

Christ and the World

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What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? — 2 Cor. 6:14

The friendship of the world is enmity with God. — James 4:4

Worldly people seem to be well aware that it is only in this life that they will be able to get vent to their worldliness. They quite count upon death putting an end to it all; and this is one of the main reasons for their dread of death, and their dislike even of the thoughts of it.

They know that there will be no “worldliness” in “the world to come”; that there will be no money-making, nor pleasure-finding, nor feasting, nor reveling; no balls, nor races, nor theaters, in heaven or in hell. Hence their eagerness to taste “life’s glad moments,” to take their fill of mirth, to make the best of this life while it lasts; and hence the origin of their motto, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Such are the out-and-out “lovers of pleasure,” the worshippers of the god of this world, the admirers of vanity, and indulgers of the flesh. They do not profess to be “religious”; but rather take pains to show that they are not so, and boast that they are not hypocrites.

But pleasure won’t do always; and this world will not last forever; and vanity will soon pass away; and the flesh will cease to satisfy. And when all these things come to an end, what will be the condition of those whose gods they were? Cheated, befooled, despairing, their blossom shall go up as dust, and they themselves shall lie down in sorrow. Their idols are broken in pieces, and they find at last that they have trusted in a lie, and that now, when most they needed succor, they have none to succor them; they are left without a god, without light, without help, without even so much as the hope of a hope, or the faintest glimmer of a dawn, in that long night which, after their merry day of pleasure, has fallen so thickly over them.

Ah, yes; the fashion of this world passeth away; and they who have followed that fashion, and identified themselves with that world, will find too late that, in gaining the world, they have lost their souls; that, in filling up time with vanity, they have filled eternity with gloom; that, in snatching at the pleasures of earth, they have lost the joys of heaven, and the glories of the everlasting inheritance. Yes, life is brief, and time is swift; generations come and go; graves open and close each day; old and young vanish out of sight; riches depart, and honors fade; autumn follows summer, and winter soon wipes out every trace of leaf and blossom; nothing abides, or remains unchanging, but the blue sky and the everlasting hills! O man, dying man, dweller on a dying earth, living amid sickbeds and deathbeds, and funerals and graves, surrounded by fallen leaves and faded blossoms, the sport of broken hopes, and fruitless joys, and empty dreams, and fervent longings, and never-healing, never-ending heartaches — O man, dying man, wilt thou still follow vanity and lies; still chase pleasure and gaiety; still sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind? After all that has been told thee of earth’s weariness, and pleasure’s emptiness; after all that thou thyself hast experienced of the poverty of all things here below; after having been so often disappointed, mocked, and made miserable by that world which thou worships; and wilt thou still pursue the lusts of the flesh, and lust of the eye, and the pride of life?

Who has felt the desolation

Of the earthquake’s dreadful reign,

And would seek the same foundation

For his peaceful bower again?

O follower of the world, consider thy ways and ponder thy prospects. Look behind thee, and see the utter emptiness of the past. Look before thee, and make sure of something better and

more substantial. Look on the right hand and on the left, and see the weary crowds, seeking rest, and finding none. Look beneath thee, to that eternal fire which is preparing for all that forget God. Look above thee, and see that bright heaven, with all its unutterable gladness, which thou art so madly despising. Think, too, of thy brief time on earth, lent thee, in God's special love, to accomplish thy preparation for the eternal kingdom. And, when thou considerest these things, rouse thyself from thy dream of pleasure, and rest not till thou hast made good the entrance at the strait gate which leadeth unto life.

But these out-and-out lovers of pleasure are, after all, not the most mysterious class, nor the most difficult to deal with: for we know exactly what they are, and what they are seeking; for they do not disguise their worldliness, nor treat it as a thing to be cloaked or apologized for.

There are other classes of a much more uncertain and indefinite kind, whose object seems to be to get hold of both worlds. They want to infuse as much religion into their life, their doings, their conversation, as will make them be reckoned religious men; at least, save them from the imputation of being worldly men. But they want also as much of worldly comfort and pleasure as will gratify the tastes of a still unrenowned nature. Their life is a compromise; and their object is to balance between two adverse interests, to adjust the conflicting claims of this world and of the world to come; to please and to serve two masters, to gratify two tastes, to walk in two opposite ways at once, to secure the friendship of the world without losing the friendship of God.

The character as well as the life of these men is undecided and feeble. They are not decided in their worldliness, and they are not decided in their religion. If they were compelled to choose between their two masters, the probability is that they would prefer the world; for their heart is not in their religion, and religion is not in their heart. Religion is irksome to them; it is a yoke, not a pleasant service. They don't want to part with it, for several good reasons; but they have no delight in it. Their consciences would not allow them to throw it off; but it occupies a very small part of their thoughts and affections. They are, in fact, worldly men varnished over with religion; that is all. They are made up of two parts, a dead and living; the living part is the world, and dead is religion.

There are many of these in our day, when religion is fashionable. When religion is unfashionable there are few; when it is scoffed at, still fewer; when it is persecuted, hardly any. But when it is in fashion, they are numerous. They may go under many names — formalists, externalists, half-hearted Christians, half-and-half disciples; they may put on more or less of religion; they may indulge more or less in worldliness; still, the class I speak of is, in all circumstances, substantially the same. They have never broken with sin, nor crucified self, nor taken up the cross. Whatever their lives or their words may be, their heart is not right with God.

Some of these are men who have been brought up in worldliness, and who have, as they grew up, added a little religion to their worldliness, to make it respectable. Others have been religiously brought up from childhood; they have been well taught in the things of Christ; they have had their religious impressions, some deeper, some shallower; and these have remained for a season, so as to mold their character and life considerably. But such feelings have never gone deep enough. They never led to the new birth; they issue in no lasting spiritual life, so that, instead of leading to the transformation of the whole man, inner and outer, they have merely religionized the outer being, leaving the inner man unmelted, unbroken, and unrenowned. The persons thus moved have gone a considerable way, but not the whole. They have been roused, but not converted. They have passed through a certain religious process, but not experienced the heavenly change, without which they cannot enter the kingdom. They have felt a good deal, read a good deal, prayed a good deal; they have not been without their earnestness and solemnity, perhaps their sighs and tears. They have been moved under sermons; roused by searching books; done many things and taken many steps which seemed to be religious. Yet, after all, there has been no broken-heartedness, no opening of the eye, no breaking off from sin, no surrender of the soul to God, no crucifixion of the old man, no resurrection to newness of life.

After a while, in such cases, a deep and settled formalism has supervened. Earnestness has faded away, and left nothing but its dregs. The soul has become sapless and insensible. The edge of feeling, both upon heart and conscience, has become blunted. The routine of religion is still gone through, and the profession still kept up; but all within is dried up and withered; there is no enjoyment of spiritual things; the service of God is a burden; praise and prayer are irksome; sermons and sacraments are wearisome; and the poor professor moves on in his heartless career; outwardly still religious, but at heart as unspiritual and worldly as if he had never at any time been touched or awakened at all.

In such a case, with a religion in which he has no enjoyment, and with a profession which brings him no liberty and no comfort, it is not wonderful that he should have recourse to the world, to fill up the dreary void within. His carnal tastes never having been radically changed, but simply over-borne for a season, by a rush of religious earnestness, he returns naturally to their gratification in their old objects, and his only restraints are the dread of a dark future, which he cannot shake off, and the desire to maintain a religious character, to stand well with religious men, and to maintain his place in the church. How many of this class there may be in our day, God only knows. We are warned that, in the last days, there will be multitudes having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

These are the ambiguous disciples of our age, who belong to Christ but in name. These are the stony-ground or thorny-ground hearers; men who have a place at our communion tables, who figure at religious committees, who make speeches on religious platforms, yet are, after all, “wells without water,” “trees without root,” stars without either heat or light.

The religion of such is but a half-and-half religion; without depth, or decision, or vigor, or self-sacrifice. It is but a picture or a statue, not a living man.

The conversion of such has been but a half-and-half conversion; it has not gone down to the lowest depths of the man’s nature. I do not say it is a pretence or a hypocrisy; but still, I say it is an unreality. It has been a movement, a shaking, a change, but it has not been a being “begotten of God,” a being “born from above.”

The discipleship of such is but a half-and-half discipleship. It has some of the aspects of discipleship; but it is not a forsaking all, and taking up the cross and following Christ. We do not count genuine the discipleship of the man who is today with Christ, tomorrow with the world; today in the sanctuary, tomorrow in the ballroom. There must be suspicion attaching to all such inconsistent discipleship; it is both cold and hot; it is both worldly and unworldly; it is both Christian and un-Christian — what can it be? — what can it mean?

In speaking of such inconsistencies, we must be faithful and direct. We are not to prophesy smooth things, and hint at certain evils, as if they were but minor imperfections, the quiet removal of which would set all to rights. No; we must strike deeper than this. We must lay the axe to the root of the tree, and say at once, that such inconsistencies betray the utter unsoundness of the man’s whole religious profession. It is not that there are some flaws in his religious life; it is that his religion itself is hollow — without foundation, without root or soil. I will not say it is all a lie; for there is sometimes a certain amount of good intention in it; but it is all a mistake — a mighty and terrible mistake; a mistake which, if not rectified at once, must issue in the fearful darkness and woeful disappointment of an undone eternity!

Such a man’s whole religious life is one grand misconception; and every step he takes in it is a blunder, and a stumble, and a snare. Let such a man know that, in his present half-worldly, half-religious condition, he has no real religion at all. It is a fiction, a delusion. It will stand no test of law or gospel, or conscience or of discipline, of time or of eternity. It will go to pieces with the first touch. It is all hollow, and must be begun again, from the very first stone of the foundation.

If, then, O worldly formalist, thou wouldst make sure thy hope, and obtain a discipleship that will stand all tests, begin this day at the beginning. Count all the past but loss. Fling away thy vain hopes and self-righteous confidences. Give up thy fond idea of securing both earth and

heaven. Go straight to Calvary; there be thou crucified to the world, and world to thee, by the cross of Christ. Go straight to the grave of Christ; there bring all thy sins, thy worldliness, thy half-heartedness, and all pertaining to thy old self, that being made partaker of Christ's death and burial, thou mayest be sharer of His resurrection too. Go at once to Him who died and rose again, and drink into His love. One draught, nay, one drop of that love will forever quench your love of sin, and be the death of that worldliness which threatens to be your eternal ruin. The love of Christ will not only make you an out and out Christian, a thorough-going, decided man in all the things of God, but it will pour in a peace which you have never known, which you cannot know, save in simple faith in the heavenly Peacemaker, and in entire surrender of soul to Him who gave Himself for us, that He might deliver us from a present evil world, according to the will of God our Father.