

# CHRISTIAN DEVOTEDNESS.



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THE declarations of the Word of God are numerous and unequivocal, that we are all, by nature and by transgression, alienated from God, dead in trespasses and sins, and exposed to righteous judgment. Not less full and explicit are the declarations of the same Word, that we consequently need the forgiveness of sins—that we must be born again through the quickening power of the Holy Ghost, before we can have fellowship with God, or be fitted for His service. It is of the utmost importance that we bear these solemn truths in mind. Overlooking them has brought confusion, uncertainty, and disappointment into the Church of God. The activities of life have been expected from those who are dead: the devotedness of love has been looked for, where peace with God and the joy of forgiveness are unknown: and thus the cause of Christ has been committed to the hands of those, who, though professedly his servants, are in reality in bondage to another master.

What would be the result in human affairs, were an enterprise, demanding the utmost vigour and de-

termination, to be committed to the conduct of an army, however numerous, a large proportion of which, was in league with the enemy, or indifferent to success? Defeat only could be expected. History tells us how a promiscuous horde of a million was withstood by the energy of a handful of true-hearted and devoted warriors. If, then, in worldly enterprise, devotedness and determination are requisite for success, is the cause of Christ to triumph in the hands of insincere, lukewarm, or half-hearted followers? Living activities are not the attributes of a corpse; neither are spiritual activities to be looked for from those that are spiritually dead. Life in Christ, and love to God, flowing from the belief and enjoyment of His love to us, are the sole basis of vigorous and successful Christian warfare.

These are statements which, perhaps, some may be scarcely prepared to receive. But, if they are Scriptural and therefore divine principles, they ought to command "the obedience of faith." God's battles are to be fought in God's way. When we attempt to advance in our own way, and in our own strength, disappointment, if not discomfiture, is sure to be the result.

"We love him," says the Apostle, "because he first loved us." This statement places things upon the only true foundation. God's love manifested in giving His Son to die for our ruined race, is the great truth, which, under the power of the Holy Ghost, tells upon the human heart, softening it, and subduing it to itself. They who believe in this love, must feel it. They who are sensible of the love of God to themselves, must love Him in return.

This love to God, as the author of our salvation and the source of our eternal blessedness, is the spring of all holy purpose—of all genuine devotedness of heart.

We address you, then, Christian reader, as one who believes in this love of God to your own very self—as one who has been changed by the power of transforming grace, and who enjoys peace with God, through faith in him who has put away your sins, by bearing them in his own body on the tree. (1 Peter ii. 24.) How great, we may well exclaim, are our privileges! “Redeemed with the precious blood of Christ,” God has not merely saved us from wrath, but He has saved us, that He may bring us, as adopted sons, into communion with Himself—that we may dwell for ever in His presence, embraced with the same love, and invested with the same glory as Jesus himself. Wondrous thought! Yet so God wills it. And He brings us into this blessedness, not for our deserts, for we have none, but “according to the good pleasure of His will,” that he might display to principalities and powers in heavenly places the exceeding riches of His grace, in taking up sinners such as we are, and bringing us into nearer and more blissful relationship to Himself than the angels that surround His throne.

Now, dear reader, if, through this boundless grace, God has accepted you as an adopted child, and made you an heir of glory—if you are to reign with Christ *above*, we would invite you to consider what ought to be your object while you are *here below*. Should it not be to glorify Him who has

redeemed you? Should it not be to identify yourself with the interests of Christ *now*, as you will be identified with him in glory *hereafter*? Does he not expect this grateful response for the stupendous benefits conferred on you? And is he not worthy of receiving it from a full heart? Are you not called upon to yield yourself unreservedly to the service of Him, who has made you the object of a love that passeth knowledge? Are you not called to be “a good soldier of Jesus Christ?” *Now* is the time of service. *Now*, you have the opportunity of manifesting a character of devotedness and gratitude, which you will not have in the world to come. You have privileges *here*, which you will not have *in heaven*.

And how would the Lord equip you for His service? He does not expect you to be engaged in a warfare for Him at your own charges, or in your own strength. No; divine strength is to be yours through faith, and in divine panoply he would clothe you. The girdle of “truth” is to encircle you. “Righteousness,” not your own, but God’s—the righteousness of God by faith—is to be the breastplate that covers you. You are to move at ease, having your feet shod with “the Gospel of peace.” “Faith” will be a shield over your person, which will cover you in the day of battle. Your head is already crowned with “the helmet of salvation;” and in your hand is placed “the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”—(Eph. vi.)

Clad thus from head to foot, the word of “the Captain of your salvation” is, “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” “Fight the good

fight of faith." "Watch you; stand fast; quit you like men; be strong." Your Lord expects undivided loyalty. He says, "He that is not with me is against me." Hollow professions of fealty he cannot accept. You cannot serve him and the world. Do not deceive yourself. "No man can serve two masters." Satan beguiles multitudes to their destruction, by inspiring the false idea, that God is pleased with the homage of the lips, or the services of the hand, while the heart is not true to Him.

Now, Christian reader, how is it with you? Do you live as a Christian ought to live? Do you live as one *who belongs to Christ*, if in your ways you act as if you were *your own*? Do you suppose God will regard you as desirous of serving and pleasing *Him*, if it be your secret purpose to serve and please *yourself*? Do you walk as one delivered from this present evil world, if you court its friendship, which, you know, is "enmity with God?" Instead of mortifying the desires of the natural heart, as you are instructed of God, are you making provision for the indulgence of its lusts?

Be assured that heart is ever unfit for the service of Christ, as it is a stranger to true happiness, which is half devoted to the world, and half to Christ. Take care that you fall not into the snare that entraps so many Christians, and keeps them all their days stunted cumberers of the ground—that of imitating the world in its selfish and luxurious ways. Nothing is more dangerous, especially to young believers, than that spurious Christianity—that radical worldliness, which, under an orthodox creed and

a daily routine of evangelical forms, professes to lay hold on both worlds, and to have discovered a pathway to the kingdom, in which there is no need of bearing the cross—which treats self-denial as an exploded austerity—which refrains from the grosser vanities of the world, in the midst of which it would be ashamed to be seen, while it is absorbed in the sober sensualities of a self-pleasing, though morally irreproachable life.

What harm, it is said by many a Christian, in splendid mansions or costly equipages—in elegant furniture or luxurious accommodation? What harm, let the Word of God reply, in a life spent amidst “purple and fine linen,” and in “faring sumptuously every day?” (see Luke xvi.) These are questions, dear reader, which must be left to individual consciences. Whilst maintaining the Christian standard, let us watch against a censorious spirit. We often make sad mistakes in our judgments of others. By the providence of God, Christians are placed in different ranks in the world; and there may be more humility and self-denial in a noble’s mansion, than in a tradesman’s cottage. Amidst inherited magnificence there may be a genuine pilgrim-spirit, and a longing after conformity to Christ, whilst the heart of the artisan may be filled with pride and ambitious emulation of a more prosperous neighbour. Rank, and riches, and prosperity are indeed dangerous trusts. They impose on their possessors a more difficult task of faithful stewardship, and expose to a thousand beguiling temptations; but it is faith alone, living in the enjoyment of present grace, and in the anticipation of future glory, that can give victory

over the world, whatever our station in society may be. Whilst refraining, therefore, from condemning others, we must not overlook the solemn truth, that those who are living to themselves and not to God—those whose minds are set on earthly things, (Phil iii. 19,) and not on “things that accompany salvation”—who are pursuing an easy, self-indulgent course, whether in a higher or a lower sphere—they have “*their good things* :” their portion is in this life. But what is the end of such a course? The sixteenth of Luke discloses the awful doom that awaits them—that of lifting up the eyes in hell.

Reader, do you think this a hard saying? Well, whatever be your thoughts, it is the verdict of the Word of God upon moral, selfish, respectable worldliness. We refer you to the chapter from which we have quoted. It is exceedingly solemn. Nothing immoral is laid to the charge of “the rich man.” He had not hearkened to “Moses and the prophets.” He lived to himself—not to God. His heart rested in the things of this life. He lived for this world. Its possessions and enjoyments were *his* “good things.” He sought them; he was allowed to possess them; and in the day of retribution he is reminded of it—“Thou in thy life-time receivedst *thy good things*.”

Should these lines reach the eye of any one whose hopes and enjoyments are centred in the things of this world, may they arouse him, and lead him to enquire how things stand between his soul and God! If he has been supposing himself a Christian on the way to the heavenly kingdom, how inconceivably



important to discover that he is mistaken? External amiabilities and performances often mislead, not only others, but even ourselves. But God cannot be deceived. He knoweth and looketh upon *the heart*. The heart is the vital centre of the system. If there be no pulsations *there*, there is no life. If heavenly things do not command the responsive homage of our affections, what ground have we for imagining that there is spiritual life in the soul? Where our treasure is, *there* will be our affections and our thoughts. Where, then, dear reader, do your treasures lie? What do you most love? What do you like to think of? What is the object of your anxiety and pursuits? Ask your spontaneous thoughts, when you allow them to take their natural unhindered course, where they delight to rest? Is it upon *earthly* or upon *heavenly* things? The answer to this question may reveal to you a secret, for which, perhaps, you are not prepared. Others may flatter and deceive you, but this enquiry will disclose the solemn truth. We repeat our question—if, while your *head* or your *hands* are engaged in your daily duties, heaven be not the home of your *affections*, why should you suppose that you are converted—why should you fancy yourself a Christian?

When a person is converted, or, in other words, when he becomes a Christian, he becomes the subject of new motives and principles. Christianity does not consist in sentimentalities or speculations; nor yet is it a system of painful prohibitions, to be obeyed under the influence of a slavish fear. No; Christianity is an inner life, which manifests itself

in new affections. All its doctrines may be entertained by the mind, and may be comprehended as abstract truths, so as to be correctly explained and enforced; but unless they penetrate the heart, and influence the affections and desires, and thus reach the springs of action, there is no conversion to God. Christianity presents to the soul new objects, and through them, inspires it with new motives. Love to God, instead of the love of self, is its great characteristic.

Let us enquire, then, dear Christian reader, is this love the animating and ruling element with us? It was so with Christ. Love to God was the leading and governing principle of his life. He pleased not himself, but did always those things which were pleasing to God his Father. (John viii. 29.) This is the character of true Christian obedience; and herein Christ is to be our Pattern, as he is our Saviour. Let us repeat it:—Christian obedience does not consist in refraining from things under the terrors of law, but *in doing things because they are pleasing to God our Father*; and if God be the supreme object of our affections, this will be with us, as it was with Christ, the leading and governing principle of our lives.

Where this love reigns in the heart, it will exhibit itself in unselfish devotedness, and practical benevolence. Love to God is always accompanied by love to man. “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” Do our steps, then, more frequently wend their way to

comfort suffering and sorrow in the abodes of poverty, than to gratify ourselves in the haunts of ease? Love to the whole family of God, is one of the instincts of the renewed heart. Let us, then, ask ourselves, do we cherish and exhibit this affection? Do we remember, that the Lord Jesus regards what is done to his people as done to himself? Were he on earth and in want, should we not delight to render unto him of our substance? And if we hear of one of his poor and afflicted ones in a cellar or in a garret in want of food or raiment, shall we withhold it?

Do we feel it to be our privilege, to be fellow-helpers with those who are engaged in the proclamation of the glad tidings of God's grace? Do we show sympathy with them in preaching deliverance to the captives of sin and Satan—the recovery of sight to the blind—setting at liberty them that are bruised—anoointing the mourners with the oil of joy—and clothing the heavy hearted with the garment of praise? Blessed service! Beautiful in the eye of God and man! Service, which the Son of God took upon himself, and now commits as a happy privilege to his people!

Do you, dear Christian reader, daily wait upon God, to know how He would have you to glorify Him? Do you look to Him for guidance, as to the way in which He would lead you to dispose of your time, your property, your talents, whatever they may be? Perhaps it is but little you can do; if so, but little is expected. But, be assured, where there is a will, there is a way, to serve the Lord acceptably. As Archbishop Usher said, "God would

have no drones in His Church." Wait, therefore, on Him in prayer, inquiring what you can do in His service. What ignorance could you instruct—what poverty relieve? What sorrow could you soothe—what sickness alleviate? To whom could you say a word for Jesus? And remember, it is only as you abide in Christ, the true vine, and derive living energy from him by communion with himself, that you will be fitted to bring forth fruit to his praise. "The closet is the battle-field of faith;" and therefore, whatever you engage in, first make it a matter of special prayer, that the Lord may be with you, and that *His strength* may be glorified in *your weakness*.

Ever hold yourself as an empty vessel which the Lord can fill with grace and power, and use to His own glory. Study the story of Gideon. He who was "the least in his Father's house," is, in the Lord's hand "a mighty man of valour." Remember, you can do nothing *of yourself*. Go forth, therefore, "in this thy might"—the sense of thine own weakness. God uses the weak and little and base things—things despised of the world—to bring to nought things that are. (1 Cor. i.) Alas! we are too strong for God. He could not use David in Saul's armour, nor could He use the army of Israel against the Midianites. Now, as of old, it is only when we are consciously weak in ourselves, that we are "strong in the Lord." We take things too much into our own hands. We often speak as if we could command success. We forget that we are merely *instruments* in God's service. The cause is His; the power is His; and He should have the praise.

Again, dear reader, ask yourself, are your motives pure? What is the object for which you labour? Is *God's* object and *your* object the same? If not, you are not walking in full communion with Him. *His* object is to glorify His Son Jesus. Is this, then, your great object? It is deeply important that you should be clear on this point; otherwise you cannot expect God to be with you, in power and blessing. If you are labouring for any personal or sectarian end, all will go for nothing in the day when the purity of our motives will be taken into account, and when all our labours and services, which have not Christ for their end and object, will be burnt up.\*

How insidiously the workings of self mingle with our holiest thoughts! It is well, therefore, to enquire whether we can, with Paul, rejoice that Christ is preached, no matter by whom. Can we thank God as heartily, when, in His sovereign

\* "If, in the midst of our exertions, the thought frequently occur, that these may not be, after all, such as God can approve, or that the end to which they are directed may not be one which He wishes to accomplish, the effect will necessarily be to create indecision and discouragement. But when we are in fellowship with God—when we know, from the testimony of His Word, that the work in which we are engaged is *His*, that our views are in accordance with His eternal purpose, and that the desires of our hearts are those with which He can sympathize; then whatever outward difficulties and opposition we may have to encounter, however profound be the sense which we cherish of our own weakness and insufficiency, we shall, nevertheless, go forward with our work in the buoyancy of an animating hope and confidence. Being in communion with God, we are, as it were, almighty for the accomplishment of our purposes, because these are the very purposes of God; and, therefore, His almighty power will be put forth for their eventual, if not for their immediate accomplishment."—*Hewitson's Remains*.

grace, it pleases Him to use another in His service, perhaps much our inferior in standing—in talents—in intelligence, rather than ourselves? This is a searching test as to the purity of our principles. If we cannot answer in the affirmative, Christ is not our only object, and the springs of action need to be purified.

When we look around upon the Church at large, can we fail to be painfully affected by the worldliness and selfishness which mark its departure from its first love? Christians seem to forget that they are delivered, not only from judgment, but also from “this present evil world,” (Gal. i.)—that they are separated unto God—that they are not of the world,” even as Christ was not of the world. Jesus is still “despised and rejected of men.” At the name of Jesus, the mind of heaven kindles into rapture! Breathe but that name in any worldly assembly, and the mention of it is treated as an unwelcome intrusion. The world may indeed be advancing in civilization—in intelligence—and even in morals; but in relation to Christ, its character is unchanged; and, therefore, “the friendship of the world” is unfaithfulness to *Him*. Are the affections and sympathies of the Church, we would appeal to you, to be in alliance with the world which has crucified her Lord? Faithless Church! ever deaf to the claims of Him who died to redeem thee! Was ever love like *his*! Was ever ingratitude like *thine*!

And as to an unselfish dedication of our substance to the cause of Christ, who is not conscious that things are at a very low ebb? The standard

of the Church is false. Liberality is rare.\* How many Christians lavish their pounds upon themselves, while their pence are enough for Christ! If mammon publishes a scheme for self-aggrandizement, his votaries are ready and eager to invest their thousands. Ask in the name of Christ on behalf of some special object, and how trifling the sums that are drawn by toilsome applications from reluctant contributors!

There are indeed, various religious societies with large annual incomes; but we ask—What of it? Why boast of the amount, as is often done? Are there not in our nation many individuals of enormous wealth, a dozen of whom could easily give the whole? There is a hundred times more spent on some single luxury, than is contributed to all the missionary societies of our land. Alas! Satan is still the god and prince of this world: he wields its power and its wealth; but those, who are redeemed out of it, and who know God as their Father, and acknowledge Christ as their Lord and Master, should learn that all they have is worth nothing, but as it gives them the privilege of laying it at the feet of Jesus. Christian reader, have *you* done so? Have *you* laid all at the feet of Jesus? An aged servant of Christ once said—"I doubt if any man be really converted, whose pocket is not converted." Now is this the character of *your* conversion? If not, may you not furnish occasion to others to question the reality of it? "Make your calling and election sure." Redeemed by

\* "Liberality is to be judged of, not by what is given, but by what is left."—*Matthew Henry*.

Christ, yield yourself to him “a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable service.” Purchased by him, you are not your own. All that you have is not yours, but his; and you are to use it as he pleases, and only as he pleases. Do not, therefore, look upon what the Lord has committed to you as *your own*. Remember, as a Christian, you are not the proprietor of a penny. You are only the steward of property: and for your stewardship you will have to give account. God grant that you may do so with joy.

When the Thessalonians were converted, St. Paul tells us they “turned from idols, *to serve* the living and true God;” and with delight and thanksgiving, he makes mention of their “work of faith and labour of love.” The fruit which they brought forth to the praise of the Lord, was the evidence that they had been grafted into the true vine. “They were created anew unto good works.” “They gave themselves unto the Lord.” They recognised His absolute claims over them; and if *we* do not, in like manner, recognise His absolute claims over us, we deny His rights, and we only mock Jesus when we call him *Lord*.

Do we not, brethren, one and all, greatly fail in acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus? And is not our half-heartedness and double-mindedness a proof that we have but little personal love for him? Alas! we easily let slip the things which we have heard. (Heb. ii.) First love too soon evaporates. Laodicean lukewarmness benumbs our energies; and with many of us, instead of giving ourselves to the Lord’s service, to glorify Him in our body and in



our spirit, which are his, (1 Cor. vii. 20,) the “doing no harm,” probably constitutes the sum of our services for Christ. We need to be aroused from our slumber. A dying saint,\* whose life had been a life of loving service to the Lord, lately said on his death-bed, addressing a Christian friend,—“Ah! dear brother, we are only half awake!” How deep, then, must not many of us acknowledge, is our sleep of insensibility—of inglorious, unprofitable idleness.

The standard of Christian devotedness needs to be raised. “How is this to be effected?” you reply. Only by raising the standard of our Christianity—by conversing and communing more deeply with the revealed thoughts of God, and less with the unworthy and unbelieving thoughts of our own hearts, and with the diluted notions and adulterated traditions of men. We have very imperfect and inadequate apprehensions of the power and grace which are engaged on our behalf. The triumphant language of faith does not fill our souls. We measure the grace and goodness of God towards us, rather by what we think it befits *ourselves* to receive, than by what it becomes and delights *God* to give. We believe the things that are spoken; but our faith is so faint, that it might almost be designated unbelief.

To serve God truly and acceptably, we must be established in grace: otherwise the bustling activities of reputed service are wanting in their main element. We must be brought into the joy and liberty of children, before we can be true servants

\* The Rev. Legh Richmond.

of Christ. Our first act of *real* obedience is, to submit ourselves to the righteousness of God. It is only when the conscience has been purged from sin by the blood of Christ, and the heart is happy in the enjoyment of God's love, that our service is free and acceptable. Then it flows, not from restlessness or sentimentality, but from love to God; and is rendered neither to our fears nor to our selfishness, but to Christ.

Dear reader, let us for a moment consider what God has done for us. He has embarked His Almighty power on our behalf, for the overthrow of every enemy. He has sent His Son into the world for the removal of every thing that was against us. *The law*, which condemned us, and must condemn us, (for the law knows no mercy,) Christ has taken out of the way, and nailed it to his cross. *Sin* he has put away, taking it upon himself, and by death, as far as we are concerned, has abolished it for ever. Our *guilt* he has washed out, as though it had never existed. Our *judgment* he has endured. The cup of *wrath* he drank to the dregs, and left not a drop for us. *Death* he has disarmed of its sting; and instead of being the executioner of judgment, he has made it the portal into paradise.

And what has God given us? He has given us *eternal life*. He has given us *divine righteousness*. He has accepted us "in the Beloved." He has made us *heirs* of His own glory. He has encircled us in the embrace of His *everlasting love*. God now looks down upon us with the tenderness of a *Father*. He is with us every step of the wilderness journey. His angels wait upon us; and we are "kept by the

power of God through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed."

Thus supremely blessed by God, although deserving to be for ever excluded from His presence, shall it not be the language of our inmost souls, "What shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits?" Can we, selfishly and ungratefully, withhold any thing? Shall we not rather surrender ourselves and all that we are and have, in self-sacrificing devotedness unto Him, praying that we may know more of communion with Himself in the joy of that divine principle, on which *He* has ever acted, and of which the whole ministry of the Lord Jesus is an unceasing living exhibition,—

"IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE"?

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