them; the Holy Spirit loves them; angels love them; and they love each other. It is around them that the virtues cluster; from them that the graces of heaven are reflected, though shaded, and very often darkened, by debasing and reproachful sins.

Love to the brethren is also an affection which rests upon the union which believers sustain with Christ. The Lord Jesus, together with all true believers, forms one mystical body. Christ is the head, and they are the members. The same bond which unites believers to Christ, binds them to each other. The love which is exercised toward the head, extends to the members. The union necessarily involves an union of affection. Those who love Christ, love those who are like him, and those who are beloved by him. Here all distinctions vanish. Name and nation, rank and party, are lost in the common character of believers, the common name of Christian. Jew and Gentile, bond and free, rich and poor, are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). They have *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all* (Eph. 4:5, 6). Actuated by the same principles, cherishing the same hopes, animated by the same prospects, labouring under the same discouragements, having the same enemies to encounter, and the same temptations to resist, the same hell to shun, and the same heaven to enjoy; it is not strange that they should love one another sincerely, and often with a *pure heart fervently*. There is a unity of design, a common interest in the objects of their pursuit, which lays the foundation for mutual friendship, and which cannot fail to excite the "harmony of souls." The glory of God is the grand object which commands their highest affections, and which necessarily makes the interest of the whole the interest of each part, and the interest of each part the interest of the whole. There are no conflicting interests, and there need be no jarring passions. In a common cause,

which in point of importance takes the place of every other, and all others, the affections of the sanctified heart are one.

The Lord Jesus has given peculiar emphasis to the duty of brotherly love, by constituting it the easy and decisive standard of true godliness. It is by this standard, that his disciples are to judge of themselves. "We know," saith an apostle, "that we have passed from death unto life, *because we love the brethren*" (1 John 3:14). This is the criterion also, by which he would have the world judge of the sincerity of their religion, and the truth and divinity of his Gospel. "By this shall *all men know* that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). In that memorable prayer just before his death, he also prays for his disciples, "that they all *may be one*; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also *may be one* in us, that *the world may believe that thou hast sent me*" (John 17:21). And with this standard before him, may not every man ascertain whether he is a child of God?

The love of good men is not one of the native affections of the carnal mind. This cold, degenerate soil bears no such heavenly fruit. The affection which Christians exercise toward each other as Christians, is the offspring of brighter worlds. It is a principle of celestial birth. *Love is of God, and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God* (1 John 4:7).

It cannot be difficult to distinguish this Christian grace from a mere natural affection, or mercenary, or sectarian attachment. A parent may love his child, and a child his parent; a husband may love his wife, and a wife her husband; and there may exist much and reciprocal affection between one man and another; while the personal religion of the party beloved, constitutes none of the reasons of this affection. Persons may have been educated also to esteem and respect pious men, while this respectful sentiment falls far below the love of men as Christians, and for their Christianity. Men may love Christians, merely because they imagine that Christians love them. This, like every other affection that is purely selfish, is unworthy of the Christian name. They may love particular Christians, because they are of their party, and imbibe their sentiments. This too is nothing better than that friendship of the world which is enmity with God. The obvious inquiry is, Do you love the people of God, *because they are the people of God?*—

because you discover in them the amiableness of that religion which is altogether lovely? Do you love them, not merely because they love you, or have bestowed favours upon you; not because they are of your party; but because they bear the image of your heavenly Father? Do you love them for their love of God, their self-denial, their heavenliness, their usefulness in the world, their reproachless example, their faithfulness and love of duty? Do you love them when they reprove you, and when their example condemns you? And do you love them in proportion to the measure of these excellencies which they possess? Do you feel an interest in them and for them? Can you bear and forbear with them? Can you forget their infirmities, or do you rejoice to magnify them: Can you cast the mantle of charity over their sins, and pray for them, and watch over them, and pity, and love them still? And can you feel thus, and act thus, toward the poorest and most despised of the flock, and that because *he is a Christian*? If so, here is your encouragement, *he that loveth is born of God* (1 John 4:7).

Essay 16. Separation from the World

A convincing evidence of true piety is the spirit of separation from the world.

Saints are expectants of glory. They are born from above, and have no home beneath their native skies. Here they are strangers and pilgrims, and plainly declare that they seek a better country (Heb. 11:13, 14). It is their avowed profession, that their happiness and hopes are neither in, nor from the present world. Their treasure is in heaven. They are not of this world, even as Christ was not of this world (John 17:14).

The spirit of the world is incompatible with the spirit of the Gospel. It is the spirit of pride, and not of humility: of self-indulgence, rather than of self-denial. Riches, honours and pleasure, form the grand object of pursuit with the men of the world. Their great inquiry is, "*Who will show us any good?*" Regardless of every thing but that which is calculated to gratify a carnal mind, they *lift up their souls unto vanity, and pant after the dust of the earth*. Their thoughts and their affections are chained down to the things of time and sense. And in these they seem to be irrecoverably immersed. They seldom think, but they think of the world; they seldom

converse, but they converse of the world. The world is the cause of their perplexity, and the source of their enjoyment. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, close every avenue of the soul, to the exclusion of every holy desire, I had almost said, every serious reflection.

This spirit, the Christian has mortified. “*Now we,*” saith the apostle, “*have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God*” (1 Cor. 2:12). The disciple of Jesus, as he has nobler affections than the worldling, has a higher object and more elevated joys. While the wise man glories in his wisdom; while the mighty man glories in his might; and the rich man glories in his riches—it is the Christians privilege to glory in nothing save *in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto him, and he unto the world* (Gal. 6:14). The character and cause of the blessed Redeemer lie so near his heart, that, in comparison with these, every thing else vanishes to nothing. He views the world by the eye of faith, and in a light that reflects its intrinsic importance—the light of eternity. There, the world shrinks to a point, and the fashion of it passeth away.

As the spirit of the world is not the spirit of God’s people, so the men of the world are not their companions. “We know that we are of God,” saith the apostle, “and the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). Between the people of God, and the men of the world, there is an essential difference of character. The views, the desires and the designs of the children of God are diametrically opposite to the views, the desires, and the designs of the men of the world. The one loves what the other hates; the one pursues what the other shuns. Saints are passing on the narrow way which leads to life; sinners the broad way which leads to death (Matt. 7:13, 14). If there were no other ground for the expectation, therefore, than the common principles of human nature, we might look for dissention rather than unity, between the disciples of Christ and the men of the world. “How can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). What fellowship hath light with darkness? Or what communion hath Christ with Belial? (2 Cor. 6:14, 15). The same principles which prompt the men of the world not to select the people of God for their familiar companions, also induce the people of God to choose other companions than the men of the world,

There is an irreconcilable spirit between them, The friendship of the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). Many as may be the mutual tokens of respect, civility, and kindness, (and many there should be) between Christians and the men of the world, they are, notwithstanding, two distinct classes of men. Much as Christians esteem the men of the world as good members of civil society; much as they regard their happiness, and endeavour to advance it; much as they compassionate their depravity, and deplore their prospects; much as they are conversant with them in the ordinary calls of duty—still, they are not their chosen companions. They cannot court their friendship; because they are afraid of it. “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” (1 Cor. 16:33) “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Prov. 13:20).

Those who have mortified the spirit, and who stand at a distance from the men of the world, are also in some good degree above its *corrupting influence*. The claim which, from their numbers and strength, the world are apt to consider themselves as warranted to make upon the opinions and practices of God’s people, is habitually resisted. Though good men may be often seduced by the smiles, and awed by the frowns of the world, it is no part of their general character to conform either to its pleasure or displeasure. They act from higher motives, and maintain a more consistent character, than to give way to indulgences merely for the sake of pleasing the world; or to avoid duty, merely through the fear of offending it. While they regard the fear of God more than the fear of man, they will not dishonour God to please the world. And while they regard the favour of God more than the favour of man, they will not purchase the favour of man at the expense of the favour of God. An habitual regard to the will and the favour of God is an effectual security against the smiles of the world. The great object of the Christian is *duty*; his predominant desire to obey God. When he can please the world consistently with these, he will do so; otherwise, it is enough for him that God commands; and enough for them that he cannot disobey. While they dread to offend God, they cannot tamely bow to the favour or frowns of men. *Whether it be right to hearken unto men, rather than unto God, judge ye?* (Acts 4:19).

There would be no difficulty in pointing out the *path of duty* upon

this subject; but there is some in saying, how far men may swerve from this path, and yet be Christians. One thing is plain; *Christians cannot be worldlings. They cannot be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God* (2 Tim. 3:4). He who fixes his highest affections on wealth, honour, business, sensual pleasures, gay amusements, and the various pursuits of the present scene, cannot fix them supremely on God.

Nor is the character of the vast multitude who attempt to make a compromise between God and the world, better than that of the mere worldling. The mere fact that they are for ever balancing between a life of devotion and a life of pleasure; that they design now to yield the empire to God, and then to the world; decides the question against them.

We may not deny that the children of God are sometimes guilty of awful defection from the standard of Christian character in their intercourse with the world. But after all, their prevailing feelings and conduct are not those of conformity to the world, but of habitual non-conformity. The principles of the new man are at war with the principles of the world. True believers have “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;” and have “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22, 24). “This I say then,” saith the apostle, “walk in the spirit, and ye *shall not* fulfil the lusts of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). We cannot walk after the flesh while we walk after the spirit. While the love of God is the reigning affection of the heart, it will turn away from the allurements of the world.

This subject presents a number of solemn questions, to every one who is anxious to ascertain whether his heart is right in the sight of God. It is a great point with all of us to know, whether we are spiritually-minded, or worldly-minded? Whether we are *conformed to this world, or transformed by the renewing of our minds?* Whether the objects of faith or of sense, things present or to come, have the predominating influence over our hearts?

What shall we say of those, who exhibit to themselves, and to others, all the traits of character which belong to worldly men? What of those, who pursue worldly things with all that ardour, all that intemperate zeal, which enters into the pursuits of worldly

men? Is there not reason to fear, that they are supremely attached to earth, and are as yet aliens from the commonwealth of Israel?

What shall we say of those who love the circles of fashion, more than the associations for prayer? and who court the friendship of the rich, the gay, and the honourable, more than that of the humble disciple of Jesus? What of those *who “send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ?”* (Job 21:11, 12). Was Job uncharitable, when he ranked persons of this character with those who *“say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?”*

What shall we say of those, who are for ever varying from the path of duty, lest it should be unpopular; who never lisp a syllable, or lift a finger for the honour of God, lest they should displease the world? What, but that *they love the praise of men more than the praise of God?* (John 5:44).

Conformity to the world, is to be expected from the professed worldling; it is the character of the worldling. But is it to be expected from the professed disciple of Jesus? Is it the result of the habitual determinations of a heavenly mind? Is it the character of one who looks on things that are unseen and eternal; of a stranger and sojourner; of one who sets his affections on things above, and not on things on the earth? How many like the young man in the gospel, exhibit a decent and regular outward profession, who are wholly devoted to the world! Here their affections centre. From this polluted fountain all their joys flow. They had been Christians but for the world. But the world is the fatal snare. They have plunged down the precipice, and drifted almost beyond the hope of recovery.

If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). *To be carnally minded is DEATH* (Rom. 8:6). Show me the men who imbibe the spirit of the world; who choose the company of the world; who imitate the example of the world; conform to the maxims of the world; are swallowed up in the gaiety, fashions and amusements of the world;—*behold these are the ungodly, who are brought into desolation as in a moment!—I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found* (Psa. 37:35).

Essay 17. Growth in Grace

How beautiful is the light of the morning! Behold it hovering over the distant edge of the horizon, and shedding its cheerful beams upon the hills. It is a *morning without clouds*. But how soon is the prospect overcast! The atmosphere is obscured by vapours, and the sun is darkened by a cloud. Again the mists are fled; the clouds have passed over; and the sun is still advancing in his course. Thus he rises; now, behind the cloud, now, in all the greatness of his strength, *shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day*.

Such is the *path of the just*. In the present world, good men are very imperfect. The best of men have reason to complain bitterly of the body of sin and death; and the best of men too, have the most ardent desires that the body of sin and death may be *crucified with Christ*. The highest point of Christian experience is to press forward. It is a distinguishing trait in the character of every good man, that he *grows in grace*.

There are various similitudes used by the inspired writers, that are significantly expressive of the advancement of Christians in knowledge and in piety. The young convert is likened unto one that is newly born. There is a point of time in which he begins to live. At first, he is a babe; then a child, till he finally attains unto the *measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13). The kingdom of heaven is also compared to *seed which is cast into the ground*. First, cometh up the tender blade; then, the thriving stalk; then, the ear; after that, the full corn in the ear, ripening for the harvest, and preparing for the garner of the husbandman (Mark 4:28, 29). It is also compared to a *well of water, springing up into everlasting life* (John 4:14). No imagery in nature can more fully illustrate the growth of grace in the heart. "The righteous," saith Job, "shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger" (Job 17:9). This is the prominent feature in the character of the good man; "he shall hold on his way." "The youth," saith the evangelical prophet, "shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not

faint” (Isa. 40:30, 31). With inimitable beauty, is the good man described by the psalmist: “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Psa. 1:3). Grace in the heart as certainly improves and advances, as a tree thrives in a kindly and well-watered soil. “It flourishes in immortal youth, and blooms for ever in unfading beauty.”

The certainty of the believer’s progress, however, rests on a surer foundation, than either the degree or the nature of his religion. *We are not sufficient, says the apostle, to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God* (2 Cor. 3:5). Covenanted grace is the support of the believer through every step of his pilgrimage. There is nothing in the nature of holiness that is incapable of corruption. Adam fell; angels fell; and such is the awful depravity of the human heart, that left to himself, the holiest saint on earth would draw back unto perdition. Still, he shall progress in holiness throughout interminable ages. It is the economy of divine grace, that where *God has begun a good work he will carry it on*, until the subject is ripened for glory (Phil. 1:6).

The hypocrite when once he imagines himself to be a Christian, views his work as done. He is satisfied. He *is rich and increased in goods*. But it is otherwise with the true Christian. Conversion is but his first step. His work is all before him. His graces are increasingly constant and increasingly vigorous. The more he loves God, the more he desires to love him. The more he knows of his character, does he contemplate the manifestations of his glory with rising delight. As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so doth his soul pant after God (Psa. 42:1). Having once *tasted that the Lord is gracious*, is not enough to satisfy him. He will ever remain unsatisfied till he reaches the fountain head, and drinks to the full of “the river of life which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1). The more he sees of the evil of sin, the more he desires to see. The more he hates it, the more he desires to hate it. The more he sees of himself, the more he abhors himself, and the more does he desire to abhor himself. The more he is emptied of himself, the more does he desire to be emptied of himself; the more he desires to become poor in spirit, to feel that he is cut off from every hope, and to rest on Christ alone. The more he is engaged in

duty, the more delight he finds in performing it. The more severe his conflict with the enemy, the harder he urges it, and the more vigorous his resolution to maintain it to the last.

There are some things in which the increase of grace is more visible, both to the world and the subject than others. Particularly have the people of God less and less confidence in themselves. They cherish an increasing sense of their dependence. They have been so often disappointed in their false confidences, that they have in some good measure become weaned from them. They know, by bitter experience, the folly of trusting to themselves, and daily taste the sweetness of that heavenly precept, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6).

They are more and more patient in sufferings. The more they are accustomed to the yoke, the less do they repine under the weight of it. They are also more and more charitable in their opinions of others. Young Christians are too often very uncharitable and censorious. They are more apt to take notice of the infirmities of their brethren than their graces, and the infirmities of others, than their own. But the more they know of themselves, the more reason do they see to exercise charity toward others. They fear *to judge*, lest they themselves *should be also judged* (Matt. 7:1). They walk "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

They have also the more full government of their passions. They are "slow to wrath" (James 1:19).

They are more and more punctual in the performance of the relative duties. Young Christians are apt to neglect them. They suffer the duties they owe immediately to God, to swallow up those that belong to their neighbour. But as they advance in the divine life, they become more uniform in the exercise of grace, and more punctual in the discharge of all duty. They do not love God less, but they love their fellow men more. As they grow more fervent and more constant in their devotional exercises, so they become more circumspect, and unexceptionable in their intercourse with the world.

Perhaps there is no one point in which growth in grace is more visible, than in that *harmony and consistency of character*, which are too often wanting in young Christians, but which shine with so

much beauty in those who are advanced in the Christian course.

In everything that belongs to the excellence of real religion, the true believer is in a state of progression. He seeks and strives, he wrestles and fights. He is ever aiming at the prize. View him in the early part of the divine life; follow him through the various stages of his progress; and you will find, that notwithstanding all his doubts and declensions, he makes a gradual advance. He does not feel, he does not act “as though he had already attained, either were already perfect; but he follows after, if he may apprehend that for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12).

“This ONE THING I do,” says Paul, “forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13, 14). Where is the Christian, that does not make the spirit of the apostle his own? Tell me, ye who have just begun the heavenly race; tell me, ye who are verging toward the goal; was there ever a Christian that felt satisfied with present attainments? Is not the unvarying voice, both of early and long-tried piety, responsive to the language of Paul? Yes, it is both the highest point of Christian experience, and the clearest evidence of Christian character, to PRESS FORWARD. It is his grand inquiry, how to be, and how to live, more like a child of God.

Mark the way of the upright. As you trace his steps through this dreary pilgrimage, sometimes he wanders from the path; sometimes he halts and tires. His progress is far from being uniformly rapid, and often far from being perceptible, either by himself or others. Sometimes his motion is retro grade. There are seasons when, instead of advancing, he is the subject of great defection. Still it is true, that *on the whole*, he advances. If you compare his present state and character with what they were a considerable length of time past, you will find that he has made gradual progress. I know there are seasons—dark and gloomy seasons, seasons of guilt and declension—when the real Christian will make this comparison at the expense of his hopes. Seasons of guilt and declension ought to be seasons of darkness. I know too that there are seasons, when he is liable to discouragement, because he does not always experience that light and joy which crowned the day of his espousals. There is a glow of affection, a flush of joy, which is felt by the young convert,

as he is just ushered into the world of grace, which perhaps may not be felt at any future period of his life. And you cannot from this draw the inference that he has made no advance. All this may be true, while there is a power of feeling, a strength of affection, in the saint who has passed through the wilderness and knows the trials of the way, to which the young convert is a stranger. As he ascends the mount, his eye is fixed; his step is more vigorous; and his path brighter and brighter. He remembers his devious steps, and how he traced them back with tears. But the trials of the way are forgotten. He is rising to that brightness of purity, which “sheds the lustre of eternity” on his character, and aiming at the crown of righteousness which fadeth not away.

Here then is another test of the genuineness of your religion. I am aware that it is a severe one. But it is one which bears the seal of truth; and we must not shrink from it. Professing Christians are apt to place too much confidence on their past experience, and think little of the present; to think much on what they imagine to have been their conversion, their first work, and then give up the business of self-examination, and allow themselves to droop and decline. But the question is, *what is your present character?* “Grace is the evidence of grace.” I know it is true, that he who is once a Christian is always a Christian; but it is also true, *that he who is not now a Christian never was a Christian.* Examine yourself, therefore, and see whether you be in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). The best evidence in the world that you are, is that you grow in grace.

No man living in spiritual sloth, and making no new advances, ought to flatter himself that he is interested in the blessings of the great salvation. *The man who is satisfied, because he thinks he is safe; who feels that he has religion enough, because he thinks he has enough to save him from hell; is as ignorant of the power, as he is a stranger to the consolation, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Essay 18. Practical Obedience

After all that has been said, the great evidence of vital piety is *Practical Obedience.* The character of men is to be decided by their conduct. I maintain this to be the great scriptural test of true religion. And it is a rule of judging which is always infallible. The conduct of men is governed by their hearts. Out of the heart “are the

issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). A good heart will produce good conduct, and a corrupt heart will produce corrupt conduct. The rule is infallible. By this, I do not mean that it is always infallibly applied. A rule may be ever so perfect, and yet by inability, unskilfulness, or error, be misapplied, and lead to a wrong decision. Still, this does not impair the infallibility of the rule. Nothing is regarded by men as more certain, than that a good tree will bear good fruit, and that a corrupt tree will bear corrupt fruit (Matt. 12:33). And it is equally certain, that a good heart will produce good practice, and that a corrupt heart will produce corrupt practice. Those dispositions of the heart which are right, are so, because from their nature, they lead to right conduct; and those dispositions of heart which are wrong, are so, because from their nature, they lead to wrong conduct. We have therefore absolute certainty, if the conduct be good, that the heart is good; and on the other hand, if the conduct be bad we have the same certainty that the heart is bad.

Men adopt no other standard of character, in the common concerns of life, and they know no other. A man who is fettered by no external restrictions, and who is left free to act, will act according to his desires and affections. If we see a man supremely and habitually engaged in the pursuit of wealth, or honour, or pleasure, we are never at a loss to know where his heart is. And the principle holds with respect to every thing. As the practice is, so is the heart. If therefore we know the practice to be good, the conclusion is infallible that the heart is good; and if we know the practice to be bad, the conclusion is as incontrovertible that the heart is bad. This is a test also which is peculiarly easy in its application. Were the inward sentiments or emotions of the soul the only test of character, we should have been peculiarly liable to self-deception. But there is by no means the same liability to deception, when we judge of the nature of our feelings by our conduct. When a man says he desires and delights above all things to serve God, let him try the reality of his desire by asking whether he actually serves him? How sure the test! How comparatively easy to form a decision! What plainer principle than this, “The tree is known by his fruit!” (Matt. 12:33).

The Scriptures assign peculiar importance to this test of religious character. God knows the blindness of the human heart, and the

strange exposure to self-deception in men. He has therefore provided, that the reality of those dispositions which we profess to cherish toward him, shall be evinced by corresponding conduct. Do you inquire, Who are the friends of Christ He himself replies, “Ye are my friends, *if ye do whatsoever I command you*” (John 15:14). Do you ask, Who are those that love the Redeemer? He himself replies, “He that loveth me, *keepeth my commandments*” (John 14:23). Do you ask, How shall we know, that we possess a saving knowledge of the Redeemer? You are informed, that “*Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments*” (1 John 2:3). Would you know the evidence of hostility to Christ He says, “He that loveth me *not, keepeth not my sayings*” (John 14:24). Would you know who are they that are deceived and deceivers? The Scriptures say, “He that saith he knoweth him, and *keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*” (1 John 2:4). Would you become acquainted with the grand line of demarcation between saints and sinners? The Bible tells you, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest, he that *doeth not righteousness, is not of God*” (1 John 3:10). Would you know what will be regarded as the grand rule of trial at the last day? The Scriptures inform you, that “without respect of persons, the Father will judge every man according *to his works*” (1 Pet. 1:17).

When the beloved disciple, in the visions of Patmos, saw the sea give up the dead which were in it, and death and hell give up the dead which were in them; they were judged *every man according to his work* (Rev. 20:13). So that the test of character to which we allude, has received from the great Searcher of hearts the decided pre-eminence. The blindness, prejudice, and carelessness of men can scarcely mistake the result of a trial by this criterion. Men say what they please about religion; they may be ever so orthodox in their creed, and ardent in their affections, and sanguine in their hopes; but if they yield not themselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead; if they bring not forth the fruits of holy obedience; their faith is vain, they are yet in their sins. By their fruits ye shall know them (Matt. 7:20). Grapes never did grow on thorns, nor figs on thistles.

In forming our estimate of the nature of holy obedience, the Scriptures must be our only guide. A man may be very good

according to the world's standard, who is very bad according to the standard of the Bible. When we inquire into the nature of that obedience which constitutes the great evidence of Christian character, it is important to turn our attention to two or three particulars.

In the first place, it has respect to *all God's commandments*. The great error into which men are apt to fall, is that of taking a partial view of the fruits of holiness. One highly extols those which relate to our duty to man, and lays little or no stress upon piety toward God; others lay the whole stress upon acts of piety and devotion, and where these are found, make very large allowances for the want of every thing else; others again direct all their attention to views and feelings, and to a particular process through which a man may have passed in attaining his present confidence and joy; while few take into consideration the fulness of the Christian character, or recognize the necessity that it should be complete in all its parts, though it is imperfect in degree. Now all this is wrong. And it is so because it is a *partial* mode of judging, and is very apt to lead to an erroneous judgment. The true method is to comprehend *all*, the fruits of righteousness; to bring into the account all the duties of religion; to compare our character with all the precepts of the Bible, both those which relate to God, to our neighbour and to ourselves; and if this entire character belongs to us, then does our conduct demonstrate the genuineness of our piety. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). If a man make high professions of his inward religious experience, and disregards the claims of justice, kindness, honesty and truth toward his fellow men, he is deceived, and knows as little of the power of godliness in his heart, as of the fruits of godliness in his life. Neither a regard to one precept of the law, or another precept affords evidence of piety, but a regard to the whole.

The obedience of which we speak, is also *habitual*. It is not constant, for if it were, then would good men in the present world be perfect. Universal and constant obedience is the very definition of sinless perfection. But such is not the obedience of any man on earth. I know it is written, "Whosoever is born of God, doth not COMMIT SIN; for his seed remaineth in him, and he CANNOT SIN,

because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9). But if we would make the Bible consistent with itself, we must give these passages some latitude of interpretation. The experience of the world, and the declarations of eternal truth, assure us, that “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccl. 7:20). We must not root out all religion from the earth, because we do not find perfection in men. Moses, Samuel, Paul, Peter, were all fervently pious, and yet they sinned. The melancholy fact is, that the best of men do sin greatly, and are sometimes the subjects of the most awful defection.

It is needless to conceal the truth, that the sins of good men are of an aggravated character. It is vain to say that they do not sin *knowingly*. They are indeed often surprised into the commission of sin; but they often commit it with calmness and deliberation. They often commit it in defiance to the sober dictates of reason, and in defiance to the most powerful conviction of their consciences.

It is in vain to say, that they do not sin *voluntarily*. No man was ever constrained to sin. Sin cannot be forced upon men contrary to their own inclination. The children of God often complain, that their hearts prompt them to sin, but their hearts never constrain them to act contrary to their choice. Seriously considered, it is impossible to sin without acting voluntarily. The divine law requires nothing but voluntary obedience, and forbids nothing but voluntary disobedience. As men cannot sin without acting, nor act without choosing to act; so they must act voluntarily in sinning.

The children of God therefore do sin; they sin knowingly; they sin voluntarily; but *they do not sin habitually*. It is not the *prevailing habit* of their lives to disobey the commandments of God; but their purpose to obey always, and their practice to obey habitually. In forming our estimate of the fruits of righteousness, therefore, we are not to attribute too much importance to *particular instances of conduct*. The life of every good man is stained with imperfection and sin; and if we pronounce none good, unless we find absolute perfection, all must be condemned. On the contrary, there is scarcely any bad man whose conduct does not sometimes exhibit the semblance of real goodness. We can say no more therefore of good men than that their obedience is *habitual*, and that their conduct, viewed as a whole, exhibits clear and decisive evidences of

a sanctified temper. This is most surely true of every Christian.

It may also be added, that the conformity to the precepts of God's word upon which we may safely rely as a test of character, is *persevering*. The disciple of Jesus Christ perseveres in his course to the end of life. *He holds on his way*. It is the characteristic, as well as the blessedness of those who "trust in the Lord, that they are as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever" (Psa. 125:1).

The apostle John speaks of a class of professing Christians, that were somewhat multiplied even in those early days of the Christian Church. He says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19). The true disciple *endures to the end* (Matt. 24:14). Though he foresees that his path is beset with obstructions on every side, still he goes forward. Though dangers may threaten, and trials discourage him; leaning upon the beloved, he goes forward. His most vigorous resolutions terminate upon his duty. He goes forward with a firm and vigorous step. No matter how rough the way, with an eye fixed on the *author and finisher of his faith*, he goes forward with unabated ardour, leaving the earth behind him, and animated with the prospect of heaven and glory before him. He is aiming at "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). No difficulties are so great, no fatigue so severe, as to divert him from his design. Perfection is his object. He cherishes no present intention to disobey at all. From the heart, he desires and intends to yield a compliance, not merely to this, or that requisition, but to all the divine requirements, without distinction, and without exception.

And now I am satisfied to make my appeal to my readers, whether this is not the conduct which flows from genuine piety. To say nothing of the example of Christ, who added to universal, habitual, and persevering conformity to holiness, a constant conformity; are not such the fruits of righteousness evinced [demonstrated] by prophets and apostles, and other holy men mentioned in the Bible? Between such obedience and the man of mere morality, or the best painted hypocrite the world ever saw, is there not a discernible difference? Such obedience begins with love

to God; it advances with hatred of sin; it is encouraged by faith in Jesus Christ; it is cherished by a self-abasing humility; it is nurtured by prayer; it is purified by detachment from the world; it is beautified by all the relative and social virtues; it is consistent in all the moral and exterior duties; it is evinced by a tender and active benevolence; and matured by a life and a death devoted to God. These are the fruits of genuine Christianity. They grow on this parent stalk, and on no other. They may be sometimes blasted and withered by the noxious atmosphere of earth; they may find little to nourish them in the impoverished soil of the human heart; they may sometimes appear in very diminished size and richness; but in greater or less perfection, here they are always found; and they never fail to flourish in such quantity and such perfection, as to tell on what tree they grow.

Let the reader then try his character by the same rule by which the word of God tries it. He that hath the *hope* of the Gospel, *purifieth himself even as Christ is pure* (1 John 3:3). Does your love to God prompt you to a devout attendance upon all his institutions? Does it animate you with increasing attachment to his word and his service? Does your love to man lead you to *do justice and love mercy, to live in peace with all men*? Does it make you the better husband, or the better wife; the better parent, or the better child; the better master, or the better servant; the better magistrate, or the better subject; the better friend, or the better citizen?

The religion of Jesus Christ is not a system of empty speculations, designed to have no practical influence. It is not the offspring of wild enthusiasm, that exhausts all its force in feeling, and leaves none for action. *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart, necessarily bringeth forth good things* (Matt. 12:35). Experience without practice is nothing; and practice without experience is no more. Experimental religion consists in the reality of the Christian graces, and in their due effect upon the life and conversation. If you are an experienced Christian, you feel the power of religion in your heart, and exhibit it in your life. With such a test, men surely need not be deceived in their fears or their hopes. Nothing is more infallible than this simple test. And if any go through the world with false hopes, it will be because they measure themselves by a standard of their own, and not by the standard which God has given

them. Never, never could the hypocrite, destitute of every good thing, and enemy of God as he is, go to the throne of judgment with the hope of eternal life, if he did this. And never could real Christians so often doubt of their good estate, if they did this. If the fruits of righteousness in their lives were not so few, withered, and sickly, they could never doubt whether they are genuine. Because you are not a better Christian, you doubt whether you are a Christian at all. God never designed that good men should have hope, peace and joy, in any other proportion, than they bring forth the fruits of holiness. If you would enjoy the pleasures of religion therefore, you must practice its duties; if you would dismiss your doubts and fears, you must dismiss your sins. If you will not do this, you will continue in darkness and doubt while you live. On the contrary, if you will awake to a life of Christian activity, you shall have that peace which passeth all understanding, and your joy shall be full.

Conclusion

The preceding pages may perhaps assist you in deciding the question, whether you are born of the Spirit and a child of God.

This subject is certainly worthy every man's serious attention. God has revealed plain and infallible tests of character, which all can understand and apply. They are tests by which we must all one day be tried. God will not revoke nor alter them. It is in vain to thrust aside the solemn inquiries which have been made in the progress of these Essays. They will meet you when you come to lie on the bed of death; they will meet you in another world. I entreat you, therefore, examine yourselves as though you were before the throne of the final judgment. The inquiry is of eternal moment [importance]. A mistake here, is a mistake for eternity. Under a deep sense of your need of the searching influences of the Divine Spirit, as you reflect upon what you have read, adopt the language of the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23, 24).

"He that is not with me," saith the Saviour, "is against me" (Luke 11:23). There is no principle within the whole compass of morals, that admits of more strict demonstration than this, that there can be

but two moral characters that are essentially different. There must be necessarily in every intelligent being, a conformity to the will of God, or the want of it. It is as impossible that a man should be neither right nor wrong, as it is that a portion of matter, at any given period, should be neither at rest nor in motion.

It is absurd to suppose, that he is neither a saint nor a sinner; neither penitent nor impenitent; neither a believer nor an unbeliever. So long as men possess any moral character, they must view themselves, and be viewed by others, either for God or against him. In the great contest which enlists the feelings and the power of three worlds, it is impossible that there should be a neutral. One side or the other will claim every intelligent being in heaven, on earth, and in hell. And it is right they should do so. If the line should now be drawn by the invisible hand of the great Searcher of hearts; on the one side would be the friends of God, on the other, his enemies.

Suffer me, then, beloved reader, plainly, solemnly, and affectionately, to ask the question, *On which side do you stand?* If you possess nothing more than mere visible morality; nothing more than the naked form of religion; nothing more than a speculative knowledge of the system of revealed truth; nothing more than simple conviction for sin; nothing more than a vain confidence of your own good estate, connected with some apparent zeal for the cause of God, and a few transient and spurious affections: how can you be one of the children of the everlasting Father? If you are a stranger to love to God; to repentance for sin; to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; to evangelical humility; to genuine self-denial—how can you cherish the hope that you are a Christian? If you know nothing of the spirit of prayer; nothing of the love of the brotherhood; nothing of mortifying the spirit of the world; nothing of growth in grace; of cordial, habitual, persevering obedience to the divine commands—how can it be, that you have been “brought nigh by the blood of Christ?” If these things are so, “thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God” (Acts 8:21).

Does this agitate you? The writer of these pages takes no pleasure in exciting needless alarm. But how can he raise the unhallowed cry, *peace, peace*, when the Eternal God saith, *There is no peace!*? How can he raise the unhallowed cry, when every note of the syren

song would only lull the hypocrite into a more deathlike security, and every sentence prove the blow to sink him deeper into the eternal pit? Poor, self-deceived man who vainly imaginest that thou art in the way to heaven, while thou art in the way to hell, rather than amuse thee with tame, smooth, pretty things, O that I could raise a voice that would make thee tremble, even in the grave of trespasses and sins! Be entreated to dismiss thy deceptions; to give up thy delusive confidence. Cast not the anchor of hope upon a shore so yielding that the final blast will break its hold. However hard the struggle, despair of mercy without being washed in the blood of Jesus. Cherish not a delusion which the king of terrors will tear from thy heart?

But do I seem to presume that my readers are hypocrites? Many, I trust, are the dear people of God. Some may be weak in faith, and weak in hope. Beloved Christian, I would not lisp a syllable to rob thee of thy confidence. Though weak and trembling, there is every thing to encourage and strengthen thee. It cannot discourage you to examine closely whether the foundation of your hope be firm; whether your confidence is built upon the sand, or whether it rests on the Rock of Ages. Feeble Christians are called upon to mourn over their weakness. Their want of strength is their sin. Their graces may be well compared to the dimly “smoking flax” (Isa. 42:3). They emit little that warms and enlightens. Their love is cold; their joys barren and poor. God hides his face, and they are troubled (Psa. 30:7). Tossed, like Peter, upon the tempestuous sea, they have hardly faith even to cry, *Lord, save, or I perish!* Still, they may rejoice. The angel of the everlasting covenant lives. That precious covenant itself recognises the heart reviving principle, redemption through the blood of Jesus, forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:7). Well then, believer, mayest thou rejoice, even in the midst of trembling. What, though thou art bowed down under the weight of guilt; what, though poor in spirit, filled with apprehension and almost hopeless; what, though thou art like the *bruised reed*—frailty itself still more frail, ready to fall by the gentlest breeze “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench” (Isa. 42:3). No, never. It shall not be broken, but supported—cherished; yea, by a hand that is omnipotent, transplanted to the garden of the Lord, and flourish in

the courts of our God. The Great Head will never disregard the feeblest members of his own body.

There is a peculiar adaptedness in the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the weakness and fears of his people. Early was he designated as One who *should bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows*; commissioned to *bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort all that mourn*. The Man Christ Jesus is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15): “He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psa. 103:14). The Shepherd of Israel “will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Isa 40:11). It is he that “giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength” (Isa. 40:29).

O believers! that we all might learn to fasten our affections, to rivet our hopes, on the cross of Christ! Here is our comfort. We must *think much, and make much of Christ*. In him, all fulness dwells. *He*, is the captain of your salvation. *He*, is a fountain for your uncleanness, and a light for your way. *It is he*, that is of God made unto his people, wisdom and righteousness and sanctification, and complete redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). No matter how great your guilt; rest on Him, and he will be increasingly precious; precious in life, precious in death, precious for ever. While your *life is hid with Christ in God*; however languid the throb, it shall never expire.

Come, then, “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb. 12:12). The heavens and the earth shall sooner crumble into their native nothing, than the feeblest Lamb of the Shepherd’s fold stumble and finally fall. “*Loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion*” (Isa. 52:2). If thou hast seasons of trial, be not alarmed; if thou hast moments of despondency and weakness, be not dismayed. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, for thou shalt thrash the mountains and beat them small. Thy Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. He will strengthen thee; yea, he will help thee; yea, he will uphold thee by the right hand of his righteousness” (Isa. 41:10). Say, is it not enough? “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).

I close, then, by beseeching the reader to devote himself unreservedly to the Lord. “What? know ye not that ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your

body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Render unto God the things that are God's. What higher delight, what greater privilege can you enjoy, than to consecrate all that you are, and all that you possess, to God! Come then, and make a voluntary surrender of every thing to him, and choose his service as your highest delight.

Henceforth let it be your greatest care to honour the Lord, who has bought you. *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him—ROOTED and BUILT UP in him—and ESTABLISHED in the faith, AS YE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT, abounding therein with thanksgiving"* (Col. 2:6, 7). Yes, blessed Redeemer! *Other Lords besides thee have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.* O thou eternal, incarnate, God! I am thine—doubly thine—wholly thine—thine for ever. Amen.

The second of two booklets.

