



A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life

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About this book

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Chapter I

Chapter I

Concerning the Nature and Extent of Christian Devotion

Devotion is neither private nor public prayer; but prayers, whether private or public, are particular parts or instances of devotion. Devotion dignifies a life given or devoted to God.

He therefore is the devout man, who lives do longer to his own will, or the will and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in every thing, who serves God in every thing, who touches all, the parts of his common life, parts of piety, by doing every thing in the name of God!, lived under such rules » are conformable to his glory.

We readily acknowledge, that God alone is to be the measure and measure of our prayers, that in them we are to look wholly unto him, and act wholly for him, that we are only to pray in such a manner, for such things, and such ends as are suitable to his glory.

Now let any one but find out the reason why he is to be thus strictly pious in his prayers, and he will find the same as strong a reason to be as strictly pious in all the other parts of his life. For there is not the

least shadow of a reason, why we should make God the rule and measure of our prayers, why we should then look wholly 'unto him' to pray according to his will ; but what

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equally proves it necessary for us to look wholly unto God, and make him the rule and measure of all the other actions of our life. For any ways of life, any employment of our talents, whether of our parts, our time or money, that is not strictly according to the will of God, that is not for such ends as are suitable to his glory, are as great absurdities and failings, as prayers that are not according to the will of God. For there is no other reason, why our prayers should be according to the will of God, why they should have nothing in them, but what is wise, and holy, and heavenly, there is no other reason for this, but that our lives may be of the same nature, full of the same wisdom, holiness and heavenly tempers, that we may live unto God in the same spirit that we pray unto him. Were it not our strict duty to live by reason, to devote all the actions of our lives to God, were it not absolutely necessary to walk before him in wisdom and holiness and all heavenly conversation, doing every thing in his name, and for his glory, there would be no excellency or wisdom in the most heavenly prayers. Nay, such prayers would be absurdities, they would be like prayers for wings, when it was no part of our duty to fly.

As sure therefore as there is any wisdom in praying for the spirit of God, so sure is it, that we are to make that Spirit the rule of all our actions ; as sure as it is our duty to look wholly unto God in our prayers, so sure is it, that it is our duty to live wholly unto God in our lives. But we can no more be said to live unto God, unless we live unto him in all the ordinary actions of our life, unless he be the rule and measure of all our ways, than we can be said to pray unto God, unless our prayers look wholly unto him. So that unreasonable and absurd ways of life, whether in labour or diversion, whether they consume our time or our money, are like unreasonable and absurd prayers, and are as truly an offence unto God.

It is for want of knowing,~or at least considerii^ this, that we see such a mixture of ridicule in the lives of many people. You see them strict as to some times and places of de'Votion ; but when the service of the church is over, they are but Uke those that seldom or sever cgo»

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itiere. la their way of life, their maDoer of ipendiop their time aad taoaej, ia their cares and fean, iQ their pleasures and initulgeaces, io their labour aDd diTenions they are tike therest of the world. Tliis makea the loose ' part of the world generally make a jest of those that are devout, becatise they see their derotioa goes do ferther tbaa their prayers, and that when they are overy they U?e no more unto God, till the time of prayer retoms again ; but Uve by the same hg-monr and fancy, and in as ManeDjoyiBentofaU the ibllies of Ufc, as other people. This is the reason why they are the jest and scorn of careless and worldly people ; not because they are really ' derot^d to God, but because they appear to hare no otb- ei devotion, but thatofocasiwial prayen.

Julius is very fearful of missing prayers ; all the parish Buppodes Julius to be sick, if he is not at church. But if yoa was to ask him why he spends the rest of his time hy boinour or chance I why he is. a companion of the ailUest people in their most ully pleasures ? why is he ready for every impertinent entertainment and diversion I If you was to ask him why there is no amusement too trifluig to please him ? why he is busy at alf Stalls and assemblies I why he gives himself up to an idle gossiping ctmveraation I why he Uves in foolish friendships and fondness for particular persons, that neither want nor deserve any particular kindness? why he allows him- self in foolish hatreds and resentment) against parrici> lu persons, without considering that he is to love every body as himself i If you ask him why he never puts hu coaversion, his time, and fortune under the rules (tf religion, JuUus has no more to say for himself, than the most disorderly person. For the whole tenor of Scrip- ture lies as directly against such a life, as .against de- bauchery and intemper-

ance : He that hves in such a course of idleness and folly, lives no more according to the religion of Jesus Christ, than he that lives in gluttony and intemperance.

If a man was to tell Julius" that there was no occasion for so much constancy at prayers, and that he might, without any harm to himself, neglect the service of the church, as the generabty of people do, Julius would think such a one to be no Christiitn, aiul that be ougb*
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to aroid his compwy. Bat if a person only tetla him . that he may live as the generality of the worid doea. that se may eajoy himself as others do ; - that he may spend his time and mooey as people of fashion do, that he may conforma to the follies and frailties of the generality, and gratify his tempera and passions aa most people do, Julius nevev suspece that man to want a Chmtian B[Hrit, Or that be is doing the devil's work. ,

And yet if Jalius was (o read all the Nevf Testament from the beginning to the end, he would fkid his coime of life condemned in every page of it.

And indeed there cannot a^y thing be imagined more absurd in itself, than wise and sublime, and heavenly^

f)rayers added to a life of ranify and folly, where neither abour nor diversions, neither time nor money, are under the direction of the wisdom and heavenly tempers of oar prayers. If we were to see a man pretending to act wholly with regard .to Ood in every thing that he did, that would neither spend time nor money, or take any labour or diversion, but ao far as he could act' according to strict principles of reason and piety, andyetat-tfae same time neglect all prayer, whether public or private, should we not be amazed at such a man, and wonder bow ha could have so much folly along with so much religion T

Yet this is as reasonable as for any person to pretend 4o strictness in

devotion, to be careful of observing times and places of prayer, and yet letting the rest of his life, fail time and labour, his talents and money be (Ksposed of, without any regard to strict rules of piety and devotion, for it is as great an absurdity to suppose holy prayers, and divine petitions, without an holiness of life suitable to them, as to suppose a holy and divine life without prayers.

Let any one therefore think, how easily he could counterfeit a man that pretended a great strictness of life without prayer, and the same arguments will as plainly confute another, that pretends to strictness of prayer, without carrying the same strictness into every other part of life. For to be weak and foolish in spending our time and fortune is no greater a mistake, than to be weak and fond of prayers. And to

It is evident! AND HOLD UP.

to rely on ourselves in any way of life that neither are nor can be offered to God, is the same irreligion as to neglect our prayers, or use them in such a manner, as make them an offering unworthy of God.

The short of the matter is this, either reason and religion prescribe rules and ends to all the ordinary actions of our life, or they do not: If they do, then it is as necessary to govern all our actions by those rules, as it is necessary to worship God. For if religion teaches as any thing concerning eating and drinking, or spending of time and money, if it teaches us how we are to use and condemn the world; if it tells us what tempers we are to have in common life, how we are to be disposed towards all people. How we are to behave towards the King, the poor, the old and destitute; if it tells us whom we are to treat with a particular love, whom we are to regard with a particular esteem: if it tells us how we are to treat our enemies, and how we are to mortify and deny ourselves, he may be very weak, that can think the parts of religion are not to be observed with as much exactness, as any doctrine that relates to prayers.

It is very observable, that there is not one command in all the gospel for public worship; and perhaps it is a duty that is least insisted

upon in scripture of any other. The frequent attendance at it is never so much as mentioned in all the New Testament. Whereas that religion Or devotion, which is to govern the ordinary actions of our life, is to be found in almost every verse of scripture, Our blessed Saviour and his apostles are wholly taken up in doctrines that relate to common life. They call OS to renounce the world, and differ in every temper and way of life, from the spirit and way of the world. To renounce all its goods, to fear none of its evils, to reject its joys, and have no value for its happiness. ' To be as new born babes, that are born into a new state of things, to live as pilgrims in spiritual watching, in holy fear, and heavenly aspiring after another life. To take up our daily cross, to deny ourselves, to profess the blessedness* of mourning, to seek the blessedness of poverty of spirit. To forsake the pride and vanity of riches, to take no thought for the morrow, to live in the profoundest state of humility, to rejoice in worldly sufferings. To reject

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the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life;* to bear injuries, to forgive and bless our enemies," 'And to love mankind as God loveth them. To give up our whole hearts and affections to God, and strive to enter through the straight gate into a life of eternal glory.

This is the common devotion which our blessed Saviour taught, in order to make it the common life of all Christians. Is it not therefore exceeding strange, that people should place so much piety in the attendance of public worship, concerning which there is not one precept of our Lord's to be found, and yet neglect these common duties of our ordinary life, which are commanded in every page of the gospel? I call these duties the devotion of our common life, because if they are to be practised, they must be made parts of our common life, they can have no place any where else.

If contempt of the world, and heavenly affection, is a necessary temper of Christians, it is necessary that this temper appear in the whole course of their lives, in their manner of using the world, because it

can have no place any where else.

If self-denial be a condition of salvation, j^lt- that would be saved must make it a part of theif Odfinfry hfe. If humility be a Christian duty, then, the.cOmmoa life of a Christian is to be .a constant course of humility in all its kiqds. If poverty of spirit be necessary, it must be the spirit and temper of every day' of our bves. If we are to relieve the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, it must be ihc common charity of our lives, as far as we can render ourselves able to perform it. If we are to love our enemies, we must make our common Ufe a visible ex- ercise and demonstration of that love. If content and thankfulness, if the patient bearing of evil be duties to God, they are the duties of every day, and in every cir- cumstance of our life. If we are to be wise and holy as the new-bom sons of God, we can no otherwise be so^ but by renouncing every thing that is foolish and vain ta every partof our common life. If we are to be in Christ new crealure?, we must shew that we are so, by having new ways of living in the wori(l^ If we are to follow

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Christ, it must be in our commoa way of spending; ever;

Thus it is in all the virtaes and holy tempen of Chrit- tiaiuQr, they are not ours, uoless they be the virtues and lempeis of Our ordinary life. So that Christiani^ is ho far nam leaving as to live in the common ways of life, conforming to the folly of customs, and gratifying the passions and tempeTs which the spirit of the world de- lights in, it i9 so far from indulging ns in any of these diiQji, that all its virtues which it makes necessary to jalration, are only so m-.iny ways of living above, and contrary to the worlil in all the common actions of our fife. If our common hfe is not a common course of hu- mility, self-denial, renunciation of the world, poverty of Bpirit, and heavenly affection, we do not live tiie lives of Christians.

But yet though it is thus plain, that this and this alone is Chmtiin- ity, an uniform, open, and visible practice of sj! these virtaes ; yet

it is as plain, that there is little or nothing of this to be found, even amongst the better sort of people. You 'see them often at church, and pleased with line preachers ; but look into their lives, and yon see them iust'the same sort of people as others are, that make no pretences to devotion. The difERENCE that yo» find betwixt theoi. Is only the difERENCE of their natural tempers. They have the same taste of the world, the same worldly cares, and fears, and joys; they have the same turn of mind, equally vain in their desires. You see the same fondness for state and equipage, the same pride and vanity of dress, the same self-love and indul- gence, the same foolish friendships and groundless ha- tred, the same levity of mind and trifling spirit, the same fondness of diversions, the same idle dispositions and vain ways of spending their tirite in visiting and conversation, as the rest of 3ie world, that make no pretences to devotion.

I do not mean tfafs comparison betwixt people seem- ingly good and professed rakes, but betwixt people of sober Wtes. Let us take an instance in two modest wo- men: let it he supposed, that one of them is careful of times* of devotion, and observes them through a sense of duty, and that the other has «o hearij concern about ity

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fent is at church Mldetn or (Aea, juat tu it happen^f Now it is a very easy thing to see this difERENCE betwixt -'these persons. But when you have seen this^ can yon find any farther ditference betwixt them? Can you find that their common life is of a dtfiereut Jdndl Are not the tempers, and customa, and manners of the oiie, of the same kind as of the other? Do they live as if they belonged to dif- ferent worlds, had different views in that beads, and different rules and measures of all their ac- tions ? Have they not the same goods and evils, are they not pleased and displeased in the same manner, and for the same things? Do they not Uve in the same course of life I Daeg one seem to be of this world, looking at the things that are temporal, and the other to be of another world, looking wholly at the things that are eternal ?-~ Does the one live in pleasure, de- lighting herself in show or dress, and the other live in selt-denial

and mortification, renouncing every thing that looks like vanity either of person, dress, or carriage ? Does the one follow public diversions, and trifle away her time in idle visits and corrupt conversation ; and does the other study all the arts of improving her time, living in prayer and watching, and such good works as may make all her time turn to her advantage, and be placed to her account at the last day? Is the one careless of expense, and glad to be able

to adorn herself with every costly ornament of dress ?

and does the other consider her fortune as a talent given her by God, Which is to be improved religiously, and no more to be spent in vain and needless ornaments, than it is to be buried in the earth ?

Where must you look to find one person of religion differing in this manner, from another that has none ? — And yet, if they do not differ in these things, which are here related, can it with any sense be said, the one is a good Christian and the other not ?

Take another instance amongst the men. Leo has a great deal of good nature, has kept what they call good company, hates every thing that is false and base ; Is very generous and brave to his friends, but has concerned himself so little with religion, that he hardly knows the difference betwixt a Jew and a Christian.

Eusebius, on the other hand, has had early impressions

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of piety, and buys bodu of devotion. He is all in all the teachers and fasts of the church, and known to the wiser men that have been eminent for piety.— Too avaricious to wear or make a joote jest ; and when he thought of religion, he talked of it, in a matter of fact last conclusion.

Here you see that one person has religion enough, according to the wish of the World, to be reckoned a pious Christian, while the other is so far from all appearance of religion, that he may fairly be reckoned a Heathen) and yet if you look into their common hearts, if you

esaa^ it>e their chief and roling ten^>eFs in the greatest articles ☒ oflife, or the ereatwl doctrines of Christianily, you mil find the least ditn:[«n(-« imaginable.

Consider them with regard to the use t^ the world, be- caose there is what every body can see.

Now to have right notions add tempera with relation to this world, is as eiaenlial to rLigioo, as ta have right uotioDS of God. And it is as possible for a man to wor- diip a crocodile, and yet be a pious man, as to have his auctions set upiM this world, and yet be a good Chris- tiao.

But now, if you consider Leo and Eusebius in this rd- ☒pect, you nill find .them exactly alike, seeking, using, sttd enjoyii^; all that can be got in this world, in the ☒ame manner and for the same ends. You will find that riches, prosperity, pleasures, indulgences, state, equip- ^e, and faouMir are just as much the happiness of Euse- Woe as they Ce of Leo. And yet if Christianity has not changed a man's mind and temper with relation to these dungs, what can we say that it has done for him ?

For if the doctrines of Christianity were practised, Oiety world Hi- ake a nan as different from other people as to all worldly tempers, sensual pleasures, and the pride of life, as a wise man is different from s natural ; 'it would be as easy a thing to know a Christian by his out- ward course of life, as it is now difficult to find any body that Ures it For it is notorious that Christians are now not only tike other men in their frailties and infirmi- ties, this might be in some degree excusable ; but the complaint is, they are like heathens in all the main and Gtyef articleg of |beir lires. They enjoy the irof Id, w4

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Jire every day in lie same tempere, mm) the same designs, 'Bod the same indulgencei, as 'they did who knew not God, nor of any hap- piness in aoother life. Every body, that is capable of any reSection, mast hftTe observed, that this is generally <the state even of devout people, whether men or wom«i. You may see them different ftoiD

other people so far as to times and places of prayer, but generally like the rest of the world in all the other parts of their lives. That is, adding Chri[^]an devotion to an heathen hfe : I have the authority of our blessed Saviour for this remark, where he says, Take no thought, toying what shalt we «U, or 'what thall we' drink., or wher[^] TDitkUthaiiwebe clothed? for after all these things do the Gtntitee *eek. But if to be thus aflecM^d even with the neceBsary things of this |ife, shews that we are not yet of a Christian spirit, bat are like tb« heathens ; surely to enjoy the vani[^] and fbllly of the world aslbey did, to be like them in the main chief tempers of our lives,- in selA love end indu[^]nce, in sensual pleasures and diversions, in (he vani[^] of dress, (he love of show and greatness, or any o(her gaudy distinction of fortune, is a much greater sign of a heathen temper. And consequently they who ' add devotion to such a life, must be said to pray as Christians, but Uve as heatbeus.