

AN
ADDRESS
TO
A FRIEND,
ON
CHURCH COMMUNION:
BY
JOSEPH KINGHORN.

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JER 50:5 THEY SHALL ASK THE WAY TO ZION WITH THEIR  
FACES THITHERWARD, SAYING, COME, AND LET US JOIN  
OURSELVES TO THE LORD IN A PERPETUAL COVENANT  
THAT SHALL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.  
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AN ADDRESS,

MY DEAR FRIEND,

The great objects of the Christian religion seem to have produced a serious effect on your mind and conduct; and you have intimated that you see the importance of obedience to the institutions of Christ, and of the privileges of communion with his church.

Permit a friend, who earnestly wishes to assist you in promoting the prosperity of your soul, to lay before you a few observations and enquiries on these subjects.

You are quite right in supposing, that it is important to obey the will of Christ; that obedience shews the genuineness of our faith; — that it is a comfort to every Christian to have given himself up to his Lord; — and that only in the way of his commandments we are to expect his blessing. It is true also, that great spiritual advantages attend Christian communion; — that the blessings of having a name and a place in the house of God have been the earnest desire of good men in all ages ; — that Christians cannot complete the duty they owe to their Saviour, or to his people, unless they unite with their brethren (if God in his providence gives them opportunity) in shewing forth the Lord's death till he come, and in holding forth the word of life as a visible part of his church. You are right also, that there is a pleasure attending it, which a serious Christian highly values; and though every new connection calls us to new duties, and sometimes places us in painful situations, yet much of our religious improvement and pleasure is nearly connected with our continuing with Christian brethren in the Apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42,) Nor does the New Testament give us an instance of anyone who professed to believe in Christ, and yet did not attend to the ordinances of the

Gospel.

It is possible (we grant) to make a premature profession. This is a very undesirable thing, and ought by all means to be avoided. Yet the reasoning and conduct of some whom we cannot but esteem as the children of God, appears unaccountable. They neglect their duty because they think it not essential to their salvation, and content themselves with the intention of doing the will of God at a future time. Hence an indifference succeeds, which often keeps them from attending to it at all, if they are aroused from this state, their only consolation is, that it is better then to obey the will of Christ, than to neglect it any longer; or, where this has not been the case, instances have occurred in which such persons have deeply regretted, on a dying bed, that trivial fears, or unimportant causes, should have restrained them from doing what their consciences approved—and that they put it off, until, alas ! It was too late!

But the duty, as well as the privilege, now spoken of, belong only to a certain description of men. If you ask, is it my duty, will it be my privilege? I reply by asking you a serious question, ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN? I do not mean by this—Do you believe the truth of divine revelation in general: but, has the doctrine of Christ, as revealed in his gospel, made such an impression on your mind, that you are led to that faith in him, and that obedience to him, which distinguishes the New Testament description of the disciple of the Lord Jesus? Suffer me to lay before you a few Serious questions: What is your view of yourself, — of Jesus Christ, — of his Ordinances, — of your duty as a professor of Christianity; — and what are your designs, desires, and hopes, respecting your future conduct?

I. What is your view of YOURSELF?

Have you been impressed with a sense of your situation as a sinner in the sight of God, who needs his mercy, and who without it

must justly be condemned? And does this sentiment abide in your mind, and lead you to make the salvation of your soul your great concern? It is not asked whether this was the first serious impression made on your heart; but, has it been made; and has it aroused you to consider your danger, and to flee from the wrath to come? We expect not that any should ask help, who are not conscious of needing it; or ever earnestly seek salvation who are not convinced that without the interference of the great grace of the Gospel, they will sink into perdition.

A conviction of our sinfulness in the sight of God, leading us to implore his mercy, is essential to true conversion. It is easy to acknowledge in general terms that we are sinners; — it requires a hardy mind to deny it. But a deep-rooted sense of the evil of sin is a different thing. This is the beginning of all genuine repentance. Before this impression is made on the mind, we suppose that we shall succeed as well as others, and better than many. Notwithstanding our imperfections, we hope to be saved at last, because God is a merciful being, and we therefore give the subject no farther thought or, if it will force itself upon us, our repentance is nothing more than a fear of the consequences of sin, leading us to be sorry that so great a being as God is, should be our enemy. But when we see that our hearts have been in a state of enmity against him ; that we loved him not, and desired not his ways, and that this was our sin—when we see ourselves in the light of his holiness, and behold the Excellency of his glory as a God who hates evil, the scene changes ; — we feel that we are sinners before him to an extent we did not conceive, and that there is need for the prayer, " God be merciful to us sinners". This state of mind leads to reformation of life, and we endeavor to serve God in a manner we had never done before; but these exertions, though good and important, only shew us more completely the evil of our own hearts. Our sincerity leads us to see our weakness; and

while we would do good, the evil which is present with us shows us how very imperfectly we estimated both our characters and condition. We now find that our former hope was presumption; that in us dwelleth no good thing; and that it is in great mercy, that God has not left us in our former ignorance to perish in our sins. Where these impressions are genuine, they are not transient in their effects. They lead us to acknowledge and lament our sinfulness—they shew us the bitterness of sin—and they produce the enquiry, never before made with such feelings, What shall we do to be saved?

Genuine repentance is more than an acknowledgement that we have sinned; it is a sorrow for sin, from a sense of the evil of it, making us loathe and abhor ourselves before God as in dust and ashes. Hence, we despair of meriting salvation by our own efforts, and feel the necessity of fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel. In different minds this effect may be produced in very different ways: in some it may take place powerfully and rapidly, and in others gradually and slowly; they may be led forward in a gentle manner, and they may see their danger and their remedy nearly together. But in all who are brought to God by Jesus Christ, there is such a degree of conviction and repentance, that they cast off self-dependence; and with all the sincerity of which they are capable, and with the earnestness of these who feel the infinite worth of their souls, they approach the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

In our first access to God in prayer, there is often great difficulty felt from a variety of causes. Fear, shame, a recollection of our former sinfulness, a sense of our present unworthiness, and the novelty of our situation in drawing near to the Everlasting God—all rush into the mind, and fill it with confusion. But where the grace of God has taken possession of the heart, it conquers our reluctance, and conducts us to his throne, as the only place where ease and encour-

agement are to be obtained. Our first attempts are in very feeble and disjointed petitions; but God knows the meaning of our broken accents, and often graciously hears and answers prayers, which have nothing that would recommend them in the hearing of men.

And now, my friend, I hope I have not been stating exercises of mind, and emotions of heart, of which you know nothing. I also hope that you daily call on God, according to the directions of our blessed Lord, (Matthew 6:6,) — that you retire from the world, and in secret pray for spiritual blessings. If you are truly under the influence of divine grace, you have in some measure adopted the practice; and let me earnestly in treat that it may never be discontinued.

We are told in the New Testament, that except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God, (John 3: 3,) In these words we are informed that a great moral change must be produced in our character, like being born into a new world, before we can enter eternal life. Perhaps you have had difficulties on this subject; you may doubt whether such a change has taken place in you, and may ask, How is it to be known? I will reply as briefly as I can. Whoever is born again, is conscious of a great alteration of view and of feeling, respecting the truth, excellence, and importance, of the Gospel; — there is now an earnest attention to it for the salvation of his own soul, though it was formerly disregarded; a tenderness of conscience respecting many things which before were little thought of; and a consciousness that the heart is naturally hard, rebellious against the Lord, proud, and prone to various evils. He that is born again, flees for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel; trusts in Christ alone for salvation; loves him, desires to know him more, to serve him better and to be conformed to his image in all things. He follows holiness from a perception of its excellency; seeks the favour of God; delights in what he once disregarded and opposed, and hates what once were the objects of his sinful attachment: old things are thus

passed away, and all things are become new.

II, What is your view of Jesus CHRIST?

If we are led to see our need of salvation, the character of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Saviour of lost sinners, will appear peculiarly important; and the suitability of the Gospel to our condition will engage our attention in a new and interesting light. We shall feel its consequence to our happiness—we shall ardently enquire after the way of life—we shall not be offended in Jesus Christ, but shall submit to the righteousness which is of God by faith. The heart of man, in its natural un-renewed state, is very apt to dislike and oppose the system of the Gospel, because it insists on our utter inability to save ourselves, and requires that we should receive with meekness the ingrafted word ; but if we are brought to a just view of our own condition, and of the glory of Christ, we shall feel no objection to hear that salvation is a gift; that it is founded on the atonement which Jesus Christ made for sinners ; and that we partake of its benefits by faith in him, The first grand principle of the Gospel is, that we are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood. (Romans 3: 24, 25). When we are enabled to look up to him in the exercise of true repentance, we rejoice that there is a way of salvation at all—that it is by grace—that it is freely pointed out to the sinful and unworthy, through the dying of the Lord Jesus for sinners—that it exalts the Saviour and glorifies God. We feel the propriety of being humbled in our hearts before him, and are thankful that we are permitted in any measure to know, and to rely on, the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

In this state of mind, it becomes of very great importance to ascertain what is meant by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We see, and commonly we now see for the first time, that believing in him, in the scriptural sense of the term, means more than merely

admitting that the gospel is true; —that it is a reliance of mind on the promise of eternal life, which God has made to all those who earnestly seek it through Jesus Christ, and for which the Atonement of Christ made the necessary provision. It is a trust in Christ for ourselves, and for the salvation of our souls. This brings it home, and distinguishes it from everything which we before considered as believing the gospel. Perhaps, during the whole of our lives, we looked upon the gospel as true, and in this general sense we may never have disbelieved it: but till we were led to a serious and new view of our situation, we did not trust in Christ for our own salvation, nor in consequence of faith in him, earnestly look up to God for the fulfillment of what he has promised. The enquiry now becomes of vast importance, do we thus believe? And we feel a propriety in the petition, which we never felt before, Lord, increase our faith.

Such sentiments also open our minds to an impressive view of the Saviour's glory. We admire the greatness of his love — we bow before the displays of his mighty power. It does not at all appear unfit that the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners should be mighty to save. The union of his divine perfections with that nature in which he came and died, that he might be an offering for sin, fills us with astonishment, and softens the heart. It encourages us to trust in him, and animates us to hold fast our profession. These considerations tend to destroy the remains of a self-righteous disposition; they show us our entire dependence on him whose love passeth knowledge; they excite our faith, and strengthen us to look forward, with the hope of being acknowledged by him and of beholding his glory, when he shall come the second time, without sin unto salvation. This is the highest desire which our hearts can entertain, and the noblest object that can engage our regard.

In living by faith in the Lord Jesus, we may have many difficulties of mind, and much struggling with an evil heart of

unbelief ; we may be harassed with a variety of fears; our progress may be slow and often interrupted ; and we may frequently feel a painful degree of suspense respecting our state before God : but difficulties of this kind are so common, especially at the beginning of our Christian course, that we should not be discouraged as if some strange thing had happened to us, but should rather press forward, and intreat an increase of strength from above. Spiritual life, like natural life, has to struggle with a variety of weaknesses and diseases. The operations of faith are oftentimes at first, like the breathings of an infant, weak and perhaps imperceptible. But where the genuine principle exists, it will lead us to GOD, it will lead us to JESUS CHRIST, and it will shew its living energy by the effects which it produces.

Here let me call your attention for a few moments to that distinguishing doctrine of the New Testament, JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS. You know the Apostle Paul discusses this subject in many parts of his writings, particularly in his Epistle to the Romans. Read what he has there written, and endeavor to understand it. As sinful beings we can expect nothing but condemnation: our works of righteousness cannot save us, for they are unable to merit divine favor, and purchase the salvation of our souls. On this account, God sent his Son to become a sacrifice for the sins of those who should believe in him. He died for them, that they should not die eternally; and his resurrection was a proof that his sacrifice was accepted, and the atonement be made was complete.

Hence it is that sin is not imputed to him that believeth in Jesus: on the contrary, God imputeth unto him righteousness without works. The death of Jesus Christ is so reckoned or placed to the believer's account, that he partakes of the benefit of his death, being considered as united to him, and a sharer in the blessings he came to procure. At the bar of God, the Lord Jesus Christ is his advocate, who pleads his

cause; and the believer is freed from the condemnation to which he would otherwise have been liable, and hence is declared Justified, on the ground that Christ died for all who believe in his name. Thus he is delivered from wrath to come by the virtue of Christ's obedience and death on his account; and the means by which he partakes of this inestimable benefit is by faith: this unites him to Christ, and enables him to plead the promises which are made through Christ. Hence you see that faith itself does not merit eternal life; but it is like a hand, the means by which we lay hold of the provision made for our Salvation. Thus, God displays the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

And now permit me to ask. Have you seen the majesty of the Redeemer, as he is displayed in the word of God, full of grace and truth, able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him (Hebrews? 8: 25), and who hath said, him that cometh unto me will in no wise cast out? (John 6: 37). Have you contemplated his atonement as the ground of your dependence for acceptance with God, since only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse from all sin; and have you ever been really humbled at the view of the greatness of the Father's grace, and of the Saviour's love, who came to redeem us not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with his own precious blood? (I. Peter. 1:18, 19). Have these things opened your eyes to your own littleness and vileness in the Divine presence, and thus tended to purify your heart? Has the consideration of your sinfulness, and of the atonement of the Saviour, destroyed all hope of saving yourselves by your reformation and obedience? Or are you still indulging the vain but natural thought, that your goodness and piety will recommend you to the favor of a God of holiness? Has the grandeur of the character of Jesus led you to rejoice that he is infinitely superior to your wants; and have his goodness and faithfulness drawn forth your heart to a confidence in him? Happy

are you, if it has pleased God to enable you to worship him in spirit, and to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. For then you will add, in the words of his servant, Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord. (Philippians 3: 3. 8).

III. What is your view of the Ordinances of Christ's Church?

As rites they are of little use, if their ends are not seen, and proper motives for attending to them are not in exercise. It is not the washing away the filth of the flesh—it is not eating bread and drinking wine in the house of the Lord — that have any effect on our spiritual state, considered in themselves; and therefore all those who wish to attend with advantage to either of the institutions of Jesus, should enquire what the New Testament says concerning them.

In the ordinances of the Gospel are set before us the principles of the doctrine of Christ. Our Christian profession begins with a declaration of our faith in the revealed character of God, by our being baptized in the name OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST. We thus testify that we believe in each of these divine persons, who in their respective offices are all engaged in the work of our salvation. In partaking of the Lord's Supper, we declare our reliance on that atoning sacrifice which the Saviour made, when he was once offered to bear the sins of many. In this light they are both of distinguished consequence in the Christian church; and demand attention not merely as commanded rites, but as means of keeping in view the fundamental principles of our hope, of reminding us of our obligations to serve the Lord, and of encouraging us to seek unto him for direction and strength. Think on these things: pray for holy light that you may enter into the design of the gospel institutions; that when you attend to them you may have a mind renewed in knowledge, and present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Have you been baptized? If not, have you examined your Bible, and used your best endeavors to obtain a knowledge of the will of God respecting the primitive mode and subjects of baptism *

** A few observations on this subject for the use of inquires, and for the information of those who know not what the sentiments of the Baptists are, may be found in the Appendix.*

Otherwise, your being baptized will not be a proof of your obedience. Baptism ought not to be considered as the condition by which you become a member of a Christian church, but as the evidence of faith in Jesus, and of devotedness to his cause. Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6: 3, 4).

In these words, the Apostle most forcibly appeals to his friends at Rome as persons who knew the spiritual design of the ordinance. In their baptism they declared that faith in the death of Christ was the ground of their hope. It pleased the Lord to make his institution bear a resemblance to the great fact on which they rested their everlasting all; therefore, says the Apostle, we are buried with him by baptism unto death. We are thus strongly reminded of the death and burial of our Lord; we pass through the image of death, as a practical declaration of our faith in his death, and as he was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we, raised from the resemblance of a burial with Christ, feel the obligation to walk in newness of life. These are the views we should take of the ordinance of baptism, these are the obligations we are laid under by it; and when, in obedience to the command of the Lord, entering into the spiritual design of his institution, those who have believed in him submit themselves to his authority, they find their baptism the most

solemn transaction of their lives : it is a profession that they desire to die to sin, and to live unto God; it is an open declaration that they are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for life and salvation ; and it is an acknowledgement, made perhaps in the presence of many witnesses, that they are bound to do his will, and to spend the rest of their days in his service.

Such is the view suggested by the Apostle's appeal, and such was the fact in the days of inspiration. Until a person had professed his faith and been baptized on that profession, he was not received into Christian fellowship; and, if we take the New Testament be our guide in preference to the reasoning's and opinions of men, this should be our habitual line of conduct at the present time.

What are your motives for wishing to participate of the Lord's Supper? I do not imagine that you have any, that are not of a religious kind; but the question is — Are they right motives; such as are derived from the word of God, and justified by it? Too many seem to think, that the Lord's Supper gives a title to heaven; so that those who receive it with tolerable seriousness, will surely go to happiness when they die. And hence such a stress is laid, both on preparation for it, and on the ceremony itself, as if thereby eternal life was sealed to the receiver, as his certain portion. The word of God gives no such representation. In the New Testament, we are told that the Lord's Supper was appointed as a memorial of the death of Christ; that those who believe in him ought to attend to it, for the purpose of shewing forth the Lord's death till he come;" expressing thereby their belief that he came and died for sin; their trust in him as their Saviour ; and their expectation, that he will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9: 28). — Worldly considerations and motives should never lead us to it. It is an important means of increasing our earnestness in the service of the Lord, by calling us to contemplate the richness of his grace; but it will have no good effect, without we

are influenced by faith in Christ, and love to him. — Those who are earnestly and sincerely seeking, through Jesus Christ, the mercy of God unto eternal life, though they may be feeble in faith, and weak in mind, need not be frightened away from their duty; and such as are not of this description, whatever may be their character in other respects, have no business at the table of the Lord. Now, my friend, what are your views of this institution? Are they such as we have above described from the word of God, or are they of any other kind? The enquiry is solemn, and the subject is of great consequence. Do you keep in mind the direction of our Lord, This do in remembrance of me? Do you give up all idea of meriting any thing at his hand, by your attention to his ordinances? And do you wish to seek, in the path of obedience, an increase of grace and of conformity to the Divine will? There is nothing to discourage him that believes in Christ and desires to follow him, and there is nothing to encourage any other.

IV. Suppose you become a member of a Christian Society, permit me to ask What is your view of your duty in the Church, as a professor of Christianity?

When you join a church, and unite with others as your brethren, you may hope for their affection and assistance in your journey towards heaven; and they receive you as one with them, hoping also, that by you their piety will be increased, and their hearts encouraged in the good ways of the Lord. Every connection in life has its duties. Have you considered the situation in which you expect to stand? It is the duty of everyone who professes his belief in the gospel, not to forsake assembling with his fellow Christians, as the manner of too many is: but especially, it is the duty of those who have given themselves up to the Lord and to his people, by becoming members of a Christian church. To see such persons negligent of God's worship, staying at home on slight pretenses, and suffering any excuse of business or pleasure to carry them another way, looks ill.

It seems as if they were careless, or worldly, or desirous of any thing rather than of keeping up a regard to God's worship, and an attention to his word. Alas! too many such are to be seen every where. Few carry forward a steady zeal for the worship of God, through the course of their religious profession.

There are some who adopt the habit of wandering from one place of worship to another; and especially if their attention is attracted by any novelty. Then they are sure to absent themselves from the church of which they are professed members, or only to be found there occasionally, merely to keep their situation. They are steady no where, least of all at the place they ought to call their home. Such persons gain no respect from their brethren, —they deserve none; and their example is injurious to all who are under their influence. Confidence cannot be reposed in them. If the church prospers, it is not in consequence of their zeal or of their piety; for were it not for others of very different disposition and conduct, the society would soon fall into ruin.

Every church that is at all in a thriving state, has certain times appointed for social prayer, and an attention to those concerns which may require deliberation. It is not my present design to point out the utility and importance of such meetings. It may be enough to observe, that usually when they are neglected the church declines; the members feel less regard for each other, than they did before; they become careless about the general interests of religion; coldness and indifference succeed, and the end of vital godliness is at hand! Scarcely is there an instance of a society which has lost the purity of the gospel, or fallen to ruin by the fewness and negligence of its members, but its decline has been marked in this way. Now, what are your intentions, should you become a member of a church If God in his providence afford you opportunity, do you moan honorably and steadily to fill up your place; — or are you desiring a name and a

place in the house of the Lord, while you wish to be excused from the duties that attend it? I hope this is not the case with you; and I am the more earnest in directing your attention to this enquiry, because many will pay some attention to these things, for a time, and then they are seen no more; — their example represents it as a matter of indifference, whether they meet with their brethren or not. They give others pain by their negligence, instead of animating their piety by zeal, and are by no means so useful in the church of God as they might be.

Besides, when you are in the church fellowship, you and your brethren will be bound to watch over each other in love. With respect to moral conduct, every individual is accountable to the whole body. If anyone unhappily wanders into the ways of evil, the others ought to admonish him in the spirit of Christianity; and in some cases, they ought to exclude him. Even in lesser things, Christians may be benefited by the admonitions or hints of their brethren; and should neither be angry if their own failings are pointed out in a spirit of charity, nor, if they feel obliged to notice to a brother any serious imperfection they may have observed in his temper or conduct, ought they to carry themselves towards him in a high and imperious manner. Have you thought on these things? So far as relates to your duty to the other members of the church, are you willing to act towards them as brethren in Christ Jesus? Do you wish to cultivate a regard for those who bear the image of Christ, whatever may be their situation, and however different it may be from your own; to love as brethren, to be pitiful, to be courteous; forgiving one another if any man have a quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you? Many painful feelings are often needlessly occasioned by the absence of prudence, proper temper, and, above all, of charity or love. It would be well, if we more frequently read, with a practical application to ourselves, the admirable view given of this subject by

the Apostle Paul, I. Corinthians Chapter 13. Permit me to recommend it to your perusal, as an important lesson of Christian duty.

You will find much to blame, as well as much to praise, even in the best of men: do you wish to bear and forbear, considering that you also are imperfect, as well as others; and to do this with cheerfulness and hope, looking for the time when you and your brethren will have no imperfections to lament in the kingdom of your God? Finally, do you wish to obey the will of Christ revealed in the New Testament, making that your LAW, so far as you may be able to understand it? Less than this will not afford you satisfactory evidence of your Christian character.

And now, my good friend, when you have considered all these things, if you still desire to be found walking in the ways of the Lord, let me ask,

V. What are your wishes and hopes respecting your future conduct?

Are you able to serve God in sincerity, and to glorify him in your body and spirit, which are his! Suppose you should meet with the scorn of the world, the rebuke of your friends, and the opposition of those who fear not God — suppose difficulties on account of your religion should press upon you in future life; — can you bear the cross for the sake of Jesus Christ? Suppose the world should engage much of your regard, and ask for more; can you steadfastly keep your heart for God, and, as becometh a Christian, be obedient to his will? Suppose prosperity should be your portion, and lead you into new society and connections; can you resist their influence; still maintain a love for the truth, for the ordinances and people of God; and keep a conversation unspotted by the world? Are you able to overcome the temptations to which all are liable, and in the end to overcome?

You will say these are hard questions; who is sufficient for these things? — But since we all have to meet with difficulties, how do

you hope to succeed in resisting evil; and in following that which is good — by your own strength and resolution — or, through the grace of God giving strength equal to the day? Do you see your great need of his gracious and divine assistance, to arm your heart, and confirm your faith, and keep you in the hour of temptation? And is it your resolution, to say with the holy psalmist, I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only (Psalms. 71: 16.) All real religion is the fruit of divine influences on the heart. By these it is begun, and by these it must be sustained. Is it your happiness, from a conviction of this truth, to make conscience of prayer in secret that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help you in time of need? And, after all, do you see reason to say, I am but an unprofitable servant; I have done that which it was my duty to do, and, at best, very imperfectly; the Lord grant, that I may find mercy of the Lord, in the day of his coming?

You have, I trust, known something of the power of religion on the heart: has it induced you to hate iniquity, and to love God and holiness? Have you thereby been led to strive against temptations to evil, and to give yourself up to the good ways of the Lord? The state of the Christian's heart is never perfectly sanctified in this world: but it is an important question — is the work of sanctification really begun? One great end of the instruction and of the ordinances of the gospel is, to train us up in the knowledge of God, that we may be holy and without blame before him in love.

Religious profession is nothing, if not accompanied with a suitable walk and conversation. Few who wish to follow Christ, are ignorant what are the general duties of Christianity. But I may be permitted to add, that many who have professed the name of Jesus, act very inconsistently: some give an undue vent to their violent passions ; — some use the name of God in a manner bordering on profanity; — some shew a haughtiness of spirit to those below them,

as if they were neither brethren nor men; some a levity, as if they had forgotten every serious sentiment; and some in their conduct in the world have a number of little mean ways, so nearly allied to injustice and falsehood as to be very dishonorable. In such cases, it may be difficult to charge a person with direct immorality, where it is easy to see that there is a lamentable absence of the spirit of Jesus Christ. Whereas others ADORN the gospel of God their Saviour: in their characters you see the Christian; you feel a confidence in them as the children of your heavenly Father; and you profess the name of the Lord in such company, both with pleasure and hope.

If you are at the head of a family, where your example and influence may immediately extend to others; is it your care, your study, and your desire before God, to walk within your house with a perfect heart? (Psalms 101: 2). In the discharge of the various duties both of life and godliness, is it visible in your family that you fear God, and that the integrity, meekness, forbearance, and kindness, of the Christian character, are your ruling principles? You know that a profession of religion is not an excuse for neglecting the duties of life. The best men fill their stations with the greatest honor. And in whatever circumstances they are placed, whether high or low, they feel the importance of adopting the maxim of the Apostle, not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; (Romans 12: 11): knowing that a conscientious discharge of their duty is required of them, as the servants of the Lord Christ, and as the means of glorifying their Father which is in heaven. (Colossians. 3:24).

If either your situation in life, or your disposition, have in former times led you into the gaieties of this world, in a manner that is generally felt to be opposite to the seriousness of the Christian profession, — are you in heart desirous of giving them up, and of showing that your taste does not now lead you after those things which, perhaps, once were your highest delight!

Consider for a moment, what will be the influence of attempting to mingle together two things so discordant as those of gaiety and religion. The world will say, what do ye more than others? They will remember your profession, and will express both surprise and satisfaction, on observing your return to them. Among your Christian friends, the more grave and serious part will be hurt, and think your conduct strange; and, if they knew the state of your mind in the earlier stage of your religious inquiries will be strongly impressed with your inconsistency. The younger part, if they are warm in their attachment to godliness, and filled with a sense of its power to satisfy the heart, will be deeply wounded; while those who are carried away by your example, and the tide of its allurements, may suffer even more injury than you do, by the habits into which you may have led them. The fair prospect which they once exhibited may be clouded; and they may fall into a snare, which may be productive of bitter repentance, by the levity of those who are in the same church, and in the same common profession with themselves.

Reflect also, on the effect which your conduct may have on the young. Their impressions, as well as sentiments, much depend on what they see at home. The tendency of their hearts is to seek pleasure with eagerness. "They often copy the imperfections of professors of the gospel with more exactness than their excellencies; and they seldom fail to plead their example, when they can use it as a license for themselves. Ask, then, the serious question, when solicited to enter the circles of gay amusement — What effect will this have on my family? Is this the plan, to train up a child in the way he should go?"

If we look at facts, was it ever found that, where life was spent in frivolity and gaiety, there was any eminence in the service of God, or in conformity to his will? Such things eat out the heart of every serious sentiment; and both from their own tendency, and that of the

society which they necessarily induce; they unfit the mind for the duties of life, for the display of many parts of the Christian character, and particularly for the discharge of those duties of religion which daily call for our attention.

I do not mean at all to oppose the cheerfulness of life and society, and make Christianity gloomy or morose. No: None taste the blessings of Providence with such a relish as those who view them as the gifts of their Father who is in heaven. I do not mean to say, that there are no other evils to be avoided than these. Many, in the profession of religion, are guilty of what may be worse in the sight of God. The indulgence of the envious, much more of the malicious dispositions; — a slandering tongue; — a hard and covetous temper; — a worldliness of heart and conduct; — a tendency to intemperance, or self-indulgence to an inordinate degree; — nay, even the tattling imprudence of many may rise to an equal height of criminality before God, and be productive of equal pain among men. Yet this affords no excuse for improprieties of either kind. How much better would it be to avoid them? To follow the things wherewith one may edify another, and to impress upon our minds the important, comprehensive precept, abstain from all appearance of evil? (I Thessalonians. 5: 22).

None of these things are written to discourage you, nor to lead you so to contemplate the difficulties that attend the Christian profession as to keep you hesitating whether to follow Christ or not; — but only to suggest useful and necessary inquiries, that you may see what lies before you; examine the motives on which you get; and proceed with increasing firmness and hope. Real sincerity will always bear investigation. True faith knows the weakness of human nature, and looks to the Lord for strength as well as for justification. Wherever earnest, serious godliness, has not taken possession of the heart, a profession of religion will do no good. Such persons are not

improved by merely attending to the ordinances of God; nor is the church benefited by their influence. It is much more likely that they will do evil than good.

When we observe the careless indifference of many professors of religion, not to mention the suspicious or positively evil conduct of others, we shall be obliged, alas! To confess that genuine religious principle is too little felt. This makes it the more important for you to examine your motives. The task is serious; but be not alarmed; in the end it will be advantageous. If you find that the real spring which moves you is, faith in Christ, a desire to obey his will, and to live to the glory of God, — you will then proceed with pleasure, and the inquiry you made will much conduce to your comfort in time to come. You will find, in a day of difficulty, it will be a source of great satisfaction that you can appeal to God for the sincerity of your heart, when you gave yourself up to him; and can therefore the more boldly hope that he will help, you forward in his good ways. It will also tend to quicken you in duty, when you reflect that, though you may be surrounded with temptations of various kinds (each of which pleads some reason why you should comply with it), yet, from the motives presented, in the gospel, you began your Christian profession, and have opened your mouth unto the Lord, and cannot go back.

I might enlarge on the many advantages of church communion; — the authority of Jesus Christ; — the love you owe him; — the impossibility of filling up your Christian character properly, without obeying the positive commands of the Lord; — and the regret you may feel, when too late, at not having considered in time, and resolved to follow the Lord through evil report and through good report. I might urge upon you the example of the first Christians. I might ask you, if you should prove tardy in obeying the convictions of your conscience — how would the cause of God have ever been carried on in the world, if none had acted with more zeal than you? I

might appeal to you — how you can consider yourself as one of the friends of Christ, if ye do not what he commands you? But I forbear. Those motives, with which every Christian is acquainted, will operate, if the mind be in a proper state to attend to them. We do not want encouragement of the most pleasing kind. We are most likely to be safe in the way of duty; there, too, we shall most increase in knowledge and grace. We honor God by trusting him, and walking in his ways; and, if we are Christians, we cannot repent of having obeyed his commandments. Jesus Christ is not ashamed to call those his brethren who confess his name; and who, though they are imperfect, yet earnestly and heartily follow him in his ways. Heaven itself is but a larger and purer church; and shall we slight the church below, while seeking membership in the church above. Even here we shall not want companions who will share our sorrows, as well as partake of our joys; and can we better employ ourselves than by joining in the worship and ordinances of God, with those whose company we hope to enjoy in eternity? — No; every Christian's heart will feel the appeal, and answer — no. Well, then, — consider your duty and privilege, and act accordingly. Let not indolence or the opinion of the world, delay you; but be fervent and steady in the work of the Lord. The day of life is fast spending, and we have no time to waste. Attend to the exhortation of the Prophet — Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Micah 4: 2).

My good friend, consider these things; and may the God of grace guide and bless you! I am yours, &c.

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