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The

THE
ALMOST CHRISTIAN
DISCOVERED :

OR,
The False Professor Tried and Cast :

BEING

The Substance of Seven Sermons,

First preached at St. Sepulchre's, London, 1661, a little before those awful visitations, the Fire and the Plague, happened in that city.

—♦—
BY **MATTHEW MEAD,**

Minister of the Gospel.
—♦—

And the Pharisees heard all these things, and they derided him. And Jesus said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: For that which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God. Luke xvi. 14, 15.

—♦*—
PHILADELPHIA :

PUBLISHED BY GEORGE B. HUNTLEY,

S. E. corner of Spruce and Fourth streets.

1819.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Where the works of Matthew Mead are known, they need no man's recommendation. They meet a good testimony in every man's conscience. Himself an experienced and practical christian, he meets the approbation of every soul anxious about its eternal state. The little treatise of his which you have republished is one of his most valuable works. In this he has shewn himself a *master in Israel—a workman that needeth not to be ashamed*. No man can read *The Almost Christian*, with seriousness and attention without knowing something more of his state than he did before.—The nature and fruits of a gracious state are delineated with accuracy, plainness and fidelity. The author's object is to make the reader prove himself; and if I am not widely mistaken, he has fully succeeded. At the present day, when many things are palmed upon the community as the genuine fruits of the operation of the Spirit of God—when the grounds of a sinner's acceptance with God are so much misunderstood, and so many are satisfied with a mere *name to live while dead*, this treatise is highly seasonable. I cheerfully recommend it to every man who feels the necessity and importance of preparing to meet his God.

CORNELIUS C. CUYLER,
Pastor of the Reformed Dutch
Church, Poughkeepsie.

This work has received the approbation of the pious for a great number of years, and has been translated into the Dutch language, and for ought I know, into the language of other nations. The merits of the book are not generally known amongst us, owing to its extreme scarcity. My name may be of some service to its spread, among those with whom my recommendation has some influence; and that influence, small and insignificant as it may be, I feel it my duty to embark in the circulation of a work so little known, and so much

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wanted, especially by those who are concerned about their future and eternal welfare.

CORNELIUS D. WESTBROOK,
Pastor of the Reformed Dutch
Church at Fishkill village.

NOTE by the author of the abridgment.

I do not know that I can serve the cause of true religion in a better way, than abridging the *Almost Christian*. Scarcely any thing of this nature is now in circulation, though nothing, perhaps, is more needed, or calculated to be more useful. In abridging I have been careful to preserve the author's meaning, though in some places I have used other words, (for being written so long since, certain expressions were wholly obsolete,) and all that appeared to me important, or unexceptionable, is retained in this abridgment.

INTRODUCTION.

The author of the *Almost Christian*, observes in his dedication: "Most men are good christians in the verdict of their opinion; but the law alloweth no man to be a witness in his own case. *The heart is deceitful above all things.* Some of the deceits thereof you will find discovered in this treatise, which sheweth that every grace hath its counterfeit, and that the highest profession may be, where true conversion is not. The design hereof is not to *break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoking flax.* I would not sadden the hearts of any *whom God would not have made sad*, or discourage the weakest believer; though I know it is hard to rip up the dangerous estate and condition of the professing hypocrite, but that the weak christian will think himself concerned in the discovery."

The author observes moreover, in his address to the reader: "Thou hast here one of the saddest considerations imaginable presented to thee, and that is—How far it is possible a man may go in a profession of religion, and yet after all fall short of salvation; how far he may run, and yet not so *run as to obtain.*"

“ I could wish that this book might fall into the hands of such whom it chiefly concerns, who *have a name to live, and yet are dead* ; who are busy with the form of godliness, but strangers to the power of it.— These are the proper subjects of this treatise : and the Lord follow it with his blessing, that it may be an awakening word to that generation of profligate professors with which this age abounds ; who if they keep to their church, bow the knee, talk out a few prayers, and at a good time receive the Sacrament, think they do enough for heaven, and hereupon judge their condition safe and their salvation sure ; though there be a hell of sin in their hearts, *and the poison of asps is under their lips*. If *eternal life* be of so easy attainment, and to be had at so cheap a rate, why did Christ tell us, *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it* ? Certainly it is no such easy thing to be saved, as many make it, and that thou wilt see plainly in the following treatise.

I am thy friend and servant,

MATTHEW MEAD.

London, October 22, 1661.”

THE
ALMOST CHRISTIAN.

Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian.
Acts xxvi. 28.

“MY design in treating on this subject, (as observed before,) is not to make sad the souls of those whom Christ will not have made sad, but to level the mountain of the sinner’s confidence : I would bring water, not to *quench the flax that is smoking*, but to put out that false fire that is of the sinner’s own kindling, lest walking all his days by the light thereof, he shall at last lie down in sorrow.

“ But it is the hypocrite’s fault to sit under the trials and discoveries of the word, and yet not to mind them, having no sense of his condition. When we see a man sick, and yet not sensible, we conclude the tokens of death are upon him : so when sinners have no sense of their spiritual condition, it is plain that they are dead in sin ; the tokens of eternal

death are upon them. These things being premised, which I desire the reader will carry along in his mind while we travel through this subject, I come to speak more distinctly and closely.

“That there are many in the world that are *almost* and yet *but almost* christians, I shall demonstrate by scripture evidence which speaks plainly and fully to the case.

“*First*, The young man in the gospel is an eminent proof of this truth ; there you read of one that came to Christ to learn of him the way to heaven : *Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life ?* Our Lord tells him, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments :* and when Christ tells him which, he answers, *Lord, all this I have kept from my youth up ; what lack I yet ?* Now do but see how far this man went.

“1. He not only heard the commandments of God, but he kept them. Now the scripture saith, *Blessed is he that hears the word of God, and keeps it.*

“2. He obeyed not this or that command, but both this and that : he did

not halve it with God, or pick and choose which were easiest to be done, and leave the rest; no, but he obeys all; *all these things have I kept.*

“ 3. He obeyed not in a fit of zeal only, but in a continual series of duty; his goodness was not like the morning dew that passes away; no, *all these things have I kept from my youth up.*

“ 4. He professeth his desire to know and to do more, to perfect that which was lacking of his own obedience; and therefore he goes to Christ to instruct him in his duty; *Master, what lack I yet?* Now would you not think this a good man? Alas! how few go this far? and yet, as far as he went, he went not far enough: he was *almost*, and yet but *almost* a christian: for he forsakes Christ at last. This, then, is a full proof of the truth of what has been stated.

“ A *Second* proof of it is that of the parable of the virgins in St. Matthew. See what a progress they make, how far they go in a profession of Christ.

“ 1. They are called *virgins*. Now this is a name given in scripture, both

in the Old and New Testament, to the saints.

“ 2. *They take their lamps* ; that is, they make a profession of Christ.

“ 3. They had some kind of *oil* in their lamps, as appears, verse 8. They had some convictions and some faith, to keep their profession alive, to keep the lamp burning.

“ 4. *They went*. Their profession was not an idle profession ; they did perform duties, frequent ordinances, and do many things.

“ 5. *They went with the wise virgins* : they joined themselves to those who had joined themselves to the Lord, and were companions of them that were companions of Christ.

“ You see how far these virgins go in a profession of Jesus Christ, and how long they continue in it, even till the bridegroom came ; they go to the very doors of heaven, and there perish with their hands upon the very threshold of glory. They were *almost* christians, and yet *but almost* ; almost saved, and yet perish.

“ If these two cases be not sufficient

to prove the truth, and confirm the credit of what has been stated, take a third ; and that shall be from the Old Testament, *Isaiah lviii. 2.* See what God saith of that people : *They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God ; they ask of me the ordinances of justice ; they take delight in approaching to God.* How far these went ; if God had not said they were rotten and unsound, we should have taken them for the chief of saints.

“ 1. They did not seek him by fits and starts, nor in a time of trouble and affliction only, as many do, but they seem to make conscience of duty, *they seek him daily.*

“ 2. *They are as a nation that did righteousness.* Not only as a nation that spake righteousness, or knew righteousness, or professed righteousness, but *as a nation that did righteousness,* that practised nothing but what was just and right. They appeared to the judgment of the world as good as the best.

“ 3. *They forsook not the ordinances of*

their God. They seem true to their principles, constant to their profession, and held out in their profession.

“ 4. *They ask of me,* saith God, *the ordinances of justice.* They will not make their own will the rule of right and wrong, but the law and will of God; and therefore, in all their dealings with men, they desire to be guided and counselled by God.

“ 5. *They take delight in approaching to God.* Can this be the guise of an hypocrite? For Job saith, *will he delight himself in the Almighty?* But these are a people *that delight in approaching to God;* and yet, for all this, they were no better than a generation of hypocrites; they made a goodly progress, and went far, but they went not far enough; they were cast off by God after all.

“ I hope by this time the truth of the point is sufficiently avouched and confirmed; that a man may be, yea very many are, *almost,* and yet no more than *but almost* christians.

“ Now for the more distinct prosecution of the point.

“ I. I shall shew, step by step, how far a man may go, what attainments he may reach unto, how specious and singular a progress he may make in religion, and yet be but *almost* a christian when all is done.

“ II. I shall shew whence it is, that many men go so far as that they are *almost* christians.

“ III. Why they are but *almost* christians when they have gone thus far.

“ IV. What the reason is, why men that go so far as to be *almost* christians, yet go no farther than to be *almost* christians.

“ I. I shall shew in twenty several steps how far a man may go in the way to heaven, and yet be but *almost* a christian.

“ 1. A man may have much knowledge, much light ; he may know much of God and his will, much of Christ and his ways, and yet be but *almost* a christian. For though there can be no grace without knowledge, yet there may be much knowledge where there is no grace ; illumination often goes before, when conversion never follows after.—

The subject of knowledge is the understanding, the subject of holiness is the will. Now a man may have his understanding enlightened, and yet his will not at all sanctified. He may have an understanding to know God, and yet want a will to obey God. Thus the apostle tells us of some who, *when they knew God they glorified him not as God.*

“ But one may ask, Is it not said, *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent?*

“ *Answer.* It is not every knowledge of God and Christ that interests the soul in life eternal. For why then do the devils perish; they have more knowledge of God than all the men in the world; for though by their fall they lost their holiness, yet they lost not their knowledge. There is, you must know, a two-fold knowledge: the one is common, but not saving; and the other is a saving knowledge of God and Christ which doth include the assent of the mind, and the consent of the will; and this is that knowledge which leads to life eternal. Now, whatever that mea-

sure of knowledge is, which a man may have of God and of Jesus Christ, yet if it be not this saving knowledge, knowledge joined with affection and application, he is but *almost* a christian. The gift of preaching and prophesying is a spiritual gift; now this a man may have, and yet be but *almost* a christian. These were great preachers that came to Christ and said, *Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, &c.* It is not gifts, but grace, which makes a christian.— They that have grace have gifts; and they that have no grace, may have the same gifts; yea, a graceless professor may have greater gifts than the most holy believer: he may out-pray, and out-preach, and out-do them; but they in sincerity and integrity out-go him.

“ It is beyond the power of the greatest gifts to change the heart; a man may preach like an apostle, pray like an angel, and yet may have the heart of a devil; one drachm of grace is of more worth than a talent of gifts; many have gone loaded with gifts to hell. The scribes and pharisees were men of great

gifts, and yet they were only as whited sepulchres ; gifts may make us rich towards men, but it is grace that makes us *rich towards God.*

“ 2. A man may have a high profession of religion, be much in external duties of godliness, and yet be *but almost* a christian. Mark what our Lord tells us, *Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.* It is a great deceit to measure the substance of our religion by the bulk of our profession, and to judge of the strength of our graces by the length of our duties.

“ A man may profess religion, and live in a form of godliness in hypocrisy. *Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.* They make mention of the name of the Lord ; here is their profession ; but not in truth, nor in righteousness ; here is their dissimulation : so many appear righteous, who are only righteous in appearance.

“ 3. Custom and fashion may make

a man a professor, as you have many that wear this or that garb, not because it keeps them warmer, or hath any excellency in it more than another, but merely for fashion. Many must have powdered hair, spotted faces, feathers in their caps, &c. for no other end but because it is the fashion of the time.— So many profess christianity, not because they see any excellency in the ways of God above the world, but merely to follow the fashion : I wish I might not say it hath been true of our days, because religion hath been uppermost, therefore many have professed it ; it hath been the gaining trade, and then most will be of that trade.

“ Religion in credit makes many professors ; but he that is a professor of religion merely for custom’s sake when it prospers, will never be a martyr for Christ’s sake when religion suffers. He that owns the truth to live upon that, will disown it when it comes to live upon him.

“ They say that when a house is decaying and falling, all the rats and mice will forsake it : while the house is firm,

and they may shelter in the roof, they will stay, but no longer; lest in the decay the fall should be upon them, and they that lived at top should die at bottom. My brethren, may I not say that we have many that are the vermin, the rats and mice of religion, that would live under the roof of it while they might have shelter in it; but when it suffers, forsake it, lest it should fall, and the fall be upon them.

“ Now the scripture is clear, that a man may perish under the highest profession of religion. Christ cursed the fig-tree that had leaves and no fruit. It is said in Matthew, *that the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness.* Who were these, but they that were then the only people of God in the world by profession, that had made a covenant with him by sacrifice? and yet these were cast out.

“ You read of some that came and made boast of their professions to Christ hoping that might save them; *Lord, say they, have we not prophesied in thy name, cast out devils in thy name, done many wonderful works in thy name?* Now

what saith our Lord Christ to this? *Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me.* The profession of religion will no more keep a man from perishing, than calling a ship the *safe-guard*, or the *good-speed* will keep her from sinking.

“ 4. To come nearer; A man may go far in opposing his sin, and yet be *but almost* a christian. How far a man may go in this work, I shall shew in seven gradual instances.

“ *First*, A man may be convinced of sin, and yet be *but almost* a christian; for, conviction may be rational, as well as spiritual; it may be from a natural conscience enlightened by the word, without the effectual work of the spirit, applying sin to the heart. Again, convictions may be worn out; they many times go off, and end not in sound conversion; saith the church, *We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have brought forth wind.* This is the complaint of the church in reference to the unprofitableness of their afflictions: and it may be the complaint of most in reference to the unprofitableness of their

convictions. And again, many take conviction of sin to be conversion from sin, and so set down, and rest in their conviction. Now then, if convictions may be only from natural conscience, if they may be worn out, or may be mistaken, and rested in for conversion, then a man may have convictions, and be *but almost* a christian.

“*Secondly*, A man may mourn for sin, and yet be *but almost* a christian; so did Saul, and so did Esau, for the loss of his birth-right, which was his sin, and therefore he is called profane Esau; yet *he sought it again carefully with tears.*

“True mourning for sin, is more for the evil that is in sin, than the evil that comes by sin; more because it dishonors God, and wounds Christ, and grieves the spirit, and makes the soul unlike God, than because it damns the soul. Now there are many that mourn for sin, not so much for the evil that is in it, as for the evil that it brings with it: there is mourning for sin in hell: you read of *weeping and wailing* there. The damned are weeping and mourning inces-

santly: but it is for the evil they feel by sin, and not for the evil that is in sin; so that a man may mourn for sin, and yet be *but almost* a christian.

“*Thirdly*; A man may make large confession of sin, to God, to others, and yet he be *but almost* a christian. How ingenuously doth Saul confess his sin to David? *I have sinned, saith he, thou art more righteous than I! Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.* So Judas makes a full confession; *I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.* Yet Saul and Judas were both rejected of God; so that a man may confess sin, and yet be *but almost* a christian.

“Some confess sin merely out of custom, and not out of conscience. Others will confess lesser sins, and yet conceal greater: like the patient in Plutarch, that complained to his physician of his finger, when his liver was rotten. And again, many will confess sin, but it is only under extremity, and is not free and voluntary. Pharaoh confesses his sin, but it was when judgment compelled him. *I have sinned against the Lord,* saith he; but it was when he had eight plagues upon him.

“ Many do by their sins as mariners do by their goods, east them out in a storm, wishing for them again in a calm. Confession should come like water out of a spring, which runs freely ; not like water out of a still, which is forced by fire.

“ Many confess their sins, but with no intent to forsake sin ; they confess the sins they have committed, but do not leave the sins they have confessed. Mr. Torshel tells a story of a minister he knew, that would be often drunk, and when he came into the pulpit, would confess it very lamentingly : and yet no sooner was he out of the pulpit, but he would be drunk again ; and this would he do as constantly as men follow their trades.

“ *Fourthly,* A man may forsake sin, and yet be *but almost* a christian ; he may leave his evil habits, and his wicked ways, which he sometimes lived in, and in the judgment of the world become a new man, and yet not be a new creature. Simon Magus, when he hears Philip preaching concerning the kingdom of God, leaves his sorcery and

witchcraft, and believes ; and yet after all he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.

“ He only is a true christian that forsakes sin from a right principle, after a right manner, and to a right end ; that forsakes sin as sin, as being contrary to God, and the purity of his nature ; this shews the soul to be right with God.

“ But now observe, there is a forsaking sin that is not right but unsound, viz.

“ Open sins may be deserted, and yet secret sins may be retained : now this is not a right forsaking ; such a soul shall never find mercy.

“ A man may forsake sin, but not as sin ; for he that forsakes sin as sin, forsakes all sin : It is impossible for a man to forsake sin as sin, unless he forsakes all that he knows to be sin.

“ A man may let one sin go, to hold another the faster ; as a man that goes to sea would willingly save all his goods, but if the storm arises, that he cannot, then he throws some overboard to lighten the vessel, and save the rest. So

the sinner chooses to keep all his sins ; but if a storm arises in the conscience, why then he will heave one lust overboard to save the life of another.

“ A man may let all sin go, and yet be a sinner still : for there is the root of all sin in the heart, though the fruit be not seen in the life ; the tree lives, though the boughs be lopped off. As a man is a sinner before ever he acts sin, so (till grace renew him) he is a sinner though he leaves sin ; for there is original sin in him enough to damn and destroy him.

“ Sin may be left, and yet be loved ; a man may forsake the life of sin, and yet retain the love of sin ; now though leaving sin makes him *almost* a christian, yet loving sin shews he is *but almost* a christian.

“ All sin may be chained ; and yet the heart not changed, and so the nature of the sinner is the same as ever.— A dog chained up, is a dog still, as much as if he was let loose to devour.

“ There may be a cessation of arms between enemies, and yet the quarrel may remain on foot still ; there may be

a making truce, where there is no making peace.

“ A sinner may lay the weapons of sin out of his hand, and yet the enmity against God still remain in his heart.

“ *Fifthly*, A man may hate sin, and yet be but *almost* a christian. Absalom hated Amnon's uncleanness with his sister Tamar, yea, his hatred was so great that he slew him for it ; and yet Absalom was but a wicked man. For,

“ A man may hate sin for the shame that attends it more than for the evil that is in it. He is ashamed of sin, and therefore hates it, not for sin's sake, but the shame's sake. This made Absalom hate Amnon's uncleanness, because it brought shame upon him and his sister.

“ A man may hate sin more in others than in himself : so doth the drunkard : he hates drunkenness in another, and yet practices it himself ; the liar hates falsehood in another, but likes it in himself. Now he that hates sin from a principle of grace, hates sin most in himself ; he hates sin in others, but he loathes most the sins of his own heart.

“ A man may hate one sin as being contrary to another. There is a great contrariety between sin and sin, between lust and lust ; and now when one lust gets to be the master lust in the soul, then that works a hatred of its contrary ; for instance, where covetousness gets the heart, there the heart hates pride ; and where pride gets uppermost in the heart, there the heart hates covetousness. Thus a man may hate sin, not from a principle of grace, but from the contrariety of lust. He does not hate any sin as it is sin ; but he hates it as being contrary to his beloved sin.

“ *Sixthly*, A man may make great vows and promises, he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin, and yet be but *almost* a christian. Thus did Saul, he promises and resolves against his sin ; *Return my son David*, saith he, *for I will no more do thee harm*. What promises and resolves did Pharaoh make against that sin of detaining God’s people ? Saith he, *I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice to the Lord* : And again, *I will let ye go*,

and ye shall stay no longer. And yet Saul and Pharaoh both perished in their sins. The greatest purposes and promises against sin, will not make a man a christian : For,

“Purposes and promises against sin never hurt sin ; we say *threatened folk live long* ; and truly so do threatened sins. It is not new purposes, but a new nature, that must help us against sin ; purposes may bring to the birth, but without a new nature, there is no strength to bring forth.

“Troubles and afflictions may provoke us to large purposes and promises against sin for the future. What more common than to vow, and not to pay ? to make vows in the day of trouble, which we make no conscience to pay in the day of peace. Many covenant against sin when trouble is upon them, and then sin against their covenant when it is removed from them.

“Purposes and resolves against sin for the future may be only a temptation to put off repentance for the present.—Satan may put a man on to good purposes to keep him from present attempts.

He knows whatever we purpose, yet the strength of performance is not in ourselves. He knows, also, that purposes for the future are a putting God off for the present; they are a secret *will not*, to a present opportunity.

“ Nature unsanctified may be so far wrought on as to make great promises and purposes against sin. A natural man may have great convictions of sin from the workings of an enlightened conscience. He may approve of the law of God; and he may have a desire to be saved. Now these three together, the workings of conscience, the sight of the goodness of the law, and a desire to be saved, may bring forth in a man great purposes against sin, and yet he may have no heart to perform his own purposes.

“ *Seventhly*, A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin in himself, and yet be *but almost* a christian. So did Balaam, when he went to curse the people of God; he had a great strife within himself; *How shall I curse*, saith he, *where God hath not cursed?* And did not Pilate strive against his sin, when

he said to the Jews, *Shall I crucify your King? what evil hath he done? I am innocent of the blood of this just man.*

“ 5. A man may desire grace, and yet be *but almost* a christian; so did the five foolish virgins; *give us of your oil*; what was that but true grace? it was that oil that lighted the wise virgins into the bridegroom’s chamber. They do not only desire to enter in, but desire oil to light them in. Wicked men may desire heaven, desire a Christ to save them; there is none so wicked upon earth but desire to be happy in heaven. But now here are they that desire grace as well as glory, and yet these are *but almost* christians. A person therefore may desire grace, and yet be but an *almost* christian: For,

“ A man may desire grace, but not for itself, but for somewhat else: not grace for grace’s sake, but for heaven’s sake; he doth not desire grace that his nature may be changed, his heart renewed, the image of God stamped upon him, and his corruptions subdued in him.

“ A man may desire grace without proportionable endeavors after grace ; many are good at wishing but bad at working ; like him that lay in the grass on a summer’s day, crying out ‘ *O that this were to work !* ’ ”

“ A man’s desires of grace may be unseasonable ; thus the foolish virgins desired oil when it was too late. So the silly sinner doth all his works out of season ; he sins away the seasons of grace, and then desires grace when the season is over. The sinner doth all too late, as Esau desired the blessing when it was too late, and therefore he lost it : had he come sooner, he had obtained it. Most men are like Epimetheus, wise too late ; they come when the market is done ; when God hath shut in shop, then they have their oil to get. When they lie upon their death-beds, then they desire holy hearts.

“ Desires of grace in many are very inconstant and fleeting, like the *morning dew*, that quickly passes away : or like *Jonah’s gourd*, that springs up in a night, and withers in a night : they have no root in the heart, and therefore quickly perish.

“ 6. A man may tremble at the word of God, and yet be *but almost* a christian, as Belshazzar did at the hand writing upon the wall; and as Felix trembled when Paul preached before him of righteousness and a judgment to come; even *the devils believe and tremble.*

“ 7. A man may delight in the word and ordinances of God, and yet be *but almost* a christian: *They take delight in approaching to God.* And it is said of the stony ground hearers, that they *received the word with joy, and yet they had no root.*

“ Many delight in the word, because of the eloquence of the preacher; they delight not so much in the truths delivered, as in the dress they are delivered in. Thus it is said of the prophet Ezekiel, that he was to them *as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice.*

“ There are others that delight to hear the word, that yet take no delight to do it: God saith of them, *they delight to hear my words, but they do them not.*

“ 8. A man may be a member of the church of Christ, he may join himself to the people of God, and share of all

church privileges, and yet be but almost a christian. So the five foolish virgins joined themselves to the wise, and walked together.

“The church, in all ages, hath unsound members: the drag-net of the Gospel catches bad fish, as well as good.

“9. A man may have great hopes of heaven, great hopes of being saved, and yet be but almost a christian.

“As there is a true and sound hope, so there is a false and rotten hope; and this is much more common, as bastard-pearls are more frequently worn than true pearls.

“There is nothing more common, than to see men big with groundless hopes of heaven; you read of the *hope of hypocrites*. The performance of duties is a proof of people's hope: the foolish virgins would never have done what they did, had they thought they should have been shut out after all; so many professors would not be at such pains in duties as they are, if they did not hope for heaven. Hope is the great motive to action; despair cuts the sinews of all en-

deavors; that is one reason why the damned in hell cease acting towards an alteration of their state, because despair hath taken hold of them; if there were any hope in hell they would up and be doing there. That hope of salvation that is not accompanied with heart-purification, is a vain hope.

“ 10. A man may be under great and visible changes, and these wrought by the ministry of the word, and yet be *but almost* a christian. Witness the case of Herod: it is said, when he heard John Baptist, *he heard him gladly, and did many things.* Saul, also, was under a great change when he met the Lord's prophets, he turned prophet too. Nay, it is said, *God gave him another heart.* Now one would think surely this was a work of grace, and that Saul was here truly converted, but yet indeed he was not. For though it is said God gave him another heart; yet it is not said that God gave him a *new* heart. So again, Simon Magus was under a great and visible change: of a sorcerer he was turned to be a believer, he left his witchcrafts and sorceries, and embraced the

gospel ; this now was a great change. If the drunkard doth but leave his drunkenness, the swearer his oaths, the profane person his profaneness, they think this is a gracious change, and their state is now good : Alas ! Simon Magus did not only leave his sins, but he had a kind of conversion ; for *he believed and was baptised.*

“ Not every change makes a man a christian ; for there is a civil change, and a moral change, as well as a spiritual and supernatural change. Many men are changed in a moral sense, and one may say they are become *new* men ; but they are in heart and nature the same men still ; they are not changed in a spiritual or supernatural sense, and therefore it cannot be said of them, that they are become new creatures.

“ Restraining grace may cause a moral change ; but it is renewing grace that must cause a saving change. Now many are under restraining grace, and so changed morally, that are not under the power of renewing grace, and so changed savingly.

“There is an outward change, as well as an inward change : the outward change is often without the inward, though the inward change is never without the outward. A man’s heart cannot be sanctified, but it will influence the life ; but a man’s life may be reformed, and yet never affect or influence the heart.

“A man may be converted from a course of profaneness to a form of godliness ; from a vile conversation to a fair profession ; and yet the heart be the same in one and the other. A rotten post may be gilt without, and yet be unsound within.

“I do not say these things to discountenance any change short of that which is spiritual ; but to awaken you to seek after that change which is more than moral. It is good to be outwardly reformed, but it is better to be savingly renewed. I know how natural it is for men to take up with any thing like a work of conversion, though it be not conversion ; and resting in that, they eternally perish. Beloved, let me tell you there is no change, no conver-

sion can avail your souls in the day of judgment, on this side that saving work, which is wrought on the soul by the spirit of God, renewing you throughout ; the sober man without this change, shall as surely go to hell, as the foolish drunkard. A man may go far in an outward change, and yet not be one step nearer heaven than he that never was under any change : nay, he may be, in some sense, further off ; as Christ said, the scribes and pharisees were further from heaven, with all their shew of godliness, than publicans and harlots in all their sin and uncleanness. Because, resting in a false work, a partial change, we neglect to seek after a true and saving change. There is nothing more common, than to mistake our state, and and by overweening thoughts misjudge our condition, and so perish in our own delusions. The world is full of these foolish builders, that lay the foundation of their hopes of eternal salvation upon the sand.

“ 11. A man may be very zealous in matters of religion, and yet be *but almost a christian* : Jehu did not only serve

God, and do what he commanded him, but was very zealous in his service.—*Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord of hosts; and yet in all this Jehu was a very hypocrite.*

“There are several kinds of zeal, none of which are true and sound, but false and counterfeit.

“*First.* There is a blind zeal, a zeal without knowledge. Now as knowledge without zeal is fruitless, so zeal without knowledge is dangerous; it is like wild-fire in the hand of a fool, or like the devil in the man possessed, that threw him, *sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water.* This was the zeal of Paul while he was a Pharisee; *I was zealous towards God as ye all are this day, and I persecuted this way unto the death. And again, I verily thought with myself, I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth: and concerning zeal, persecuting the church.*

“*Secondly,* There is a partial zeal; in one thing fire hot, in another key cold; zealous in this thing, and yet careless in another; many are zealous

in the duties of the first table, and yet neglect the second ; thus the Pharisees were zealous in their Corban, and yet unnatural to their parents, suffering them to starve and perish. Jehu was zealous against Ahab's house ; but not so against Jeroboam's calves ; many, also, are zealous against the sin of opinion, that yet use no zeal against the sins of their conversation.

Thirdly, There is a misplaced zeal, fixed upon unsuitable and disproportionate objects ; many are very zealous in trifling things that are not worth it, and trifle in the things that most require it ; like the Pharisees that were diligent tythers of *mint, annise and cummin*, but neglected the weightier matters of the law ; *Judgment, Mercy and Faith*. They had no zeal for these, though very hot for the other ; so many are more zealous for a ceremony, than for the substance of religion.

“ Fourthly, There is a selfish zeal that hath a man's own ends for its motive ; Jehu was very zealous, but it was not so much for God, as for the kingdom : not so much in obedience to the

command, as in design to step into the throne; and therefore God threatens to punish him for that very thing he commands him to do; *I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu*: because he shed that blood to gratify his lust, not to obey God. So Simeon and Levi pretend great zeal for circumcision, seem very zealous for the honour of God's ordinances, when in truth their zeal was covetousness, and revenge upon the Shechemites.

“*Fifthly*, There is an out side zeal; such was that of the scribes and pharisees, they would not eat with unwashed hands, but yet would live in unseen sins: Jehu was a mighty outside reformer, but he reformed nothing within, for he had a base heart under all. *Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart*. Though his fleece was fair, his heart was unsound.

“*Sixthly*, There is a forensic zeal; that runs out upon others, and sees not its own sins; as many are hot and high against the sins of others, and yet cannot see the same in themselves. It is easy to see the faults in others, and as

hard to see them in ourselves. Jehu was zealous against Baal and his priests, because that was Ahab's sin; but not against the calves of Bethel, because that was his own sin.

“*Seventhly*, There is a sinful zeal; all the former may be called sinful from some defect: but this I call sinful in a more special manner, because against the life and chief of religion; it is a zeal that flies not at profaneness, but at the very power of godliness; not at error, but at truth, and is most hot against the most spiritual and important truths of the times. Whence else are the sufferings of men for the truth, but from a spirit of zeal against the truth? This may be called a devilish zeal, for as there is the faith of devils, so there is the zeal of devils.

“*12.* A man may be much in prayer, he may pray often, and pray much, and yet be *but almost* a christian. So did the pharisees, whom yet our Lord rejects for hypocrites.

“*First*, Nature may put a man upon prayer, for it is a part of natural worship.

“ *Secondly*, A man may pray in pretence, for a covering to some sin ; so did those devout pharisees : *Wo to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers, therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.* So the papists seem very devout to pray a rich man's soul out of purgatory, but it is to cheat the heir of much of his estate, under pretence of praying for his father's soul.

“ *Thirdly*, A man may pray, and yet love sin : as Austin, before conversion, prayed against his sin, but was afraid God would hear him, and take him at his word. Now God hears not such prayers ; *If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayer.*

“ *Fourthly*, A man may pray much for temporal things, and little for spiritual things : and such are the prayers of many. David copies out the prayer of such ; *that our sons may be as plants, and that our daughters may be as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace : that our garners may be full, &c.* This is the carnal heart's prayer ; and this

David calls vanity. *They are strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity.*

“*Fifthly, A man may pray, and yet be far from God in prayer. This people draw nigh to me with their mouths, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*

“*Sixthly, A man’s prayer may be a lie ; as a profession without sanctity is a lie to the world ; so prayer without sincerity is a lie to God. It is said of Israel, that they sought God, and enquired early after him : they were much in prayer, and God calls all but a lie.— Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouths, and they lied to him with their tongues, for their heart was not with him.*

“*Seventhly, Afflictions and the pressures of outward evils will make a man pray, and pray much ; When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and enquired early after God. The heathen mariners called every man upon his God when in a storm : when they are drowning, then they fall to praying, Jonah i. 5. Mariners are for the most part none of the devoutest, nor much addicted to prayer ; they will swear twice,*

where they pray once, and yet it is said, *They cry to the Lord in their trouble* : and hence you have a proverb, ‘ *He that cannot pray, let him go to sea.*’

“ But one may ask, Suppose a man pray, and prevail with God in prayer, is not this a witness from heaven, of a man’s sincerity in prayer ?

“ *Answer.* A man may pray and be answered, for God many times answers prayers in judgment. As God is sometimes silent in mercy, so he speaks in wrath : and as he sometimes denies prayer in mercy, so he sometimes answers in judgment, when men are over-impudent in something their hearts are upon, and will take no nay, then God answers in judgment. *He gave them their own desire.* They had desired quails, and God sends them : But now mark the judgment. *While the meat was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them and slew them.*

“ But one may further ask, Suppose a man’s affections are much stirred in prayer, how then ? Is not that a true note that he is a christian ?

“ *I answer,* So was Esau’s affections much stirred when he sought the bles-

sing; *He sought it carefully with tears.* A man may be affected with his own parts in a duty, while good notions pass through his head, and good words through his lips, some good motions also may stir in his heart, but they are as sparks which fly out at the tunnel of the chimney, which suddenly vanish; so that it is possible a man may pray and prevail in prayer; pray and be affected in prayer, and yet be but *almost* a christian.

“13. A man may suffer for Christ in his goods, in his name, in his person, and yet be *but almost* a christian.— For every man that bears Christ’s cross on his shoulders, doth not therefore bear Christ’s image in his soul.

“There is a suffering for Christ, that is, a note of sincerity, and shall have its reward. That is, when a man suffers for a good cause, upon a good call, and with a good conscience, for Christ’s sake, or when a man suffers *as a christian*, as the apostle hath it. But now every suffering for Christ is not suffering as a christian: For,

“*First.* A man may suffer for Christ, for that profession of religion that is up-

on him ; the world hates the shew of religion ; times may come, that it may cost a man as dear to wear the livery of Christ, as to wear Christ himself.— Alexander had like to have lost his life for the gospel's sake, yet he was that Alexander, as is generally judged, that afterwards made shipwreck of faith, and greatly opposed Paul's ministry.

“ *Secondly.* A man may suffer for Christ, and yet have no true love to Christ. This is supposed ; *Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits nothing.*

“ Love to Christ is the only noble ground of suffering, but a man may suffer much upon other ends.

“ *First,* Out of opinion of meriting by our suffering, as the papists : Or,

“ *Secondly,* Out of vain glory, or for applause among professors ; some have died that their names might live : Or,

“ *Thirdly,* Out of a Roman resolution, or stoutness of spirit.

“ *Fourthly,* Out of design of profit, as Judas forsook all for Christ, hoping to mend his market by classing with him : Or,

“Fifthly, More to maintain an opinion, than for truth’s propagation. Thus a man may suffer for professing Christ, and yet suffer upon wrong principles, and consequently be *but almost a christian.*”*

* An earlier writer than Matthew Mead, observes : “Some suffer with and for Christ, and as he commands, (as they think) in shame, in reproach, in imprisonment, in loss of goods, houses, lands, wife and children ; yea, in loss of liberty and life itself : but though they think it is for him, and they pretend and seem to suffer for and with him, yet it is not for him, but for themselves ; nay, not only so, but many are come so far that they do not only suffer these things, viz. suffer poverty and suffer forsaking of houses, lands, wife, children, good name, liberty, life, &c. But they may, and also do take pleasure in suffering with and for him : This indeed they may do, but how do they do it ? They suffer indeed, willingly and cheerfully, and yet unwillingly : willingly, as it may accomplish ends to themselves, and ends of their own ; but they suffer not for his will’s sake, for his name’s sake and the gospel’s.

“They may thus suffer, because this is the way (as they think) to bring about their own happiness ; so that, though they suffer willingly, and may rejoice in it, yet it is but as of necessity ; seeing there is no other way to heaven, but by sufferings, and by undergoing the cross. But yet withal, they grudge and think hardly of God, and they could wish from their hearts, the way had been easier and smoother, without such crosses, and without such hard, tough, self denial. There is indeed in them a willingness to suffer and act, and confirm, things being as they are, but they do not choose to have them so as they are, their wills and God’s jar ; they like not (in themselves) the cross of

“ 14. A man may be called of God, and embrace this call, and yet be but almost a christian : for many under the

Christ, they wish God had done otherwise than to make their way to heaven so rough, and so tedious ; they do his commands, but they do them as a hard and sore task ; they would seem and pretend to wear his livery, but they serve not him, but themselves. These do indeed, (as Augustine says) *carry the cross, but they do not follow Christ*. And though all these be good herbs in regard to the matter of them, yet self ends poisons all, and we may say of them, as in 2 Kings, iv. 40, *There is death in the pot*.

“ Therefore I had need to say to you as Christ said to his disciples, *Take heed of the leaven of the pharisees and of the sadducees*. This is that leaven that in all ages, the most learned and most famous professors and teachers, are commonly leavened with, and indeed, most of their admirers and auditors. Therefore take heed of this poison, this leaven of self ends in what you do ; for you may run far, and act much, and soar high, but if *self* be your end, *you lose all the things you have wrought*, as the apostle saith ; though it be but a small thing, (as you think) yet it corrupts your best duties : as you know a *dead fly* is but a small thing, yet it corrupts the most precious *ointment of the apothecary, and makes it offensive*, Ecc. x. 1. Therefore it is to be mainly looked to, that this self-seeking and self-ends in your actions and duties, do not poison and bring all you do to nought.

The same writer adds, “ Beloved, I would not be he that should discourage or discomfort any man in the way to heaven, by any means ; and yet also I would have you set sure footing, so that you may not *labour in vain, and lose the things ye have wrought* ; the truth is, I aim not, (as you may think, and as some have affirmed of me) to bring hell into your conscien-

call of God, come to Christ, but are not converted to Christ, have nothing of the grace and life of Christ; such as he who when Christ sent out his servants

ces, but only to save you from hell; and as the apostle saith, *O ye Corinthians! our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. And though I made you sorrowful with a letter, I do not repent.* So if the Lord by me doth so kindle hell-fire within you here for a time, to keep you from the everlasting hell; this were a great mercy to you, and a fruit of true love.

“But I am sure you are all of David’s mind concerning Ahimaaz, *O! he is a good man, and he brings good tidings.* And you are good at saying, as in Isaiah, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good:* Oh! these are the good men in your esteem, that will preach of nothing but peace, and that can *sew pillows under all arm-holes*, as the prophet speaks, and *daub with untempered mortar*, and prophecy all good to you, these are the only men with you, though indeed they are no other but false prophets, who *prophecy lies in the name of the Lord:* And dare *pollute the Lord among his people*, and *betray your souls for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread;* for so that they can have but their tithes, they will *save the souls alive that should die*, and when it is denied, they will *slay the souls that should not die*, as the prophet Ezekiel speaks. But I, for dealing plainly with you, and for searching your wounds to the bottom, to make a sound cure, shall even gain that opinion from you that *Mtchaiah*, the prophet, had from *Ahab;* for he said, *I cannot abide him, I hate him; for he never propheceth good to me, but evil.*”

to bid guests unto the marriage, some came in at the call of Christ, but yet had not on the wedding garment, that is, had none of the grace and righteousness of Christ. Hence it is declared, *many are called, but few are chosen.*

“15. A man may have the spirit of God, and yet be *but almost* a christian. Balaam had the spirit of God given him when he blessed Israel. *Balaam saw Israel abiding in tents, and the spirit of the Lord came upon him.* Saul had, *behold a company of prophets met him, and the spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.*

“There is a having the spirit, which is a sure mark of saintship, viz. Where the spirit is an effectual-prevailing principle of grace and sanctification, renewing and regenerating the heart; where the spirit is as a potent worker, *helping the soul's infirmities, &c.* But now every man that hath the spirit, hath not the spirit in this manner; For,

“*First.* A man may have the spirit only transiently, not abidingly: the

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spirit may be in a man, and yet not dwell in a man.

“*Secondly*, A man may have the spirit, and yet not be born of the spirit; every true christian is born of the spirit; an hypocrite may have the gifts of the spirit, but not the graces; the spirit may be in him, by way of *illumination*, but not by way of *sanctification*; by way of *conviction*, but not by way of *conversion*.

“*Thirdly*. A man may have the spirit only as a spirit of bondage; thus many have the spirit working only to bondage; *the spirit of bondage* is an operation of the Holy Ghost by the law, convincing the conscience of sin, and of the curse of the law, and working in the soul such an apprehension of the wrath of God as makes the thoughts of God a terror to him. — This spirit may be, and often is without saving grace; this operation of the spirit was in Cain and Judas. There are none that receive the spirit of adoption, but they first receive the spirit of bondage: yet many receive the spirit of bondage that never receive the spirit of adoption.

“ Fourthly. A man may have the spirit of God working in him, and yet it may be resisted by him. It is said of the Jews, they rebelled and vexed his holy Spirit ; and the same sin is charged upon their children. Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart, ye have always resisted the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did so do ye. The hypocrite retains not the spirit so long as to come up to regeneration and adoption, but quenches the motions of it, and thereby miscarries eternally.

“ 16. A man may have faith, and yet be but almost a christian. The stony ground, that is, those hearers represented by the stony ground, for a while believed. It is said also, that many believed in the name of Christ, yet Christ durst not commit himself to them. Though they trusted in Christ, yet Christ would not trust them ; and why ? because he knew all men, as it is there said. He knew they were rotten at root, notwithstanding their faith ; a man may have all faith, to the removing of mountains, and yet be nothing.

“ But one may ask, Doth not our

Lord promise life eternal and salvation to all that believe? And is not this the Gospel that is to be preached to every creature, *He that believes shall be saved?*

“To this I answer, Though it is true what our Lord saith, that *he that believes shall be saved*; yet it is as true, that many believe that shall never be saved; for Simon Magus believed; yea, James saith, *The devils believe and tremble*: Now none will say these shall be saved.

“As it is true what the apostle saith, *All men have not faith*; so it is as true, that there are some men have faith who are not a whit the better for their faith.

“You must know, therefore that there is a two-fold faith.

“*First.* There is a saving faith. This is called *faith of the operation of God*.—It is a work of God’s own spirit in the soul. It is such a faith as rests and casts the soul wholly upon Christ for grace, pardon and peace, sanctification and salvation. It is an united act of the whole soul, understanding, will and affections, all concurring to unite the soul to an all-sufficient Redeemer. It is such a faith as *purifies the heart* and

makes it clean ; it influences and gives strength and life to all the other graces. Now, whoever hath this faith, is a christian indeed. But then,

“ *Secondly*, There is a common faith, not saving, a fading and temporary faith ; there is the faith of Simon Magus, as well as the faith of Simon Peter ; Simon Magus believed, and yet was in the *gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity*. Now Simon Magus hath more followers than Simon Peter ; the faith of most men will at last be found to be no better than the faith of Simon Magus : For,

First. The faith of most is but a temporary faith ; it endures for a while, and then dies and perisheth.

“ *Secondly*. There is a faith that lies only in generals, not in particulars.— Now many have a general faith to believe all the scripture, and yet have no faith to make a particular application of Jesus Christ in the promise. Devils and reprobates may believe the truth of the scripture, and what is written of the dying and suffering of Christ for sinners ; but there are but

few that can close up themselves in the wounds of Christ, and by his stripes fetch in healing to their own souls.

“*Thirdly.* There is a faith that is seated in the understanding, but not in the will; this is a very common faith: many assent to the truth. They believe all the attributes of God, that he is just, holy, wise, faithful, good, merciful, &c. But yet they rest not on him, notwithstanding. They believe the commands are true, but yet do not obey them: they believe the promises are true, but yet do not embrace and apply them; they believe the threatenings are true, but yet do not flee from them. Thus their faith lies in *assent*, but not *consent*: by assent they lay a foundation, but never build upon it by application. O my brethren, it is not a believing head, but a believing heart that makes a christian: *with the heart man believes to righteousness*; without this our faith is vain, and we yet in our sins.

“*Fourthly.* There is a faith without experience; many believe the word upon hearsay, to be the word of God,

but they never felt the power and virtue of it upon their hearts and consciences. Now what good is it to believe the truth of the word, if a man's conscience never felt the power of the word? What is it to believe the truth of the promise, if we never tasted the sweetness of the promise? We are in this case, like a man that believes the description others give of strange countries, but never travelled them to know the truth: or as a patient that believes all the physician says, but yet tries none of his potions. We believe the word, because we cannot gainsay it; but yet we have no experience of any saving good wrought by the word, and so are *but almost* christians.

“*Fifthly.* There is a faith that is without brokenness of heart, that does not avail to melt or soften the heart, and therefore is not true faith; for the least true faith is ever joined with a bending will and a broken heart.

Sixthly. There is a faith that transforms not the heart; faith without fruit, that doth not bring forth a new creature in the soul, but leaves it in a state

of sin and death. This is a faith that makes a man a sound professor, but not a sound believer; he believes the truth, but not as it is in Jesus; for then it would change and transform him into the *likeness of Jesus*. He believes that a man must be changed that would be saved, but yet is not savingly changed by believing. Thus, while others believe to salvation, he believes to damnation; for *his web shall not become a garment, neither shall he cover himself with his work.*

“ 17. A man may go further yet: he may possibly have a love to the people of God, and yet be *but almost* a christian. Every kind of love to those who are saints, is not a proof of our saintship: Pharaoh loved Joseph, and advanced him to the second place in the kingdom, and yet Pharaoh was but a wicked man. Ahab loved Jehoshaphat, and made a league with him, and married his daughter Athaliah, to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son, and yet Ahab was a wicked wretch.

“ But you will say this seems to contradict the testimony of the scriptures;

for that makes love to the saints and people of God a sure proof of our regeneration, and interest in life eternal.

“ To this I answer, that there is a love to the children of God, which is a proof of our being the children of God. As, for instance, when we love them as such, for that very reason, as being the saints of God ; when we love them for the image of God which appeareth in them, because of that grace and holiness which shineth forth in their conversations ; this is truly commendable, to love the godly for godliness’ sake ; this a sure testimony of our christianity. The love of grace in another, is a good proof of the life of grace in ourselves ; there can be no better evidence of the spirit of Christ in us, than to love the image of Christ in others. For this is a certain truth, that a sinner cannot love a saint, as such ; *an Israelite is an abomination unto an Egyptian.* There is a contrariety and natural enmity between the two seeds ; between the children of the world, and those whom the Father hath chosen

out of the world. It is likeness which is the great ground of love ; now there is the highest dissimilitude and unlikeness between an unregenerate sinner, and a child of God, and therefore a child of God cannot love a sinner as a sinner. He may love him as a creature ; he may love his soul, or he may love him under some relation that he stands in to him, but he cannot love him as a sinner. So neither can a sinner love a child of God, as a child of God. He may love a child of God, I grant, but it is upon some other consideration ; he may love a person that is holy, not the person for his holiness, but for some other respect. As,

“ *First.* A man may love a child of God for his loving, peaceable, courteous deportment to all with whom he converseth. Religion beautifies the conversation of a man, and sets him off to the eye of the world. The grace of God is no friend to morose, churlish, unmannerly behaviour among men : it promotes an affable demeanor and sweetness to all ; and where this is found, it winneth respect and love from all.

“*Secondly.* A man may love a child of God for his fidelity and usefulness in his place. Where religion, in the power of it, taketh hold of a man’s heart, it maketh him true to all his intrustments, diligent in his business, faithful in all his relations; and this gaineth respect. A carnal master may prize a godly apprentice or servant that makes conscience of pleasing his master, and is diligent in promoting his interest. I might instance in many things of the like nature, as charity, beauty, learning, parts, &c which may procure love to the people of God from the men of the world.— But this love is no proof of grace: For,

“*First.* It is but a natural love, arising from some carnal respect, or self end; that love which is made by the scripture an evidence of our regeneration is a *spiritual love*, the principal loadstone and attractive whereof is grace and holiness; it is a love which embraceth *a righteous man in the name of a righteous man.*

“*Second.* A carnal man’s love to saints is a limited and bounded love;

it is not universal *to the seed*. Now as in sin, he that doth not make conscience of every sin, maketh conscience of no sin as sin; so he who doth not love all in whom the image of Christ is found, loveth none for that of the image of Christ which is found in them.

“Now then, if the love we bear to the people of God may possibly arise from natural love only, or from some carnal respect; or if it be a limited love, then it is possible that a man may love the people of God, and yet be no better than *almost a christian*.

“18. A man may obey the commands of God, yea, many of the commands of God, and yet be *but almost a christian*. Balaam seems very conscientious of steering his course by the compass of God's command. When Balak sent to him to come and curse the people of God, saith Balaam, *If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God*: and so in the 38th verse, saith he, *The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak*. The young man that came to

Christ went far in obedience, *All these things have I observed from my youth up.* And yet he was but an hypocrite, for he forsook Christ after all.

“ But one may ask, Is it not said, *he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me?* And doth not our Lord tell us expressly, *ye are my friends if ye do whatever I command you?* And can a man be a friend of Christ, and be but almost a christian.

“ I answer, that there is an obedience to the commands of Christ, which is a sure proof of our Christianity and friendship to Christ. This obedience hath a three-fold property. It is 1. evangelical, 2. universal, 3. continual.

“ *First.* It is evangelical obedience, and that both in matter and manner, ground and end. In the matter of it, and that is what God commands, *Ye are my friends if ye do whatever I command you.* In the manner of it, and that is according as God requires; *God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in*

truth. In the ground of it, and that is a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned. In the end of it, and that is the honour and glory of God; *Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

“*Secondly.* It is an universal obedience; such was the obedience of Caleb, *who followed the Lord fully.*

“*Thirdly.* It is a continual obedience, a putting the hand to God’s plow, without looking back. He that thus obeys the command of God is a christian indeed, a friend of Christ indeed, but all obedience to the commands of God, is not this obedience, For,

“*First.* There is a partial obedience. Now this obedience is no obedience; for he that doth not obey the commands of God universally, cannot be said to obey any command truly.— It is said of those in Samaria, that they *feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after their own manner*: and yet in the very next verse it is said, *They feared not the Lord*: so that their fear of the Lord was no fear: in like manner that obedience to God is no obedience, which is but a partial and peace-meal obedience.

“ *Secondly.* A man may obey much, and yet be in his old nature, and if so, then all his obedience in that state, is but painted sin : *He that offereth an oblation, is as if he offered swine's blood : and he that burneth incense as if he blessed an idol.* The nature must be renewed before the command can be rightly obeyed, for *a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit.* Whatever a man's performances are, they cannot be called obedience whilst the heart remaineth unregenerate, because the principle is false and unsound. Every duty done by a believer is accepted of God as a part of his obedience to the will of God, though it be done in much weakness : because though the believer's hand is weak, yet his *heart is right* ; the hypocrite may have the most active hand, but the believer hath the most faithful and sincere heart.

“ *Thirdly.* A man may obey the law, and yet have no love to the law-giver : a carnal heart may do the command of God, but he cannot love God, and therefore cannot do it aright : for

love to God is the foundation and spring of all true obedience ; every command of God is to be done in love : this is the *fulfilling of the law*. The apostle saith, *Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, (these seem to be acts of the highest obedience) yet if I have not love, it profits me nothing.*

“ *Fourthly*. I might add, that a man may be much in obedience from sinister and base, selfish ends ; as the pharisees prayed much, gave much alms, fasted much ; but our Lord tells us that it was *that they might be seen of men, and have glory of men*. Most of the hypocrite’s piety empties itself into vain glory : and therefore he is but an empty vine in all he does, because *he bringeth forth fruit to himself*.

“ Now, then, if a man may obey the commands of God partially, and by halves ; if he may do it, and yet be in his natural state ; if he may obey the commands of God, and yet not love God ; if the ends of his obedience may be base and selfish ; then a man may be much in obeying the commands of God, and yet be *but almost a christian*.

“ 19. A man may be in a sense sanctified, and yet be *but almost* a christian. For every kind of sanctification doth not make a man a new creature ; many are sanctified that are never renewed.

“ Now you must know there is a two-fold work of sanctification spoken of in scripture ; the one common and ineffectual, the other special and effectual. That work of sanctification which is true and effectual, is a working of the spirit of God in the soul, enabling it to the mortifying of all sin, *to walking with God, in all well-pleasing.* Now whoever is thus sanctified, is one with Christ. Christ will not be ashamed to call such brethren. But then there is a more common work of sanctification, which is ineffectual as to the two great works of dying to sin, and living to God. This kind of sanctification may help to restrain sin, but not to mortify sin ; it may lop off the boughs, but it layeth not the axe to the root of the tree ; so that a man is *but almost* a christian, notwithstanding this sanctification.

“Or thus, there is an inward and outward sanctification. Inward sanctification is that which deals with the soul and its faculties, understanding, conscience, will, memory and affections. Outward sanctification is that which deals with the life and conversation; both these must concur to make a man a christian indeed. Outward sanctification is not enough without inward, nor inward without outward; we must have both *clean hands and a pure heart*. The heart must be pure, that we may not incur blame from within; and the hands must be clean, that we may not incur blame from without; we must have *hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and bodies washed with pure water.*—*We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.* Inward purity is the most excellent, but without the outward, it is not sufficient; the true christian is made up of both.

“Now many have clean hands, but unclean hearts; they wash the outside of the cup and platter; when all is filthy within; now the former, without the latter, profiteth a man no more

than it profited Pilate to wash his hands in the presence of the people when he condemned Christ; he washed his hands of the blood of Christ, and yet had a hand in the death of Christ. The Egyptian temples were beautiful on the outside, but within you should find nothing but some serpent or crocodile. *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly.*

“Some pretend to inward sanctity without outward; this is the pretence of the open sinner: Though I sometimes drop an idle, foolish word, (saith he,) or though I sometimes swear an oath, yet I think no hurt; I thank God, my heart is good;’ such are like the sinner Moses mentions, that *bles-
sed himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.* Some pretend to outward sanctity without inward; such are like the scribes and pharisees, who *outwardly appeared righteous unto men, but within were full of hypocrisy and iniquity; fair professors, but foul sinners.*

“ Inward sanctity without outward, is impossible, for it will reform the life ; outward sanctity without inward, is unprofitable, for it will not reform the heart ; a man is not a true christian without both ; the body doth not make a man without the soul, nor the soul without the body ; both are essential to the being of a man ; so the sanctification of both are essential to the being of a new man. True sanctification begins at the heart, but works out into the life and conversation ; and if so, then a man may attain to an outward sanctification, and yet for want of the inward, be no better than *almost* a christian.

“ 20. And so I shall end this long pursuit of the *almost* christian in his progress heavenward, with this one general conclusion, viz.—A man may do all, as to external duties and worship, that a *true* christian can, and when he hath done all, be *but almost* a christian.

“ You must know all the commands of God have an *intra* and an *extra* : there is, I may say, the body and the soul of the command. And according-

ly there is an internal and an external worship of God. The internal acts of worshipping of God, are to love God, to fear God, to delight in God, to trust in God, &c. The external acts of worshipping of God, are by praying, teaching, hearing, &c. Now there is a vast difference between these internal and external acts of worship; and such a difference there is, that they distinguish the *altogether* from the *almost* christian; the sincere believer from the unsound professor; and indeed in this very thing the main difference between them doth lie.

“ *First.* Internal acts of worship are necessarily good; for a man cannot love God, nor fear God, but it will be imputed to him for a gracious act, and a great part of his holiness. But now external acts of worship are not denominated ‘good so much from the matter done, as from the manner of doing them; a man cannot sin in loving and delighting in God, but he may sin in praying and hearing, &c. for want of a due manner.

“ *Secondly,* Internal acts of worship put a goodness into external; it is our

faith, our love, our fear of God, that makes our duties good.

Thirdly. Internal acts of worship better the heart and increase the degrees of a man's holiness; external duties do not always do this; a man may pray, and yet his heart never be the holier; he may hear the word, and yet his heart be never the softer: but now the more a man fears God, the wiser he is: the more a man loves God, the holier he is: Love is the perfection of holiness: we shall never be perfect in holiness until we come to be perfect in love.

“Fourthly. There is such an excellency in this internal worship, that he who mixes it with his external duties, is a true christian when he doth least: But without this mixture he is *but almost* a christian that doth most. Internal acts of worship, joined with outward, sanctify them, and make them accepted of God, though few: external acts of worship, without inward, make them abhorred of God, though they be never so many. So that although the *almost* christian may do all those duties in hypocrisy, which a true

christian doth in sincerity : nay, though in doing external duties he may outdo the true christian, as the comet makes a greater blaze than the true star ; if Elijah fast and mourn, Baal's priests will cut their flesh ; yet he cannot do those internal duties that the weakest true christian can. I do not say these things to discourage any soul in the doing of duties, or to beat down outward performances, but to rectify the soul in the doing of them.

“ And thus I have answered the first query ; to wit, how far a man may go in the way to heaven, and yet be *but almost a christian.*

“ 1. He may have much knowledge.

“ 2. He may have great gifts.

“ 3. He may have a high profession.

“ 4. He may do much against sin.

“ 5. He may desire grace.

“ 6. He may tremble at the word.

“ 7. He may delight in the word.

“ 8. He may be a member of the church of Christ.

“ 9. He may have great hopes of heaven.

“10. He may be under great and visible changes.

“11. He may be very zealous in the matters of religion.

“12. He may be much in prayer.

“13. He may suffer for Christ.

“14. He may be called of God.

“15. He may in some sense have the spirit of God.

“16. He may have some kind of faith.

“17. He may love the people of God.

“18. He may go far in obeying the commands of God.

“19. He may be in some sense sanctified.

“20. He may do all, as to external duties, that a true christian can, and yet be no better than *almost* a christian.

“I come now to the second question proposed.

“11. Why, or whence is it, that many men go so far as that they come to be *almost* christians?

“*First.* It may be to answer the call of conscience: though few men

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have grace, yet all men have conscience. Now do but observe, and you shall see how far conscience may go in this work.

“1. Conscience owns a God, and that this God must be worshipped and served by the creature. Now there being such a light in conscience as to discover that there is a God, and that he must be worshipped, by the help of farther light, the light of the word, a man may be enabled to do much in the ways of God, and yet his heart be without a drachm of grace.

“2. Know this, that natural conscience is capable of great improvements from the means of grace; it may be much regulated, though it be not at all renewed: it may be enlightened and convinced, and yet never be savingly converted and changed.— Hence a man may have an improved conscience, and yet be a stranger to a renewed conscience; and conscience thus improved, may put a man very much upon duty. I pray God, none of us may mistake a conscience thus improved by the word, for a conscience

renewed by the spirit : the mistake is very easy, especially when a life of duties is the fruit of it.

“ 3. The conscience of a natural man is subject to distress and trouble. Though a natural conscience is not sanctified by grace, yet it is often troubled at sin : trouble of conscience is not incident to believers only, but to unbelievers also. A believer’s conscience is sometimes troubled, when his sin is truly pardoned ; and a natural man’s conscience is troubled for sin, though it is never freed from sin. God sometimes sets the word home upon the sinner’s conscience, and applies the terrors of the law to it : and this fills the soul with fear and horror of death and hell ; now in this case, the soul usually betakes itself to a life of duties, merely to fence trouble out of conscience.

“ When Absalom sets on fire Joab’s cornfields, then he runs to him, though he had refused before ; so when God lets a spark of hell, as it were, fall upon the sinner’s conscience, in applying the terrors of the word ; this drives

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the sinner to a life of duties, which he never minded before. The ground of many a man's engaging in religion is the trouble of his conscience, and the end of his continuing his religion is the quieting of conscience; if conscience would never check him, God should never hear from him.

“Natural conscience hath a voice, and speaks aloud many times in the sinner's ears, and telleth him, This ought to be done: God must not be forgotten: the commands of God ought not to be slighted; living in sin will be the ruin of the soul, &c. And hence it is, that the natural man runs to duties, and takes up a lifeless and graceless profession, that he may thereby silence conscience. As a man sick in his stomach, whatever sweet morsel he hath eaten, he brings up all; and although it was sweet in the eating, it was bitter in the rising; so it fareth with the sinner when he is sermon-sick, or conscience-sick; though his sin was sweet in the practice, yet the thought of it riseth bitter upon the conscience: and then his profession of

religion is the pill he rolleth about in his mouth to take away the bitterness of sin's taste.

“ 4. Natural conscience, enlightened by the word, may discover to a man much of the misery of a natural state, so as to make him restless and weary of it: It may show a sinner his wickedness; and hereupon the soul runneth to a life of duties; thinking hereby to help the miseries of his case, and to make a covering for his nakedness. It is said that when Adam and Eve saw they were naked, they *sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves a covering*. So when once the sinner seeth his nakedness and vileness by reason of sin, he runneth to a life of duties and performances, and thus maketh himself a covering with the fig leaves of a *profession*. A natural man would fain be his own Saviour; and supposeth a change of state to be within his own power: and that the true work of grace lieth in leaving off the practice of sin and taking up a life of duties; and therefore upon this principle doth many a graceless professor outstretch

a sound believer ; for he resteth in his own performances, and hopeth these will commend him to God.

“ After what has been stated, one may ask, If a natural conscience may go thus far, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and a renewed conscience in believers? or, how may I know whether the working of my conscience be the working of nature only, or else of grace wrought in it.

“ To this I answer, I grant that it is difficult to distinguish between the one and the other ; arising from that resemblance there is between grace and hypocrisy : for hypocrisy is a resemblance of grace, without substance ; likeness of grace without the life of grace. There is no grace but a hypocrite may have somewhat like it : and there is no duty done by a christian, but an hypocrite may outstrip him in it. Now when one that hath not true grace shall go farther than one that hath, this may well make the believer question whether his grace be true or

not; or whether the workings of his conscience be not the workings of nature only, rather than of grace wrought in it.

“But to answer the question: you may make a judgment of this in these seven particulars.

“1. If a natural man's conscience putteth him upon duty, he doth usually bound himself in the work of God; his duties are limited, his obedience is a limited obedience; he doeth one duty and neglecteth another; he picketh and chooseth among the commands of God; obeyeth one and slighteth another. Thus much is enough, he concludes; what need of any more? If I do thus, and thus, I shall go to heaven at last. But now, where conscience is renewed by grace, there it is otherwise: though there may be many weaknesses which accompany its duties, yet that soul never bounds itself in working for God; it never loves God so much but still it would love him more: Nor doth it serve God so well at any time, but it still makes conscience of serving him better. A

renewed conscience is a spring of universal obedience ; for it seeth an infinite excellency, and goodness, and holiness in God ; and therefore would fain have its virtue rise up towards some proportionableness to the object. A God of infinite excellency and goodness should have infinite love, saith conscience.

“ Now then, if I set bounds to my love to God, or to my service to God ; then is all I do but the working of a natural conscience. But on the other hand, if I love the Lord with my whole heart, and whole soul, might and strength ; then is my love and service from a renewed conscience.

“ 2. If a natural man's conscience check him, or accuse for sin, then he seeketh to stop the mouth of conscience, but not to satisfy it. Most of the natural man's duties are to still and stifle conscience. But now the believer chooseth rather to let conscience cry, than to stop the mouth of it, until he can do it upon good terms, and till he can fetch in satisfaction to it from

the blood of Jesus Christ by fresh acts of faith apprehended and applied.

“The natural man seeketh to still the noise of conscience rather than remove the guilt: the believer seeketh the removal of guilt by the application of Christ’s blood; and then conscience is quiet of itself. As a foolish man, having a mote fallen into his eye, and maketh it water, he wipeth away the water, and labours to keep it dry, but never searcheth his eye to get out the mote: but the wise man mindeth not so much the wiping, as the searching his eye: somewhat is got in, and that causeth the watering, and therefore the cause must be removed.

“Now then, if when conscience accuseth for sin, I take up a life of duties, a form of godliness, to stop the mouth of conscience; and if hereupon, conscience be still and quiet, then is this but a natural conscience: but if, when conscience checks, it will not be satisfied with any thing but the blood of Christ, (which cleanseth from sin) and I beg the sprinkling of his blood upon conscience, and labour, not so

much to stop the mouth of it, as to remove guilt from it, then is this a renewed conscience.

“ 3. There is no natural man, let him go never so far, let him do never so much in matters of religion, but still he has his Delilah, his bosom sin. Judas went far, but he carried his covetousness along with him : Herod went far, he did many things under the force of John’s ministry ; but yet there was one thing he did not ; he did not put away his brother’s wife, his Herodias lay in his bosom still. Nay, commonly all the natural man’s duties are to hide some sin ; his profession is only made use of to cover shame. But now the renewed conscience hateth all sin, as David said : *I hate every false way : he regardeth no iniquity in his heart : he useth duties not to cover sin, but to help to work out sin.*

“ Now then, if I profess religion outwardly ; if I make mention of the name of the Lord, and make my boast of the law, and yet through breaking the law dishonour God : if I live in the love of any sin, and make use of my

profession to cover it, then am I an hypocrite, and my duties flow but from a natural conscience : but on the other hand, if I *name the name of the Lord Jesus, and withal depart from iniquity ;* if I use duties, not to cover, but to discover and mortify sin, then am I upright before God, and my duties flow from a renewed conscience.

“ 4. A natural man prides himself in his duties : if he be much in duty, then he is much lifted up under duty. So did the pharisee : *God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are ;* and why ? where lay the difference ? why, *I fast twice in the week ; I give tithes of all, &c.* But now take a gracious heart, a renewed conscience, and when his duties are at highest, then is his heart at lowest. Thus it was with the apostle Paul ; he was much in service, preaching up the Lord Jesus with all boldness and earnestness : and yet very humble in a sense of his own unworthiness under all : *I am not worthy to be called an apostle.* Thus a believer, when he is highest in duties, then is he lowest in humility. Duty

puffeth up the hypocrite, but the believer comes away humbled : and why ? because the hypocrite hath had no visions of God ; he hath seen only his own gifts and parts, and this exalteth him : but the believer hath seen God, and enjoyed communion with God, and this humbleth him. Communion with God, though it be very refreshing, yet it is also very abasing and humbling to the creature.

“ Now then, if I pride myself in any duty, and am puffed up under my performances, then have I not seen nor met with God in any duty. But on the other hand, if when my gifts are at highest, my heart is at lowest : if when my spirit is most raised, my heart is then most humbled : if in the midst of all my services I can maintain a sense of my own unworthiness, then have I seen and had communion with God, and my performances are from a renewed conscience.

“ 5. Look what that is to which the heart doth secretly render the glory of a duty, and that is the principle of the duty. We read in scripture of them

that sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag ; where the glory of an action is rendered to a man's self, the principle of that action is self. All rivers run into the sea ; that is an argument they came from the sea ; so when a man's duties terminate in self, then is self the principle of all.

“ Now all the natural man's duties run into himself ; he was never by a thorough work of grace truly cast out of himself, and brought to deny himself ; and therefore he can rise no higher than himself in all he doth. He was never brought to be poor in spirit, and so to live upon another ; to be carried out of all duties to Jesus Christ. But the believer giveth the glory of all his services to God, whatever strength or life there is in duty. God hath all the glory, for he is by grace outed of himself, and therefore seeth no excellence or worthiness in self. *I laboured more abundantly than they all, saith the apostle ; but to whom doth he ascribe the glory of this ? to self ? No ; yet not I, saith he, but the grace of God which was with me.*

“ There are two things very hard ; one is, to take the shame of our sins to ourselves ? the other is, to give the glory of our services to Christ.

“ Now then, if *I sacrifice to my own net*, if I aim at my own credit or profit, and give the glory of all I do to self, then do I *sow to the flesh*, and was never yet cast out of self, but act only from a natural conscience ; but if I give the glory of all my strength and life in duty only to God : if I magnify grace in all, and can truly say in all I do, *yet not I*, then am I truly cast out of self, and do what I do with a renewed conscience.

“ 6. Though a natural conscience may put a man much upon service, yet it never presses to the attainment of holiness ; so that he carrieth an un-sanctified heart under all. How long was Judas a professor, and not one drachm of grace that he had got.— The foolish virgins, you know, *took their lamps, but took no oil in their vessels* ; that is, they looked more after a profession than after sanctification.— But now, when a renewed conscience putteth a man upon duty, it is succeed-

ed with the growth of holiness ; as grace helpeth to the doing of duty, so duty helpeth to the growing of grace ; a believer is the more holy and the more heavenly by his being in duties.

“ Now then, if I am much in the life of duties, and yet a stranger to a life of holiness ; if I maintain a high profession, and yet have not a true work of sanctification ; if, like children in the rickets, I grow big in the head, but weak in the feet, then have I gifts and parts, but no grace ; and though I am much in service, yet have I but a natural conscience. But on the other hand, if the holiness of my conversation carrieth a proportion to my profession, if I am not a *hearer of the word only, but a doer of it* ; then do I act in the things of God from a renewed conscience.

“ 7. And lastly, If a natural conscience be the spring of duty, then this spring runs fastest at first, and so abateth, and at last drieth up. But if a renewed conscience, a sanctified heart, be the spring of duty, then this spring will continuë. *The righteous*

shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.

“And thus I have, in seven things, answered that question, *namely*, If conscience may go thus far in putting a man upon duties, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and a *renewed* conscience in believers?—And this is the first answer to the main query, *namely*, Whence is it that many men go so far that they come to be *almost christians*? It is all to answer the call of *conscience*.

“*Secondly*. It is from the power of the word under which they live; for though the word doth not work effectually upon all to renew them, yet it hath a great power upon the hearts of sinners to reform them. A man that is under the power of the word, that hath his heart ransacked and discovered by it, his conscience bound and awed, his state and sinful condition judged and condemned, may take up a resolution of a new life, and convert himself to a great profession of religion.

“*Thirdly.* A man may go far in this course of profession from affectation of applause and credit, and to get a name in the world ; as it is said of the pharisees, they love to pray in the market places and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.

“ Many are of Michiavel’s principle, that the appearance of virtue is to be sought : because though the use of it is a trouble, yet the credit of it is a help.

“ Jerom, in his epistle to Julian, calls such the base bond-slaves of common fame. Many a man doth that for credit, that he will not do for conscience ; and owns religion more for the sake of his own advantage, than for the sake of Christ ; thus making God’s stream to turn the devil’s mill.

“*Fourthly.* It is from a desire of salvation. There is in all men a desire of salvation ; it is natural to every being to desire and seek its own preservation : and many a man may be carried so far out in the desire of salvation, as to do many things to obtain it. This did the young man ; Good

master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life? He went far and did much, obeying many commands, and all out of a desire of salvation. So then, put these together, namely: The call of conscience—The power of the word—The affectation of credit—And the desire of salvation.—These may carry a man so far as to be *almost* a christian. The third question propounded here follows.

“III. Whence is it that many are *but almost* christians when they have gone thus far? What is the cause of this?

“I might multiply answers to this question; but I shall instance in two only, which I judge the most material.

“*First.* It is for the want of right and sound conviction. If a man be not thoroughly convinced of sin, and his heart truly broken, whatever his profession of godliness may be, yet he will be sure to miscarry. Every work of conviction is not a thorough work; there are convictions that are only natural and rational; and convictions from the powerful work of the spirit

of God, and may be called spiritual conviction: I shall, in five things, lay down the most considerable difference between the one and the other.

“1. Natural convictions reach chiefly to open and scandalous sins; sins against the light of nature: for natural conviction can reach no farther than natural light. But spiritual conviction reaches to secret, inward, and undiscerned sins; such as hypocrisy, formality, lukewarmness, hardness of heart, &c. Observe then, whether your trouble for sin looks inward, as well as outward, and reaches not only to open sins, but to secret desires: and if so, this is a sure sign of the work of the spirit, because the trouble occasioned by these sins, bears a more immediate relation to the holiness of God, who only is offended by them; they being such as no one else can see or know.

“2. Natural convictions deal only with a man's conversation, not with his state and condition: but spiritual convictions reach the sins of the heart, as well as the sins of life; to the sin of

our nature, as well as the sins of practice ; to the sin that is born in us, as well as the sin that is done by us.

“ 3. Natural convictions carry the soul out to look more on the evil that comes by sin, than on the evil that is in sin : so that the soul, under this conviction, is more troubled at the dread of hell, and wrath and damnation, than at the vileness and heinous nature of sin. But now *spiritual* convictions work the soul into a greater sensibleness of the evil that is in sin, than of the evil that comes by sin ; the dishonour done to God by walking contrary to his will, &c. this wounds the soul more than a thousand hells.

“ 4. Natural convictions are not durable ; they are quickly worn out : they are like a slight cut in the skin, that bleeds a little, and is sore for the present, but is soon healed again, and in a few days, not so much as a scar is to be seen. But *spiritual* convictions are durable ; they are like a deep wound in the flesh, that goes to the bone, and seems to endanger the life of the patient, and is not healed but with great

skill, and when it is healed, leaves a scar behind it, so that when the patient is well, yet he can say, 'here is the mark of my wound, which will never wear out.'

“ 5. Natural convictions make the soul shy of God. Guilt works fear, and fear causes estrangedness; thus it was with Adam, when he saw his *nakedness*, he ran away and hid himself from God. Now spiritual convictions drive not the soul from God, but unto God. So that there is, you see, a great difference between conviction and conviction; between that which is natural and that which is spiritual.— Yea, such is the difference, that though a man hath never so much of the former, yet if he be without the latter, he is *but almost* a christian, and therefore we have great reason to inquire more after this *spiritual* conviction.— For,

“ 1. Spiritual conviction is an essential part of sound conversion. Conversion begins here. Till the sinner be convinced of sin, he can never be converted from sin; Christ's coming

was as a Saviour to die for sinners ; and the spirit's coming is to convince us we are sinners, that we may close with Christ as a Saviour. So long as sin is unseen, Christ will be unsought : *they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

“ 2. Slight and common convictions, when they are but skin deep, are the cause of much hypocrisy ; they bring the soul to clasp about Christ, but not to close with Christ, and this is the guise of an hypocrite : I know of no other rise and spring of hypocrisy like this of slight convictions : this hath filled the church of Christ with hypocrites. Nay, it is not only the spring of hypocrisy, but it is also the spring of apostacy : what was the cause that *the seed was said to wither away* ? It was because *it had no deepness of earth.* Where there is thorough conviction, there is a depth of earth in the heart, and there *the seed of the word grows* ; but where convictions are slight and common, there the seed withers for want of depth : so that you see clearly in this one instance, whence it is

that many are but *almost* christians when they have gone so far in religion, viz. for want of sound convictions.

“*Secondly*, And this answer hath a near relation to the former: It is for want of a thorough work of grace first wrought in the heart: where this is not, all a man’s following profession comes to nothing; that scholar is never like to read well that will needs be in his grammar before he is out of his primer: cloth that is not wrought well in the loom, will never wear well, nor wear long, it will do little service: so that christian that doth not come well off the loom, that hath not a thorough work of grace in his heart, will never wear well, he will shrink in the wetting, and never do much service for God. It is not the pruning a bad tree will make it bring forth good fruit; but *the tree must be made good before the fruit can be good.*

“He that takes up a profession of religion with an unbroken heart, will never serve Christ in that profession with his whole heart.

“ If there be not a true change in that man’s heart that goes far and does much in the ways of God, he will either die an hypocrite or an apostate.

“ Look, as in nature, if a man be not well born, but prove crooked or misshapen in the birth, why he will be crooked as long as he lives; you may bolster or stuff out his clothes to conceal it, but the crookedness, the deformity remains still: you may hide it, but you cannot help it; it may be covered, but it cannot be cured.—

So it is in this case; if a man come into a profession of religion, but be not *begotten of God, and born of the spirit*; if there be not a thorough work of grace in his heart, all his profession of religion will never mend him; he may be bolstered out by a life of duties, but he will be but a hypocrite at last: a form of godliness may cover his crookedness, but will never cure it. A man can never be a *true christian*, nor be accepted of God, though in the highest profession of religion, without a work of grace in the heart. For,

“1. There must be an answerableness in the frame of that man’s heart that would be accepted of God, to the duties done by him; his spirit and affections within must carry a proportion to his profession without; acts of *internal* worship must answer the duties of *external* worship. Now where there is no grace wrought in the heart, there can never be any proportion or answerableness in the frame of that man’s heart to the duties done by him.

“2. Those duties that find acceptance with God, must be done in sincerity. God doth not take our duties by the bushel, nor judge of us according to the frequency of our performances, but according to the sincerity of our hearts in the performance. It is this that commends both the doer and the duty to God: with sincerity God accepts the least we do, without sincerity God rejects the most we do, or can do. This is the crown of all our duties: thousands perish and go to hell in the midst of all their performances and duties, merely for the want of a little sincerity of heart to God.

“Now where there is not a change of state, a work of grace in the heart, there can be no sincerity to God-ward; for this is not an herb that grows in nature’s garden. So that it is impossible to find sincerity in any soul till there be a work of grace wrought there by the spirit of God; and hence it is that many are but *almost christians* when they have done all.

“I now proceed to the fourth question.

“IV. What is the reason that many go no farther in the profession of religion, than to be *almost christians*.

“Reason 1. It is because they deceive themselves in the truth of their own condition; they mistake their state, and think it good and safe, when it is bad and dangerous; a man may look upon himself as a member of Christ, and yet God may look upon him as a vessel of wrath; for by looking more upon his duties than his sins, he may think he sees *his name written in the book of life*, and yet be in the account of God a very reprobate.

“ There is nothing more common than for a man to *think himself something when he is nothing*, and so he *deceives himself*. Many a man blesses himself in his interest in Christ, when he is indeed a stranger to him. Many a man thinks his sin pardoned, when alas ! he is still in *the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity*. Many a man thinks he hath grace when he hath none : *There is, saith Solomon, that makes himself rich, and yet hath nothing*. This was the very temper of Laodicea ; *Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not, pray mind that, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked*. As bad as she was, she thought her state good ; as poor as she was in grace, she thought she was rich ; as miserable and naked as she was, yet she thought she had need of nothing.

“ Now there are several rises or grounds of this mistake. I will name five.

“ *First*. The desperate deceitfulness of the heart of every natural man.—

The heart is deceitful above all things. You read of the deceitfulness of the tongue—of the deceitfulness of riches—of the deceitfulness of beauty—and of the deceitfulness of friends. But yet the heart is deceitful above them all ; nay, you read of the deceitfulness of Satan, yet truly a man's heart is a greater deceiver than he ; for he could never deceive a man if his own heart did not deceive him.

“ Now it is from hence that a man presumes upon the goodness of his case, from the desperate treachery of his own heart. How common is it for men to boast of the goodness of their hearts. Says one, ‘ I thank God, though I do not make such a shew and pretence as some do, yet I have as good a heart as the best.’ But hear Solomon in this case, *he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.*

“ *Secondly.* This mistake arises from the pride of a man's spirit : there is a proud heart in every natural man, and from hence arises this overweening opinion of a man's state and condition. Solomon saith, *Be not righteous over-*

much. Austin, speaking occasionally of those words, saith, it is not meant of the righteousness of the wise man, but the pride of the presumptuous man.— Now in this sense every carnal man is righteous overmuch, though he hath none of that righteousness which commends him to God ; he hath too much of that righteousness which commends him to himself, and that is self-righteousness.

“ A proud man hath an eye to see his beauty, but not his deformity ; his parts, but not his spots ; his seeming righteousness, but not his real wretchedness. . . .

“ It must be a work of grace that must shew a man the want of grace.— The haughty eye looks upward, but the humble eye looks downward, and therefore this is the believer's motto, *the least of saints* ; but the carnal man's motto is, *I thank God I am not as other men.*

“ *Thirdly.* Many deceive themselves with common grace instead of saving, through the resemblance there is between them. As many take counter-

feit money for current coin, so do too many take common grace for true.—Saul took the devil for Samuel, because he appeared in the mantle of Samuel; so many take common grace for saving, because it is like saving grace. A man may be under a supernatural work, and yet fall short of a saving work: the first raiseth nature, the second only reneweth nature; though every saving work of the spirit be supernatural, yet every supernatural work of the spirit is not saving; and hence many deceive their own souls, by taking a supernatural work for a saving work.

“*Fourthly.* Many mistake a profession of religion for a work of conversion, and outside reformation for a sure sign of inward regeneration. If the outside of the cup be washed, then they think all is clean. This is the common rock that so many souls split upon, to their eternal hazard, taking up a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

“*Fifthly.* Want of a home application of the law of God to the heart

and conscience, to discover to a man the true state and condition he is in.— Where this is wanting, a man will sit down short of a true work of grace, and will reckon his case better than it is. That is a notable passage which the apostle hints concerning himself: *I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.* Paul had the Law, for he was a Pharisee, and they had the *form of knowledge, and of the truth of the Law*; therefore, when he saith he was *without the Law*, you must not take him literally, but spiritually: he was without the power and efficacy of it upon his heart and conscience; and so long as this was his case, he doubted not of his state, he was confident of the goodness of his condition: but then, when the word of the Lord came with power upon his soul, when the spirit of God set it home effectually upon his conscience, that is meant by the *coming of the commandment, then sin revived, and I died*; that is, I saw the desperateness of my case, and the filthiness of all my self-righteousness;

then my hope ceased, and my confidence failed; and as before I thought myself alive, and my sin dead; so when God had awakened conscience by the word, then I saw my sin alive and powerful, and myself dead and miserable.

“ So that this is the first reason why men go no farther in the profession of religion, than to be *almost* christians. It is because they mistake their state, and think it good when it is not; which mistake is five-fold. 1. A deceitful heart. 2. A proud spirit. 3. Taking common grace for saving. 4. Outward reformation, for true regeneration. 5. Want of home application of the law of God to the heart and conscience.

“ *Reason 2.* It is from Satan’s cunning, who, if he cannot keep sinners in their open profaneness, then he labours to persuade them to take up with a form of godliness: if he cannot entice them on in their sins, with a total neglect of heaven, then he entices them to such a profession as is sure to fall short of heaven. He will consent

to the leaving some sin, so as we do but keep the rest; and to the doing of some duties, so as we neglect the rest. Nay, rather than part with his interest in the soul, he will yield far to our profession of religion, and consent to any thing but our conversion, and closing with Christ for salvation; he cares not which way we come to hell, so as he gets us but thither at last.

“*Reason 3.* It is from worldly and carnal policy: this is a great hindrance to many. Policy many times enters caveats against piety; Jehu will not part with his calves, lest he hazard his kingdom.

“*Reason 4.* There are some secret sins espoused in the heart, that hinder a hearty close with Christ; though they bid fair, yet they come not to God's terms; the young man would have eternal life: and he bid fair for it, a willing obedience to every command but one, but only one; and will not God abate him one? Is he so severe? Will he not come down a little in his terms when man rises so high?

Must man yield all? Will God yield nothing? No, my brethren, he that underbids for heaven, shall as surely lose it as he that will give nothing for it. He that will not give all he hath, part with all for that pearl of great price, shall as surely go without it, as he that never once cheapens it.

“The not coming up to God’s terms is the ruin of thousands of souls; nay, it is that upon which all that perish, do perish.

“Most professors are like iron between two equal loadstones; God draws, and they propend towards God; and the *world* draws, and they incline to the *world*; they are between both; they would not leave God for the world, if they might not be engaged to leave the world for God. But if they must part with all, with every darling, every beloved sin, why then the spirit of Demas possesses them, and God is forsaken by them.

“My brethren, this is the great reason why many that are come to be almost christians, go no farther; some one beloved sin or other hinders them,

and after a long and high profession, parts them and Christ for ever. Thus having answered these four questions, namely :

“ I. How far a man may go in the way to heaven, and yet be *but almost* a christian.

“ II. Whence it is that a man goeth so far as to be *almost* a christian.

“ III. Whence it is that a man is but almost a christian when he hath gone thus far.

“ IV. What is the reason men go no farther in religion, than to be *almost* christians.

“ I proceed now to the application.

“ *Inference 1.* That salvation is not so easy a thing as it is imagined to be, is attested by our Lord himself : *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it.* The gate of conversion is a *very strait gate*, and yet every man that would be saved, must enter in at this strait gate, for salvation is impossible without it. *Except a man be born again, born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

“ Not that this gate is strait simply, and in respect of itself: no; for converting grace is free; none are excluded unless they exclude themselves; Christ doth not say, if such and such will come to me, I will not cast them out: but *him that cometh unto me* (be he who or what he will, if he hath a heart to close with me) *I will in no wise cast him out.* He saith not, If this or that man will, here is water of life for him; but *If any man will, let him take the water of life freely.* Christ grudgeth mercy to none—though salvation was dearly purchased for us, yet it is freely proffered us.

“ So that the gate which leadeth to life is not strait on Christ’s part, or in respect of itself, but is strait in respect of us, because of our sins and corruptions, which make the entrance difficult. A needle’s eye is big enough for a thread to pass through, but it is a strait passage for a cable rope; either the needle’s eye must be enlarged, or the cable rope must be untwisted, or the entrance is impossible. So it is in this case, the gate of conver-

sion is a very strait passage for a carnal and corrupt sinner to go in at; the soul can never pass through with any one lust beloved and espoused; and therefore the sinner must be untwisted from every lust; he must lay aside the love of every sin, or he can never enter in at this gate, for it is a strait gate. And when he is in at this strait gate, he meeteth with a narrow way to walk in; so saith Christ, *Narrow is the way that leadeth to life.*

“It is no wonder, then, that our Lord saith of life, that few there be that find it, when, as the gate is strait, and the way narrow that leadeth to it. Many pretend to walk in the narrow way, but they never entered in at the strait gate: and many pretend to have entered in at the strait gate, but they walk not in the narrow way.

“It is a very common thing for a man to perish upon a mistake of his way, to go on in those paths that take hold of hell, and yet hope to find heaven at last. Those twenty parts fore-mentioned, run into destruction, and yet many choose them, and walk in

them as the way of salvation. As many profane and open sinners perish by choosing the way of death, so many formal professors perish by mistaking the way of life. This I gather from what our Lord saith, *Few there be that find it* : which doth clearly imply what in Luke is plainly expressed, to wit : *many seek to enter in, and yet are not able* ; many run far, and yet do not so run as to obtain ; many bid fair for the pearl of great price, and yet go without it ; hell is had with ease, but the *kingdom of heaven suffers violence.*

“ *Inference 2.* If many go thus far in the way to heaven, and yet miscarry, O then what shall be the end of them who fall short of these ! If he shall perish that is *almost* a christian, what shall he do that is not *at all* a christian ? If he that owneth Christ, and professeth Christ, and leaveth many sins for Christ, may be damned notwithstanding ; what then, shall his doom be that disowneth Christ, and refuseth to part with one sin for Christ ? If the formal professor must be shut out, surely then every carnal sinner

much more : if there be a wo to him that falleth short of heaven, then how sad is the wo to him who *falls short* of them that *fall short of heaven*? Oh, that God would make this an awakening word to sinners that are asleep in sin, without the least fear of death or dread of damnation.

Use of Examination.

“ Are there many in the world that are *almost*, and yet *but almost* christians? Why then it is time for us to call our condition into question, and to make a more narrow scrutiny into the truth of our spiritual state; what it is, whether it be right or no; whether we are sound and sincere in our profession of religion or no.

“ There are two questions of very great importance, which we should every one of us often put to ourselves :

“ 1. *What am I?* Am I a child of God, or not? Am I sincere in religion, or am I only an hypocrite under a profession?

“ 2. *Where am I?* Am I yet in a natural state, or in a state of grace?

Am I yet in the old root, in old Adam, or am I in the root Christ Jesus?

“Indeed this is the first thing a man should look at ; for if we know not *where* we are, we cannot know what we are ; and if we know not what we are, we cannot be what we should be ; namely, *altogether* christians. Let me then, I beseech you, press this duty upon you that are professors ; try your own hearts, examine yourselves whether you are in the faith ; prove your own selves. I urge this upon the following arguments.

“1. Because many rest in a notion of godliness and outward shews of religion, and yet remain in their natural condition. *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God.*

“2. Because errors in the first foundation are very dangerous. If we be not right in the main, in the fundamental work ; if the foundation be not

laid in grace in the heart, all our following profession comes to nothing : the house is built on a sandy foundation, and though it may stand for a while, yet *when the floods come and the winds blow, and beat upon it, great will be the fall of it.*

“ 3. Because many are the deceits that our souls are liable to in this case. There are many things like grace, that are not grace ; now it is the likeness and similitude of things that deceives, and makes one thing to be taken for another.

“ Many take gifts for grace, common knowledge for saving knowledge ; whereas a man may have great gifts, and yet no grace ; great knowledge, and yet not know Jesus Christ.

“ Some take common faith for saving, whereas a man may believe all the truths of the gospel, all the promises, all the threatenings, all the articles of the creed to be true, and yet perish for want of saving faith.

“ Some take morality and restraining grace, for piety and renewing grace, whereas it is common to have

sin much restrained, where the heart is not renewed.

“ Some are deceived with a half work, taking conviction for conversion, reformation for regeneration; and endless are the delusions that Satan fastens upon souls, for want of this self-search.

“ 4. Satan will try us at one time or other: he will winnow us, and sift us to the bottom; and if we now rest in a groundless confidence, it will then end in a comfortless despair. Nay, God himself will search and try us at the day of judgment especially, and who can abide that trial, that never tries his own heart?

“ 5. Whatsoever a man's state be, whether he be altogether a christian or no, whether his principle be sound or no, yet it is good to examine his own heart. If he find his heart good, his principles right and sound, this will be matter of rejoicing: if he find his heart rotten, his principles false and unsound, the discovery is in order for a renewing. If a man have a disease upon him, and know it, he may send

to the physician in time ; but what a sad vexation will it be, not to see a disease till it be past cure ? So for a man to be graceless, and not see it till it be too late, to think himself a christian when he is not, and that he is in the right way to heaven, when he is in the ready way to hell, and yet not know it till a death-bed or a judgment-day confute his confidence : this is the most irrecoverable misery.

“These are the grounds upon which I press this duty of examining our state ; O that God would help us in the doing this necessary duty !

“But you may say, how shall I come to know whether I am *almost* or *altogether* a christian ? If a man may go so far, and yet miscarry, how shall I know when my foundation is right, when I am a christian indeed ?

“*Answer 1.* The *altogether* christian closes with, and accepts of Christ upon gospel terms. True union makes a true christian. Many close with Christ, but it is upon their own terms ; they take him and own him, but not as God offers him. The terms upon

which God in the gospel offers Christ, are, that we shall accept of a broken Christ with a broken heart, and yet a whole Christ with the whole heart. A broken Christ with a broken heart, as a witness of our humility ; a whole Christ, with the whole heart, as a witness of our sincerity. A broken Christ respects his suffering for sin ; a broken heart respects our sense of sin ; a whole Christ includes all his offices ; a whole heart includes all our faculties. Christ is a King, Priest and Prophet, and all as Mediator ; without any one of these offices, the work of salvation could not have been completed :— as a Priest he redeems us ; as a Prophet he instructs us ; as a King he sanctifies and saves us : therefore the apostle says, *He is made to us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption : righteousness and redemption flow from him as a Priest, wisdom as a Prophet, sanctification as a King.*

“ Now many embrace Christ as a Priest, but yet they own him not as a king and prophet ; they like to share in his righteousness, but not partake

of his holiness ; they would be redeemed by him, but they would not submit to him ; they would be saved by his blood, but not submit to his power.— Many love the privileges of the gospel, but not the duties of the gospel.— Now these are but almost Christians, notwithstanding their close with Christ, for it is upon their own terms, but not upon God's. The offices of Christ may be distinguished, but they can never be divided.

“ But the true christian owns Christ in all his offices : he doth not only close with him as Jesus, but as Lord Jesus ; he says with Thomas, *My Lord, and my God.* He doth not only believe in the merits of his death, but also conforms to the manner of his life : as he believes in him, so he lives to him ; he takes him for his wisdom, as well as for his righteousness ; for his sanctification as well as his redemption.

“ 2. The *altogether* christian hath a thorough work of grace and sanctification wrought in the heart, as a spring of duties. *Regeneration* is a whole

change ; all old things are done away, and all things become new : it is a perfect work as to parts, though not as to degrees. Carnal men do duties, but they are from an unsanctified heart, and that spoils all. *A new piece of cloth never doth well in an old garment, for the rent is made worse.*

“ 3. He that is *altogether* a christian, looks to the manner as well as to the matter of his duties ; not only that they be done, but how they be done. Here the *almost* christian fails ; he doth the same duties that others do for the matter, but he doth them not in the same manner ; while he minds the substance, he regards not the circumstance ; if he obeys, he looks not to the frame of his heart in obeying, and therefore miscarries in all he doth ; and these defects spoil the good of every duty.

“ 4. The *altogether* christian is known by his sincerity in all his performances. Whatever a man does in the duties of the gospel, he cannot be a christian without sincerity. Now the *almost* christian fails in this ; for though he doth much, prays much, hears

much, obeys much, yet he is an hypocrite under all.

“ 5. He that is *altogether* a christian, hath an answerableness within to the law without; his heart is, as it were, the transcript of the law: the same holiness that is commanded in the word, is implanted in his heart; the same conformity to Christ, that is enjoined in the word of God, is wrought in the soul by the spirit of God; the same obedience which the word requireth of him, the Lord enableth him to perform by his grace bestowed on him. This is that which is promised in the new covenant: *I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.* Now the writing his law in us, is nothing else but his working that grace and holiness in us which the law commandeth and requireth of us.

“ In the old-covenant administration, God wrote his laws only upon tables of *stone*, but not upon the heart; and therefore, though God wrote them, yet they broke them; but in the new-covenant administration, God provides new tables; not tables of *stone*, but the

fleshly tables of the heart, and writes his laws there, that there might be a *law within*, answerable to the *law without*; and this every true christian hath; so that he may say in his measure, as our Lord Christ did: *I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.*

“ Moreover, from this impression of the law upon the heart, obedience and conformity to God becomes the choice and delight of the soul; for holiness is the very nature of the new creature, so that if there were no scripture, no bible to guide him, yet he would be holy, for he hath received *grace for grace*; there is a grace within to answer to the word of grace without. Now the almost christian is a stranger to this law of God within; he may have some conformity to the word in outward conversation, but he cannot have this answerableness to the word in inward constitution.

“ 6. The *altogether* christian is much in duty, and yet much above duty; much in duty, in regard of performances; much *above* duty, in regard of de-

pendance ; much in duty by obeying ; but much *above* duty by believing.— He lives in his obedience, but he doth not live upon his obedience, but upon Christ and his righteousness. The *almost* christian fails in this : he is much in duty, but not above it, but rests in it ; he works for *rest*, and he rests in his *works* ; he cannot come to believe and obey too : if he believes, then he thinks there is no need of obedience, and so casts off that : if he be much in obedience, then he casts off believing, and thinks there is no need of that. He cannot say with David, *I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments.* The more a man is in duty, and the more *above* it : the more in *doing*, and more in *believing*, the more a christian.

“ 7. He that is *altogether* a christian is universal in his obedience. He doth not obey one command and neglect another, do one duty and cast off another : but he endeavors to leave every sin, and love every duty. The *almost* christian fails in this : his obedience is partial and piece-meal ; if he obeys

one command, he breaks another ; the duties that least cross him, he is much in ; but those that cross him, he lays aside. The pharisees *fasted, prayed, paid tithes, &c.* but they did not lay aside their covetousness, their oppression ; they *decoured widows' houses,* and were *unnatural to parents.*

“ 8. The *altogether christian* makes God's glory the chief end of all his performances: if he prays, or hears, or gives, or fasts, or repents, or obeys, &c. God's glory is the main end of all. Now the *almost christian* fails in this : his ends are corrupt and selfish ; self is at the farther end of all his work ; for he that was never truly cast out of himself, can have no higher end than himself.

“ Now then, examine thyself by these characters : put the question to thy own soul ; dost thou close with Christ upon gospel terms ? Is grace in the heart the principle of thy performances ? Dost thou look to the manner, as well as the matter of thy duties ? Dost thou do all in sincerity ? Is there an answerableness within to the law

without? Art thou much *above* duty, when much *in* duty? Is thy obedience universal? Lastly, is God's glory the end of all? If so, then art thou not only almost, but *altogether* a christian.

Use of Caution.

“ O take heed of being *almost*, and yet *but almost* a christian. It is a great complaint of God against Ephraim, that *he is a cake not turned*; that is, half baked, neither raw nor roasted. This is a condition that of all others, is greatly unprofitable, exceedingly uncomfortable, and desperately dangerous.

“ *First.* It is greatly unprofitable to be *but almost* a christian; for failing in any one point, will ruin us as surely as if we had never made any attempts for heaven. It is no advantage to the soul to be almost converted; for the little that we want, spoils the good of all our attainments; there is no profit in leaving this or that sin, unless we leave all sin. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things, but he kept his Herodias, and that ruined him; one

sin ruined the young man, that had kept all the commands but one; Gideon had seventy sons, and but one bastard, and yet that one bastard destroyed all his sons; so may one sin spoil all our services, as that one bastard slew all the sons of Gideon.

“*Secondly.* It is exceedingly uncomfortable, in that such a one is hated of God and men: the world hates him because of his profession, and God abhors him because of his dissimulation; the world hates him because he seems good, and God hates him because he doth but seem so. How uncomfortable then, must that condition needs be, wherein a man is abhorred both of God and man?

“*Thirdly.* As it is greatly unprofitable, and exceedingly uncomfortable to be but almost a christian, so it is desperately dangerous: For,

“1. This hinders the true work: a man lies in a fairer capacity for conversion, that lies in open enmity and rebellion, than he that sooths up himself in the formalities of religion. This I gather from the parable of the two

sons, which our Lord urged to the professing scribes and pharisees. *There was a man had two sons, and he came to one, and said, Go work to-day in my vineyard ; he said, I will not, but afterwards repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise : and he said, I go sir ; but went not.* The first represents the carnal open sinner, that is called by the word, but refuses, yet afterwards repents and believes. The second represents the hypocritical professor, that pretends much, but performs little. Now mark how Christ applies this parable, verse 31. *Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

“ And upon this account it is better not to be at all, than to be almost a christian ; for the almost hinders the altogether. None farther from the kingdom of God, than such as are not far from the kingdom of God. As, for instance, when there lies but one lust, one sin between a soul and Christ, that soul is not far from Christ : but now, when the soul rests in this nearness to

Christ, and yet will not part with that one sin for Christ, but thinks his condition secured, though that sin be not subdued; who is farther from the kingdom of God than he?

“2. This condition is so like a state of grace, that the mistake of it for grace is easy and common; and it is very dangerous to mistake any thing for grace that is not grace; for in that a man contents himself, as if it were grace. Formality doth often dwell next door to sincerity, and one sign serves both; and so the house may be easily mistaken, and by that means a man may take up his lodging there, and never find his way out again.

“What one saith of wisdom (many might have been wise, had they not thought themselves so when they were otherwise) the same I may say of grace; many a formal professor might have been a sincere believer, had he not mistook his profession for conversion, his duties for grace, and so rested in that for sincerity that is but hypocrisy.

“ 3. It is dangerous to be *almost* a christian, in that this stills and serves to quiet conscience. Now it is very dangerous to quiet conscience with any thing but the blood of Christ : it is bad being at peace till Christ speaks peace. Now the almost christian quiets conscience, but not with the blood of Christ ; it is not a peace flowing from Christ’s propitiation, but a peace rising from a formal profession ; not a peace of Christ’s giving, but a peace of their own making ; he silences and bridles conscience with a form of godliness, and so makes it give way to an undoing, soul-destroying peace ; he rocks it asleep in the cradle of duties, and then it is a thousand to one it never awaketh more till death or judgment. Ah, my brethren, it is better to have conscience never quiet, than quieted any way but by *the blood of sprinkling*.

“ 4. It is dangerous to be almost a christian in respect of the unpardonable sin ; the sin that the scripture saith *can never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come* : I mean

the sin against the Holy Ghost. Now such are only capable of sinning that sin, as are but almost christians. For a true believer cannot; the work of grace in his heart, *that seed of God abiding in him*, secures him against it. The profane, ignorant, open sinner cannot, for it must proceed from an enlightened mind.

“There must be three ingredients to make up that sin. It must be wilful: *if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.* It must be against light and convictions, *after we have received the knowledge of the truth*; and it must be resolved malice. Now you shall find all these ingredients in the sin of the pharisees, Matt. xii. 22. Christ heals one that was *possessed with a devil*, a great work, which all the people wondered at. But what say the pharisees? *This fellow casteth out devils by the prince of devils.* Now that this was *the sin against the Holy Ghost*, is clear, for it was both wilful and malicious, and against clear convictions. They could not but see that he was the Son of God, and that

this work was a peculiar work of the spirit of God in him, and yet they say he wrought it by the devil; whereupon Christ charges them with this sin *against the Holy Ghost*. Now the pharisees were a sort of great professors; whence I gather this conclusion, that it is the professor of religion that is the subject of this sin: not the open, carnal sinner, nor the true believer, but the formal professor. Here, then, is the great danger of being *almost* a christian, he is liable to this dreadful, unpardonable sin.

“ 5. This being *but almost* a christian provokes God to bring dreadful spiritual judgments upon a man.— Barrenness is a spiritual judgment: and not bringing forth fruit unto righteousness, provokes God to give us up to barrenness: when Christ found the fig tree that had leaves, but no fruit, he pronounces the curse of barrenness upon it: *Never fruit grow on thee more*. A spirit of delusion, also, is a sad judgment; and this is the *almost* christian's judgment; for he receives the truth, but not in the love of it. *Because*

they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, God shall send them strong delusions. My brethren, it is a dreadful thing for God to give a man up to spiritual judgments; and, therefore, it is a very dangerous thing to be almost a christian.

“6. Being almost, and yet but almost christians, will exceedingly aggravate our damnation; he that falls but a little short of Heaven, will fall deepest into Hell; he that hath been the nearest to conversion, being not converted, shall have the deepest damnation when he is judged. Capernaum's sentence shall exceed Sodom's for severity, because she exceeded Sodom in the enjoyment of mercy; she received more from God, and yet was not right with God, therefore she shall be punished more by God. The higher the rise, the greater the fall; the higher the profession, the lower the damnation; he mis-carrieth with a light in his hand, he perisheth under many convictions, and convictions never end but in a sound conversion, as in all saints, or in a sad damnation, as in all

hypocrites. Praying ground, professing ground, and conviction ground, is, of all, the worst ground to perish upon.

“ Now then, to sum up all under this head:—If to be *almost* a christian hinders the true work of conversion; if it be easily mistaken for conversion; if this be that which quiets conscience; if this subjects a man to commit the unpardonable sin; if it provokes God to give us up to spiritual judgments; and if it be that which exceedingly aggravates our damnation; sure then, it is a very dangerous thing to be *almost*, and yet *but almost* a christian. O labour to be altogether christians, to go farther than they who have gone farthest, and yet fall short! This is the great counsel of the Holy Ghost, *So run that ye may obtain; give diligence to make your calling and election sure.*

“ *Question.* But you will say, possibly, how shall I do? What means shall I use, that I may attain to a thorough work in my heart; that I may be no longer *almost*, but *altogether* a christian?

“*Answer.* Now I shall lay down three rules of direction, instead of many, to further and help you in this important duty, and so leave this work to God’s blessing.

“*Direction 1.* First, break off all false peace of conscience : this is the devil’s bond to hold the soul from seeking after Christ. As there is the peace of God, so there is the peace of Satan : but they are easily known, for they are as contrary as heaven and hell, as light and darkness.

“The peace of God flows from a work of grace in the soul, and is the peace of a regenerate state ; but the peace of Satan is the peace of an unregenerate state, it is the peace of death ; in the grave Job saith there is peace ; *there the wicked cease from troubling ;* so a soul dead in sin is full of peace ; the wicked one troubleth him not.

“The peace of God in the soul, is a peace flowing from removal of guilt, by justifying grace ; *Being justified by faith in his blood, we have peace with God ;* but the peace of Satan in the soul arises and is maintained by a stu-

pidity of spirit, and insensibility of guilt upon the conscience.

“ The peace of God is a peace from sin, that fortifies the heart against it : *The peace of God, that passeth all men’s understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.* The more of this peace there is in the soul, the more is the soul fortified against sin ; but the peace of Satan is peace in sin : *The strong man armed keeps the house, and there all is peace.* The saint’s peace is a peace with God, but not with sin ; the sinner’s peace is a peace with sin, but not with God : and this is a peace better broken than kept : it is a false, a dangerous, an undoing peace. My brethren, death and judgment will break all peace of conscience, but only that which is wrought by Christ in the soul, and is the fruit of the blood of sprinkling ; when he gives quietness, who can make trouble ? Now that peace that death will break, why should you keep ? Who would be fond of that quietness which the flames of hell will burn in sunder ? And yet how many travel to hell

through the fool's paradise of a false peace!

“O break off this peace! for we can have no peace with God in Christ, whilst this peace remains in our hearts. Christ gives no peace to him that will not seek it, and that man will never seek it that does not see his need of it; and he that is at peace in his sins, sees no need of the peace of Christ. The sinner must be wounded for sin, and troubled under it, before Christ will heal his wounds, and give him peace from it.

“*Direction 2.* Labour after a thorough work of conviction; every conviction will not do it: the *almost* christian hath his convictions, as well as the *true* christian, or else he had never gone so far; but they are not right and sound convictions; God will have the soul truly sensible of the bitterness of sin, before it shall taste the sweetness of mercy. The plough of conviction must go deep, and make deep furrows in the heart, before God will sow the precious seeds of grace and comfort there, that so it may have depth

of earth to grow in. This is the constant method of God ; first to shew a man his sin, then his Saviour ; first his danger, then his Redeemer ; first his wound, then his cure ; first his own vileness, then Christ's righteousness. We must be brought to cry out *unclean, unclean, to mourn for him whom we have pierced,* and then he sets open for us a fountain to wash in for sin, and for uncleanness. That is a notable place, Job xxxiii. 17, 28, *He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not : he will deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his life shall see the light.* This is the unchangeable method of God in working grace, to begin with conviction of sin.

“ O therefore, labour for thorough conviction ; and there are three things we should especially be convinced of.

“ *First.* Be convinced of the evil of sin ; the odious and heinous nature of it, for sin is the greatest evil in the world ; it wrongs God, it wounds Christ, it grieves the Holy Spirit, it

ruineth a precious soul ; all other evils are not to be named with it. My brethren, though to do sin is the worst work, yet to see sin is the best sight ; for sin discovered in its vileness, makes Christ to be discovered in his fulness.

“ But above all, labour to be convinced of the mischief of an unsound heart ; what an abhorring it is to God, what certain ruin it brings upon the soul.

“ *Secondly.* Be convinced of the misery and desperate danger of a natural condition ; for till we see the plague of our hearts, and the misery of our state by nature, we shall never be brought off ourselves to seek help in another.

“ *Thirdly.* Be convinced of the utter insufficiency and inability of any thing below Christ Jesus, to minister relief to thy soul in this case ; all things besides Jesus Christ, are *physicians of no value* ; duties, performances, prayers, tears, self-righteousness avail nothing in this case ; they make us, like the troops of *Tema*, to return

ashamed at our disappointment from such failing brooks.

“ Alas ! it is an infinite righteousness that must satisfy for us, for it is an infinite God that is offended by us. If ever thy sin be pardoned, it is infinite mercy that must pardon it : if ever thou be reconciled to God, it is infinite merit must do it : if ever thy soul escape hell, and be saved at last, it is infinite grace must save it.

“ In these three things right and sound conviction lieth ; and wherever the spirit of God worketh these thorough convictions, it is in order to a true and sound conversion ; for by this means the soul is brought under a right qualification for the receiving of Christ.

“ You must know that a sinner can never come to Christ ; for he is dead in sin, in enmity against Christ, an enemy to God, and the grace of God ; but there are certain qualifications that come between the soul’s dead state in sin, and the work of conversion and closing with Christ, whereby the soul is put into a capacity of receiving the

Lord Jesus Christ: for no man is brought immediately out of his dead state, and made to believe in Jesus Christ; there are some qualifications coming in between. Now sound convictions are the right qualifications for the sinner's receiving Christ, for he came not to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance; that is, such as see themselves sinners, and thereby in a lost condition; so Luke exemplifies it, *The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost; he is anointed and sent to bind up the broken hearted, to comfort all that mourn.*

“O therefore, if you would be sound christians, get sound convictions; ask those that are believers indeed, and they will tell you, had it not been for their convictions, they had never sought after Christ for sanctification and salvation; they will tell you, they had perished if they had not perished; they had been in eternal bondage, but for their spiritual bondage; had they not been lost as to themselves, they had been actually lost as to Christ.

“ Direction 3. Never rest in convictions till they end in conversion : this is that wherein most men miscarry ; they rest in their convictions, and take them for conversion, as if sin seen were therefore forgiven, or as if a sight of the want of grace, were the truth of the work of grace.

“ You that are at any time under convictions, O take heed of resting in them ; though it is true that conviction is the first step to conversion, yet it is not conversion. A man may carry his convictions along with him into hell.

“ What is that which troubleth poor creatures, when they come to die, but this—I have not improved my convictions ; at such a time I was convinced of sin, but yet I went on in sin in the face of my convictions. My brethren, remember this ; slighted convictions are the worst death bed companions.

“ There are two things especially, which above all others make a death bed very uncomfortable : 1. Purposes and promises not performed. 2. Convictions slighted and not improved.—

When a man takes up purposes to close with Christ, and yet puts them not into execution; and when he is convinced of sin and duty, and yet improves not his convictions; O this will sting and wound at last.

“ Now, therefore, hath the spirit of the Lord been at work in your souls? Have you ever been convinced of the evil of sin, of the misery of a natural state, of the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help, of the fulness and righteousness of Jesus Christ, of the necessity of resting upon him for pardon and peace, for sanctification and salvation? Have you ever been really convinced of these things? O then, as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last, and enjoy God for ever, improve these convictions, and be sure you rest not in them till they rise up to a thorough close with the Lord Jesus Christ, and perfect conversion. Thus shalt thou be not only *almost*, but *altogether* a christian.

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EXTRACTS

FROM

A DISCOURSE,

ON

*Living unto Ourselves, and Living
unto God.*

First printed at Hudson, (N. Y.) in 1812.

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again. 2 Corinthians, v. 15.

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TO THE READER.

The following discourse is on a very important subject, and well calculated to enable every one to see what his true state and standing is before the Lord. It seems well suited for an appendix to the *Almost Christian*, and plainly shews wherein those that are *born of God* differ from the *unregenerate*.—The most material parts of the discourse are all comprised in these extracts, and I trust they will be received as an acceptable offering by every pious mind.

EXTRACTS

FROM

A DISCOURSE, &c.

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And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. 2 Corinthians, v. 15.

“IN consequence of the death of Christ, the Father has set open the door of mercy to our fallen world, and every child of Adam is invited to enter before the door is shut. It is in view of the ample provision which is made, that the servants of the King of Heaven are commanded to bid all, as many as they find, unto the marriage. Nor did Christ die merely to put them into a state in which they might be saved; but he died with a full determination to redeem them from all iniquity, and purify them unto himself. He died that he might give them life, even a spiritual and holy life, which should be supported by a different food, and

devoted to a different end, from that which they lived when they were dead in trespasses and sins.

“ The first clause of the verse might lead us to treat of the atonement, as consisting, not in the obedience, but *the death* of Christ, and also as a provision made, not for a part, but for all mankind ; so that whosoever believeth might not perish, but have eternal life : but the verse has not been selected at this time, with a view to illustrate and prove these points of doctrine. The other part of the verse is proposed as the foundation of the present discourse. And this suggests two very important ideas :

“ I. That there is a real difference between the characters of men, before and after regeneration :

“ II. That the difference is this, That before regeneration they live unto themselves, and that afterwards they live not unto themselves, but unto Christ.

“ I. The text will lead me to show that regeneration makes a real difference in the characters of men. Re-

generation, or a change of heart, is what is meant in the text by *living*, in distinction from being dead in the sense of the preceding verse. *Then were all dead*, saith the apostle—the whole human race are by nature spiritually dead. Christ, the second Adam, is a quickening Spirit. He quickens the dead. *The dead hear the voice of the Son of God, and live.* The word *henceforth*, in the text, marks a dividing line in the life of those, who become subjects of grace. That regeneration is meant in the text, is made evident by the context, particularly the 17th verse, where it is said, *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.*

“ That there is a real, fundamental difference between a regenerate and an unregenerate state, or between the character of a man before and after regeneration, may be proved by such arguments as these :

“ 1. The force of the words used in the scriptures to describe this change. It is called a being *born again* ; and as

the change is spiritual, it must imply the beginning of a new spiritual life. It is called a *new creation*; which gives the idea of a new existence, as character is respected. This supposes that regeneration makes as great a change in a man's character, as creating power made, in bringing the world from nothing into existence. The apostle tells the Ephesians, that they were dead in trespasses and sins, but that God had quickened them. The difference between being *dead*, and *alive*, is a perfect difference. Do not these scriptural representations of regeneration, evidently lead us to view it as a radical change; a change which makes a *new man*?

“ 2. That regeneration makes a real and essential difference in the human character, appears further in this; that it forms the dividing line, which will separate us as far apart as heaven and hell. Some of our fallen race are to spend their eternity in a holy and blessed heaven, and others in a wicked and wretched hell. The former will be the lot of all the regen-

erate, and the latter of all the unregenerate: for Christ saith, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* This makes it clear, that without the new birth, none can enter the kingdom of heaven; and that with it, none shall be kept out. If the new birth is the line which is to make an eternal separation between the children of Adam, it must be no imaginary line. It makes a difference, which to the eye of the Judge, is as discernible as the difference between sheep and goats. Having shown, that there is a real difference between the character of men before and after regeneration, I proceed,

“II. To shew what the difference is. It is this, that before regeneration, or a change of heart, men live unto themselves; and that afterwards, they live not unto themselves, but unto Christ. The text says, *That they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.* This evidently points out such a difference as we have now stated; and this is the

difference between renewed, and unrenewed nature. Men live unto themselves, when they make themselves their supreme object; when they make their own happiness their chief end.— A chief end is that which is sought for its own sake, as being the greatest good, or best object which the mind desires. A great many other things may be desired and sought, as subordinate to the chief end, and as helpful to obtain it; but this is sought, because it is itself most pleasing to the one who seeks it. That man who makes his own happiness his chief end, to which he wishes to subordinate every thing else, lives unto himself, and not unto God. He is a selfish man. If a man seek wealth with a supreme regard to himself, he is a selfish man. In the language of scripture, he layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God. If a man's chief end in seeking a post of honour, is, to exalt himself, he is guilty of living to himself. It is equally true of the man who attends to religion from the same motives. If men attend to religion, not

out of supreme love to God, but from supreme regard to their own happiness, they are equally selfish as though their attention was confined to the concerns of this life. Men may be as perfectly selfish in seeking *future*, as *present*; and *eternal*, as *temporal* happiness. So long as self is the chief end of our actions, we cannot be said to live unto God. Let us do ever so much for God, if all this is done with an ultimate reference to self, it is evident that we do not live unto Him, but unto ourselves.

“As having a supreme regard to self, is living to ourselves, so on the other hand, a supreme regard to the glory of Christ, is living unto Him.—When he is beheld as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and is therefore loved; and when the interests of his kingdom are supremely regarded, then we live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us. God must be loved for what he is, and his glory and blessedness must be preferred to our own glory and blessedness, whether in this, or

the coming world, to make it true, that we live, not unto ourselves, but unto God.

“I have shewn what it is to live unto ourselves, and what it is to live unto Christ; I am now ready to adduce scriptural proof, to shew, that this constitutes the difference there is in the character of the regenerate and the unregenerate. Before regeneration men live unto themselves, but after regeneration, as far as they possess a new spirit, they live not unto themselves, but unto Him, who is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last.

“1. The matter may be proved by attending to the point of controversy between the Lord and Satan, concerning Job. The Lord declared concerning Job, that he was a perfect and upright man, one who feared God and departed from evil. Satan did not pretend to deny but that this was Job's appearance; but he insinuated, that all this apparent love to God proceeded from love to himself. *Then Satan answered the Lord and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast thou not made an*

hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. To shew how groundless this insinuation was, the Lord suffered Job's piety to be put upon trial. But if converted men have no higher motive, than an ultimate regard to themselves in all their religion, this controversy between the Holy One, and the enemy of all righteousness, would have been at an end. And if unconverted men are ever actuated by supreme love to God, then the Lord said nothing in favour of his servant Job, which might not have been said of a graceless sinner. I am persuaded, my hearers, that we cannot understand the point in controversy, between the Most High and Satan, concerning Job, without being convinced, that supreme love to God, and supreme love to one's own self, forms the difference of character between the righteous and the wicked. For we are not

to understand this portion of scripture as of any private interpretation, as though the dispute about selfishness and disinterestedness were confined to the man of Uz. Satan meant to say, that none of the saints loved God, only for the favours which they had received, or expected to receive from him : and the Lord no doubt meant to say, that the insinuation was false, not only concerning this servant of his, but also concerning all his sanctified ones. If supreme love to God, in distinction from supreme love to one's self, is the distinguishing mark of a saint, (as appears from the case of Job,) then it will follow, that supreme love to self, in distinction from supreme love to God, is the distinguishing mark of a sinner.

“ 2. That living to ourselves, and living to God, constitutes the difference between the saint and the sinner, is capable of being proved from Christ's vindication of the goodness of his character, which we find recorded in the gospel of John. There he says, *He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own*

glory : but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true. Again he says, *I seek not mine own glory.* By these declarations, the faithful and true Witness did as much as to say, If I had acted selfishly, or made my own glory my chief end, I should be a sinner ; but because I have invariably sought the glory of God, as my chief end, my character cannot be impeached. This is a decided proof, that Jesus Christ viewed this, as the difference between evil and good men ; that the former live to themselves, and that the latter, as far as grace makes them to differ, live unto God.

“ 3. That living to ourselves, and living to God, is the difference between nature and grace, may be argued by what the scriptures say about hypocrites. The fallacy of their religion is detected, by their being shown, that they have never regarded God, but themselves. To such the Lord speaks, *Zech. vii. 5, 6, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto ME, even unto ME. Audi*

when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for YOURSELVES, and drink for YOURSELVES? Their entire hypocrisy is shewn by their being told that they had no real regard to God, but, on the contrary, an entire regard to themselves, both in their fasting, and in their feasting. But if failing to regard the glory of God, and being wholly absorbed in self regard, proves a professor of religion to be a hypocrite, it incontrovertibly establishes the point before us. It proves that living to God, and living to one's self, is the difference between those who are converted, and those who are not. There are other places in the bible, where the unsoundness of a profession is detected by the same kind of proof; which irresistibly forces upon us the idea, that an unrenewed heart is perfectly selfish; but that a renewed heart is possessed of unfeigned love to the Lord Jesus Christ.

“ 4. The complaint of the apostle, *For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's*, shews how improper and unbecoming it is for

those who profess christianity to be influenced by selfish considerations, while the grand interests of the Redeemer's kingdom are, either neglected, or imperfectly regarded. And if a low state of religion is here described, (as appears to be the case) by a comparatively weak regard to the things of Christ, and a too great attention to our own things, it evidently goes on the ground, that if we have no religion, we have no real regard to the things of Christ, but that we wholly regard our own things; and, on the other hand, that a perfection of the christian principle would lead us perfectly to regard the things which are Jesus Christ's. As the scriptures mark the low degrees of grace by the prevalence of the selfish principle; so they consider the prevalence of a disinterested spirit, as evidential of higher attainments in religion. The most disinterested exercises and actions are most commended by the inspired penmen.— All this proves, that disinterested affection, in distinction from that which is

selfish, is the very thing which distinguishes the *new* from the *old* man.

“ 5. Another argument to prove that living to ourselves, and living to Christ, discriminates between nature and grace, is drawn from what Christ made essential to any one's becoming his disciple. He said, *Whosoever will come after me, let him DENY HIMSELF, and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for MY SAKE, and the gospel's, shall save it.* This explicit statement of the lowest terms, on which any one can become an approved disciple of Christ, evidently supposes, that two characters exist among men; and that the one character regards Christ and his kingdom above any selfish interest, while the other prefers self interest above Christ and the gospel. If any one becomes a christian by denying himself for Christ's sake, then it will follow, that whoever is not a christian, does prefer his own interest to that of Christ. This makes the difference between an unrenewed, and a renewed

state, to consist in self love, and love to Christ.

“ 6. Sinners are described every where in the bible, as loving themselves, and not loving God ; but saints are described as loving God. *Men shall be lovers of their own selves.*— When Christ said, *For sinners also love those that love them*, he meant to teach us that unrenewed sinners love themselves, and that they love others only in relation to their own happiness ; that they make themselves the center of the system, and the chief end of all their actions. Christ told unrenewed sinners to their face, that he knew them, that the love of God was not in them. Concerning all mankind in their unrenewed state, it is said, *They have come short of the glory of God*, i. e. they have not at all regarded it. But concerning the renewed it is said, *The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost*. They are every where spoken of as loving God, and this is *peculiar* to them. The apostle saith, *For me to live is Christ* : and he does not speak of this, as peculiar to

himself, in distinction from other christians ; for in another place he applies this to christians in general. *For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.* It is evidently agreeable to the word of God, to view that change which is effected, by the Holy Spirit, as leading creatures out of themselves, to regard the glory of God. The command is, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* God writes this law in the hearts of all those whom he calls out of darkness into his marvellous light. Now if the unregenerate are described as loving themselves, but not loving God ; as coming short of the divine glory, and seeking their own glory ; and if the regenerate are characterised, as those who love God and deny themselves ; and as those who eat, and drink, and live, and die unto the Lord, it will follow, that a supreme regard to self, and a supreme regard to God, is the line of difference between them. The

“ 7th, And last argument which I shall now bring to prove that this is the real difference between the converted and the unconverted, is this, that it can consist in nothing else. We have shewn that there is a *real difference* of character between them: but if the difference does not consist in one’s making self, and the other’s making God the supreme object, let it be shewn in what it does, or can consist. Certainly none can be so absurd as to say, that there is any real, fundamental change in a man’s character, because he has left one way of seeking his own things for another way of seeking them. It is common when we become men, to put away childish things, though we may have no change of heart. But if, when we become men, we pursue *business* from the same selfish motives with which we pursued *sports* when children, there has no moral change taken place in us. If a miser, who has spent his life in hoarding, should deal out all his stores to the poor, for the sake of gaining the character of a liberal man, though it

would make a great difference in his appearance, yet he would, in reality, be possessed of the same character in the sight of Him, who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins. The apostle supposes such a case, and pronounces such a character utterly deficient. No real change is made in the character of a man, by his becoming religious, if his religion terminate in love to himself. If a wicked man should forsake all his wicked ways, as to the external of them, and go into the strictest religious practice, merely for the sake of escaping the pains of hell, and being selfishly happy through eternity, this would make no radical change in his character. Scribes and pharisees were full of religion; yet the Saviour said, *Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.* If seeking my own happiness for time, does not make me a new creature, then seeking my own happiness for eternity, will not make me so. So long as the same ultimate end is sought, the

changes which take place in us, do not make us, in a spiritual sense, new men. There is no way to become new men, or to possess an entirely different character, only by changing our ultimate end. And there is no way of changing our ultimate end, but by loving God. There are but two ultimate ends sought through the intelligent universe. Sinful creatures make, each one his own happiness his ultimate end; but holy beings all unite in paying a supreme regard to the glory of God, which ever ought to be considered as including in it the greatest possible good of the moral system. There is no such thing as a creature's going out of himself, without rising as high as the glory of God. If happiness is loved for its own sake, without being viewed in relation to one's self, then the greatest good of the universe will be supremely regarded. There is, therefore, *no middle character* between him who lives unto himself, and him who lives unto God. The patriot, who confines his love to his own country, is

not an exception to this rule ; for he does not regard the good of his country, as an aggregate good, (if he did, he would also regard the good of other countries, whose prosperity is equally valuable,) but he regards it wholly on account of its relation to him, because it is *his* country, &c. &c.

PART II.

“ It is probable objections will arise in some minds, against the representation which has now been made of the difference between a natural and a gracious state ; or, which is the same, between unsanctified and sanctified men.

“ 1. It will be objected against fixing upon this, and this alone, as the point of difference, That other things are mentioned in the word of God, as discriminating marks between a natural and gracious state. Is it not said, *By their fruits ye shall know them ?* To this we answer, that no external fruit or works, however fair, will constitute a christian, if they proceed from a corrupt heart. *Though I give all my*

goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. One characteristic of this charity is that *she seeketh not her own.* This brings the matter to the same point where our subject has placed it: No works, however splendid, will distinguish a saint from a sinner, but such as proceed from a principle of supreme love to God.

“Some are ready to say, We thought that *prayer* was the thing which made the difference between saints and sinners. Is it not mentioned as a proof of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, *Behold he prayeth.* To this it may be replied, That the pharisees made long prayers; and that as Saul was before his conversion, a pharisee, he had no doubt made many prayers. The objector cannot hold his ground in making *prayer* the line of difference between the converted and the unconverted, without he defines prayer, and shews that it must be of the right kind, in order to distinguish the real convert from the hypocrite. And as soon as

he comes to define *that* prayer which is right and acceptable, and shew wherein it differs from such prayer as graceless men may make, he will be obliged, if he makes any distinction between them, to shew that an acceptable prayer has an ultimate regard to the glory of God, while the prayer of the hypocrite is selfish.

“*Repentance* and *faith* are spoken of in the scriptures, as graces which distinguish the renewed from the unrenewed ; yet the *unrenewed* are spoken of as *repenting* and *believing*. This obliges us to distinguish between that repentance, and that faith which are true, and those which are false : and this we cannot do, without coming to the same point of distinction, which has all along been held up in this discourse. We must show that true repentance is *godly sorrow* for sin, while that which is not true is a sorrow which arises wholly from love to one’s own self. Judas repented of his treachery, because by it he had destroyed *himself*. As it is with repentance, so it is with faith : the faith of God’s people

differs from the faith of others in this ; that it is a *faith which worketh by love*. I am persuaded, that in whatever way we seek to distinguish between a gracious and a graceless state, it will run into that which has in this discourse been laid down as the differing point, viz. *supreme love to God, and supreme love to one's own self*.

“ 2. Some have supposed that this passage, John iv. 19, *We love him because he first loved us*, stands opposed to the leading sentiment of this sermon. They think this passage allows of love to ourselves, as the moving cause and main spring of our love to God ; and that God cannot be loved until he is viewed as *our friend*.

“ If the passage be understood in this sense, it makes the love which a saint has for God, no better than the love which one sinner has for another ; for it is said, *Sinners love those that love them*. If a graceless sinner can love a fellow creature because he views him as *his friend*, why may we not on the same ground love God ? If I make God's love to me, the foundation of my

love to him, I make myself more than God ; I make all his worthiness of my love, to consist in his regard for me, and attention to my happiness. This interpretation of the passage, which is so calculated to foster the native pride and selfishness of the heart, ought not for a moment to be indulged. The passage must mean one or the other of these two things, (both of which are in themselves true,) either ; 1. That the love which the children of God have towards their Father in heaven, was put into their hearts by his special grace ; that while they were full of enmity against him, he benevolently loved them, and sent his son to die for their sins ; and when they refused an offered Saviour, being dead in trespasses and sins, he quickened them, and shed his love abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost ; Or, 2. That the love of God to us, the children of Adam, in giving his Son to die, has above every thing else endeared his character to us ; as it has above every thing else displayed the excellency of it. It is the infinite holiness of God,

which should draw forth our love to him. But this holiness could not be loved, if it were not manifested. And there is no manifestation equally great, with that which is made by the work of redeeming sinners from sin and misery by Jesus Christ. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.* It is the loving, benevolent nature of God which makes him lovely ; but every apostate creature ought to know, that God may for ever remain benevolent, and, of consequence, worthy of being loved, without recovering him from his apostacy.

“ 3. Some may oppose to the doctrine which has been advanced, the frequent use which the scripture makes of *threatenings* and *promises*, to excite mankind to attend to the things of religion. Do not these things countenance self-love, and make it the spring of holy actions ?

“ To this it may be replied, 1. It is the duty of every man to attend to his own soul, though not to make his own happiness his chief end. To let a fellow creature perish, through our inat-

tention, is a sin against God, as well as against him; and it is no less sinful to perish ourselves, by neglecting our own souls. 2. Threatenings and promises; or punishments and rewards, annexed to the commands of God, should powerfully influence us, as they are expressive of the feelings of the divine mind towards sin and holiness. The punishment annexed to the divine law, should not deter us from sin, chiefly because that the enduring of it will make us miserable, but rather as it is a declaration of the Lawgiver, that sin is infinitely displeasing to him, and calculated to do infinite mischief in the world. So on the other hand, the reward annexed to the divine law, is a declaration how perfectly pleasing holiness is to the Lawgiver. Viewed in this point of light, it ought to have great influence on every rational creature.*

* There is no more real virtue, or holiness, in avoiding evil merely for the sake of escaping punishment in the next world, than there is in avoiding stealing, or any other crime, only in order to escape

IMPROVEMENT.

“ 1. From this subject we learn, that selfishness and *disinterested love*, are the sources of *all the sin*, and of *all the holiness* in the universe. All the sin of an unregenerate state consists in living to one's self; that is, in being entirely selfish. All the pride and ambition in the world, with all their dreadful consequences, are wholly the fruit of supreme love to one's own self. All the idolatry and superstition in the world, are the fruit of selfishness. All infidelity, together with all hypocrisy, are the streams which flow from a selfish heart. Evil spirits have no worse principle than selfishness.— Name the sin, on earth, or in hell, which cannot be traced up to selfishness as its source.

“ On the other hand, there is nothing on earth, or in heaven, which is

imprisonment, or some other punishment in this.— And it requires no higher principle to serve the Lord for the sake of getting to heaven, than to work in order to obtain an estate. If people act from no higher principle than this, it may well be said to them: *What do ye more than others? Sinners do the same.*

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morally good, but that it can be traced up to disinterested love, as its source. This disinterested love constitutes all the holiness of the Deity. The justice, the mercy, the long-suffering, and the faithfulness of God, are all fruits of his infinite benevolence. The holiness of the angels of light, is all summed up in that love which is not selfish. All the graces which are in the saints; their humility, repentance, faith, submission, brotherly love, and spirit of devotion, are but so many modifications of disinterested love: and all those good works, which God will approve, are so many *labours of love*.

“2. We may conclude from this subject, that all the *selfish religion* in the world, whether in pagan, or christian lands, is the religion of unrenewed nature, and not of grace. Unrenewed men can be prevailed upon to be religious, yea, to do much in religion, provided self can be made the chief end. Pagans will build temples for their *Baals*, and for their *Juggernauts*, and will weary themselves in the wor-

ship of their idol gods, if self can be allowed to be the supreme object. Pharisees could tithe mint, annis and cummin; be strict in the observance of the sabbath, and of the temple and synagogue worship, and have a zeal for God, while all terminated in exalting the idol *self*, either in this, or the future world. All the religion of the present day, which makes more of our own happiness than of the glory of God, whether it cry up good works, or cry them down, is the religion of the natural heart. This subject will furnish an important criterion, by which to judge of every system of doctrine, which is advanced:—If supreme love to ourselves is its basis, however hidden, the system is corrupt; it has been invented by the natural heart, which can love no system which is not selfish. If the glory of God, and the good of his kingdom, be laid as the cornerstone of the system, it is good. Still it should be remembered, that our holding to a disinterested scheme of doctrine, will not avail us, unless we feel

the power of it on our own hearts, and reduce it to practice.

“ 3. From this subject we learn, that even christians have no more acceptable religion, than they have of a disposition to live, not unto themselves, but unto Christ. Christians must not think, they have as much religion, as they have numbers of prayers and alms-deeds. The Lord searches their hearts, and accepts of what they do from love to him, and to their fellow men, and of no more, whether it be in their religious performances, or secular duties : and christians search their own hearts, and cast away from their duties, and confess as their sin, whatever they discover to spring from a selfish motive.

“ 4. In the light of this subject, we see why a change of heart reconciles us to *gospel doctrine*, and to a *godly life*. A heart which supremely regards self interest, is opposed to a life of godliness. If it submit to the external of such a life, it is like the service of an hireling ; but when the heart is changed, from loving one's own self, to love

God, a life of godliness becomes the most pleasurable life ; and a life of sinful gratifications looks like a most miserable servitude. If the converted were more sanctified, a godly life would be still more pleasurable. It will be through the perfection of this renovation of heart, that the service of God in heaven, will forever delight all the redeemed.

“ 5. In view of the truth before us, see what a foundation is laid for harmony and perpetual friendship among those who are born of God, and for eternal discord among those who are not born of him. Those who are born of God, all possess one common nature, and that is a benevolent one. They all supremely love one object. They make a common centre. They all, like so many planets, revolve around the Sun of righteousness. When their renewed hearts become perfectly sanctified, as they will be in the heavenly state, their harmony will be perfect ; their friendship will be more pure and undisturbed. Being perfectly free from selfish affections, they will re-

joice in each other's bliss. Perfect benevolence will exclude unfeelingness from their hearts, and pride and malice cannot enter. They will take the greatest complacency in each other's characters, on account of that supreme, ardent and unceasing love to God, which will forever reign in their hearts, and be manifested in all their actions.

“ On the other hand, they who are not born of the Spirit, being perfectly selfish, can have no sweet and durable friendship subsist among them. Their friendship in this world is very liable to be dissolved, and even turned into bitter hatred; and in the world to come, when all merciful restraint is taken off, and that good nature, which belonged to them, as animals rather than as intelligent beings, is gone, and their selfish affections reign uncontrolled, their enmity will become perfect and perpetual. The unrenewed all possess one common nature, but they do not make one common object. Each one makes himself his supreme object. This makes as many centres,

as there are individuals; and this makes the greatest possible discord and confusion. *Hateful, and hating one another*, is the record which God hath given of us all, while destitute of his grace. All those who remain destitute of his grace, until their probationary state is ended, will be condemned to an eternal confinement in the prison of hell. In this prison countless millions of perfectly selfish and malicious creatures will be shut up together; and oh, what a wretched place this must be! Who can conceive of the misery which will be endured, by their tormenting one another, and themselves, with those malicious passions which reign within, and are acted out, free from all restraint! *If the filthy remain filthy still*, they must remain wretched still. *Except a man be born again*, (i. e. be changed from selfishness to benevolence) *he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

“ I shall close with two addresses; the one to the *converted*, and the other to the *unconverted*.

“1. I shall address a word to the converted. Your names I do not know; God knoweth. Your distinguishing characteristic is your love to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to his holy kingdom. The time was when your hearts were entirely selfish, but God has, in great mercy, made you new creatures. You essentially differ from what you once were, and from your fellow men, who are now unconverted. It is disinterested love which makes the difference. Be exhorted, my brethren, to cultivate this heavenly plant, with the greatest assiduity. The more you rise above selfish considerations, and act for the glory of God, and the extension of the kingdom of Christ, the nearer do you resemble your Father in Heaven; the more will you please him; the more useful you will be to your fellow men, and the more pure comfort you will enjoy in your own souls. Let us then lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us; let us press towards the mark!

“2. I would address myself to the unconverted. Many of you, I know,

(for some men's sins go beforehand to judgment,) and God knoweth all who are in this state; for he knoweth all hearts. God knoweth that there is not one of you who has any love to him. There is a great difference among the unconverted, as to their external conduct; some pursue one vice, and some another, and some are quite regular in their deportment; but they all agree in this, that they are always governed by selfish motives. You, who are unconverted, make *yourselves*, your *chief end* in all that you do. You have no desire to please God, only as Haman desired to please Ahasuerus, that he himself might thereby be advanced. You are not only destitute of true religion now, but you are opposed to becoming religious at any future time. True religion is a disinterested thing, but your hearts are entirely selfish. You may be convinced that it is necessary for your future well-being, that you should embrace religion, but still your selfish hearts will reject it. It is reasonable that you should deny yourselves, that you should love God, and

serve him in sincerity ; but your hearts are so contracted with self-love, that you will never do this without there is a radical change wrought within you. You will never be willing to make a common interest with the Redeemer, and his holy family, until you are *made willing*. I hope many of those, whom I now address, will yet be born into the kingdom of grace. And let me beseech you, never to indulge the thought, that this blessed change has passed upon you, until you perceive, that you are actuated by some higher motive, than a regard to your *own happiness*. Whatever change shall take place in your religious sentiments, practice, or feelings, do not think the change *saving*, until you are made to live, not unto yourselves, but unto him that died for you. Be on your guard against deception ; for Satan has gone forth to deceive the nations ; and one of his most subtle ways of deceiving is by *selfish religion*.— Very many of the professors of religion are, no doubt, thus deceived.— That these may be undeceived, and

driven from their sandy foundation ; and that those, who shall hereafter obtain a hope of a moral change, may dig deep, and build on the *eternal rock*, may God, of his infinite mercy, grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our righteous Advocate! Amen!"



The same writer, in a discourse on *Satan's transforming himself into an angel of light*, observes :

“ Satan has his *ministers*. It is a deep-laid wile of Satan, to have his ministers on earth, and in the very church of Christ ; who shall call themselves the ministers of Christ, and pretend to favour the cause of righteousness ; as if to build up this cause, was their main object. That Satan has his ministers, yea very many of them in the world, is clear from the word of God. There is, no doubt, a great many shades of difference in their character. Some of them, we are taught to expect, shall be so wonderfully transformed as ministers of

righteousness, that they shall deceive, if it were possible, the very elect.— There may be this difference between Satan and his ministers ; Satan, when transformed into an angel of light, has not deceived himself ; for he knows that he is not an angel of light : but his ministers may be, and often are, self-deceived. Paul tells Timothy, that evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and *being deceived*. Because men do not receive the love of the truth, God, in judgment, sends them strong delusion, that they should *believe a lie*. There is no reason to doubt, but that many of Satan's ministers have really supposed themselves to be great friends to Christ, and great instruments in his hand of the conversion and salvation of sinners.

“ The false prophets in the church of Israel were evidently in the devil's service : and this was a distinguishing characteristic of them, that they prophesied smooth things ; that they sewed pillows under arm-holes, and strengthened the hands of the wicked,

that he should not turn from his wicked way, by promising him life. All those preachers, whose main drift is to prevent the enemies of God from being alarmed, and to lay them to rest in an unconverted state, are manifestly the ministers of Satan. They may say much in favour of the goodness of God, and the merits of the Redeemer, and their love to the souls of men ; but this is their mask ; this is their transformation into the ministers of righteousness.

“ If preachers even sound an alarm in the ears of the enemies of God, and then preach in such a manner, as is directly calculated to build them up on their own self-righteous performances, still the adversary of souls is well pleased. Pharisaic scribes taught, that something was necessary to be done to enter into life. They taught men to make clean the outside of the cup and platter : but the Divine Teacher taught those who heard him ; that unless their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, they could in no case

enter into the kingdom of heaven. It does no good to wound sinners, and then heal their wounds slightly. Those who do not make regeneration a radical change, and who do not lead sinners to go out of themselves, and build their hopes on the chief corner stone which God hath laid in Zion, are not ministers of Christ, but the ministers of Satan. If these pretend to make regeneration a radical change, but do not in reality do it; if they pretend to destroy the self-righteous system; but do in every sermon build it up; this is their covering; this is their being transformed as the ministers of righteousness. Let all, who hold the Bible in their hands, beware what they hear. Let them imitate the Bereans, who daily searched the scriptures, to see whether those things which they heard were so.

“ Another fruit by which you are to judge of those, who call themselves gospel ministers, is the effect produced by their ministry. If the uniform effect of any preaching, is to make men proud and self-sufficient, instead of

making them humble and believing, it has not the seal of Christ upon it.— When the true gospel is preached with power, it casts down imaginations, and every high thing which exalteth itself against the knowledge of God. It makes us do justly, love mercy, and *walk humbly with God.*

“ Another way, by which we are to distinguish between the ministers of Christ, and the ministers of Satan, is by their personal behaviour, i. e. by the manner in which they live.— Christ’s ministers will live godly lives; and some of Satan’s ministers may be expected to affect an uncommon degree of piety; for they will transform themselves into the apostles of Christ. Pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others; and yet they had no such righteousness as God approved. But though they were righteous overmuch in some things, they were quite deficient in other things relating to practice. The Saviour told them, that they devoured widows’ houses, &c. &c.

“It is no proof that any one is not a minister of Satan, because he gives the caution, Beware of the ministers of Satan. This may be one of the ways in which they put on the appearance of being the friends of Christ.— The servants of the devil have often called the ministers of Christ by the name which properly belonged to themselves. The false apostles at Galatia and at Corinth run down even the very chief of the apostles, and treated him as though he were not an apostle, and had no authority to preach. It is undoubtedly the duty of the ministers of Christ, to detect, and expose the ministers of Satan; but they must expect, that Satan will stir up his servants to denounce the servants of Jesus, and call them the servants of the devil,” &c. &c.

Note to the Reader.

I shall conclude this little volume with some interesting extracts; further to illustrate and confirm the subject matter already treated of, and render it still more acceptable to the pious reader: for it is to promote the welfare of mankind, and to inculcate important and just sentiments, that the present compilation has been made.

T. B. G.

**On MOTIVES which produce LAUDABLE
ACTIONS.**

[Extracted from the Youth's Magazine.]



“GOD is a spirit, and he requires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. *He abhors the sacrifice where the heart is not found.* The purpose of the writer is to manifest his love to the children of men, by calling them to remember the possibility of their doing good, while their zeal and activity have not a right origin.— They bring forth fruit, and apparently good fruit; but the question is, to whom? to God? or to themselves? do they bring forth this fruit. The prophet Hosea, says, *Israel is an empty vine—He bringeth forth fruit unto himself.* The temple service and alms-giving, and solemn festivals, were all outwardly and splendidly observed with much zeal; but while *ostensibly* to God, these were not really from the heart; nor the motive the promotion of his glory. With all this apparent fruit, still Israel is charged with being an empty vine. Why? He bringeth

forth fruit unto himself. It was a vine planted of God, for his own praise, and productive of fair clusters; but they were despised, sour grapes. And this, now strange vine was rejected and cast out to the burning, because it brought not forth good fruit unto God.

“ Like conduct, like punishment. If men now bring forth fruit only to *themselves*, they and their fruit will be rejected. There may be some good thing in the heart and conduct, yet vanity and pride, and self-righteousness may spoil the whole. Self contaminates and spoils all before God. Popularity or self-seeking, and not simple obedience to God, are often the motives of conduct outwardly worthy of praise. How little do men generally know their own motives! How desperately deceitful the natural human heart! How many heart idols have even flourishing professors. Fame in their smaller or larger circle of observers: Self-gratulation: Covetousness in some secret channel expecting advantage. These are some of the household deities of depraved man. How many empty vines in what is called the religious world! How rare the jewel of integrity before God! Yet,

without it what is the fruit? and what is the vine? Examine, therefore, carefully your motives, and strive to draw your motives for the good you do, from the best source."

Says the pious Flavel: "The pains and labours which many persons take in religion, are but lost labour, and pains to no purpose, such as will never turn to any account. Many great services are performed, many glorious works are wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God, and shall never stand upon record, in order to an eternal acceptance, because they took no heed to their hearts. This is that fatal rock, upon which thousands of vain professors have shipwrecked themselves eternally. O how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, conferring, and yet, as to the main end of religion, as good they had sat still, and done nothing; for it all signifies nothing if the work of the heart be neglected."

Extract from the writings of that ancient and pious minister, *John Everard*, D. D. first printed at London, in 1653.

“Religion, if it begin not at the heart, is nothing worth. Do but rectify the heart, and the actions cannot be amiss: *make the tree good, and there will follow good fruit.* Therefore see the folly of many men in our days: they think by their pains, and by their discipline, to force men into religion, into faith and good works, and spiritual actions. But I say, whatever fair pretences their actions may have, and however good they may seem; yet if the heart be not reformed, they are but golden vices, like rotten apples gilded over, and gilded sepulchres, fair to the eye, but within full of rottenness, and dead mens’ bones: they neither have a good root, nor tend to a right end. And though people may think highly of such works, and of themselves on account of them, yet there is nothing of God in them, and to him they are no better sacrifice than *cutting off a dog’s neck, or the offering up of swine’s blood,* as Isaiah saith.

“Therefore : always look to thy heart, that it be set right, before ever thou expectest the actions can be good : if that be not so, conclude all that proceeds from it is naught ; for if either fear or law, heaven or hell, rewards or any hope, or any by-ends urge or prick on the heart to goodness ; these are but dead works, and you shall know it by this : Do but take away these respects, and these by-ends, and these works cease ; take away hope of reward, or fear of punishment, and this body is dead, he works no more : why ? Because there is no life, no heat within, to move him. But tell him whose heart is set right, and made good within ; tell him, he must deny himself, forsake the world, and be emptied of all the glory of the world, of all self-seeking, self-glorying, self-praising, &c. 'tis no sad news : Why ? Because herein is his life, his peace, his glory : But to the other who hath been only taught by such precepts as come from men, from self, this preaching is death to him, because his life, peace and joy, is to hear how he shall be advanced, esteemed, honoured, &c.”

An intelligent and modern writer observes:—"It is a fundamental truth, which will neither bend nor bow to the opinion of any mortal, that *self-love* must be destroyed in us, before we can ever be approved of God, or enter the kingdom of heaven. Self-love was the downfall of angels: and who, but a deluded victim of the most palpable error, can for a moment suppose or expect, that God can or will, receive to his habitation of holiness, mortals full of the spirit of that selfishness, for which, and which alone, immortal and superior beings were expelled therefrom? God assuredly, must be far dearer to me than myself, or than millions of *heavens, earths, and solar systems*, or I am not worthy of him; and he would act inconsistent with his own divine character, to receive me into his holy habitation. Heaven is a *nature*, as well as a place, and we must possess that nature, (I mean supreme love to God,) before we can possibly enjoy it.

"If I am correct in asserting that no man can possibly be in a state of salvation, who does not think right and act well; I am equally correct in believing, that millions of our sanctimonious Religionists in the present day, are as com-

pletely deceived, and as fatally deluded as the ancient scribes and pharisees were. The eyes which are now reading these lines, *will soon be closed in death!* and then will you know, whether the millions who now advocate the selfish system, or myself, are correct in our ideas of moral goodness. But even if they are right, I surely cannot be wrong. For if it is *just* to love holiness for the sake of recompence—it is far *more just* to love it for its own intrinsic value. If that is an *excellent* child who loves and obeys his father for the sake of his property, he must be *much more excellent* who loves and obeys him through a filial and true affection. In a word, if *selfish actions and services are good, benevolent actions and services are better.*”

I shall conclude this work, by an extract from Mr. Bellamy, author of *True Religion Delineated*, &c.

“ All kinds of false religion, however different in many things, yet all agree in this, to result merely from a principle of self-love. All the idolatrous religion of the heathen world, in which some took so much pains, had its rise from this principle. They had some notion of a future state; of a heaven and a hell, as well as temporal rewards and punish-

ments, and so were moved by hope and fear, from a principle of self-love, to do something to pacify the anger of the gods, and to recommend themselves to the favour of their deities: and all the superstitions of the seemingly devout papist; his *pater-nosters*, his *ave marias*, his *penances*, and *pilgrimages*, and endless toils, still arise from the same principle: so does all the religion of the formalists, and legal hypocrites, in the reformed nations. It is a slavish fear of hell, and a mercenary hope of heaven, which, from a principle of self-love, sets all a going; yea the evangelical hypocrite, who mightily talks of supernatural light; of the spirit's operations; of conversion, and a new nature, still after all, has no higher principle in him than self-love. His conscience has been greatly enlightened, and his heart terrified, and his corruptions stunned; and he has by the delusions of Satan, obtained a strong confidence of the love of God, and pardon of his sins; so that instead of being influenced chiefly by the fear of hell, as the legal hypocrite is, he is ravished with heaven; but still, all is from self-love and for self-ends; and, properly and scripturally speaking, he neither knows God, nor cares at all for him."

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