















# NEXT STEPS

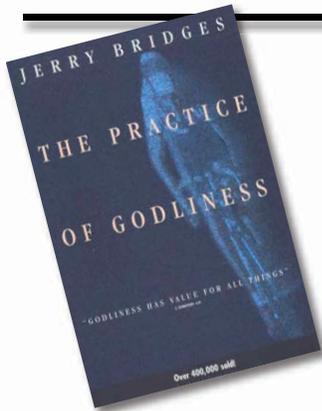


WEEK 4

...keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good;  
keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

— 2 TIMOTHY 4:5 (MSG)

Well, you're into the third week of the BASIC Training series. By now you should be taking some NEXT STEPS to help you in your spiritual journey. You can always go back do one of the NEXT STEPS from previous weeks. It's completely up to you. But keep reading, sharing, listening, thinking, and growing.



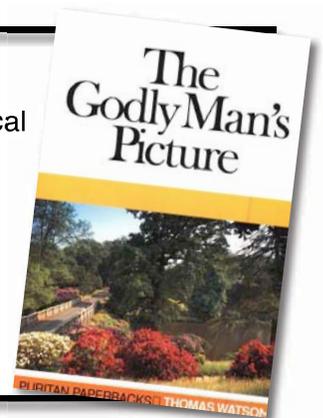
## 1. READ "THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS"

Scripture tells us the God has given us "everything we need for life and godliness." But what makes a Christian godly? In *The Practice of Godliness*, Jerry Bridges examines what it means to grow in Christian character and helps us establish the foundation upon which that character is built. Bridges opens our eyes to see how character formation affects the way we relate to God, to ourselves, and to others. You can pick up a copy of the book in the church book store on Sunday, or order the audio book online at:

[http://christianaudio.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=133](http://christianaudio.com/product_info.php?products_id=133)

## 2. READ "THE GODLY MAN'S PICTURE"

This is one of my favorite books. It was written in the 1600s, but is as practical today as it was the day it was first published. Thomas Watson paints a compelling and convicting portrait of what a godly man should look like according to the Scriptures. A godly man is a man of knowledge who is moved by faith, fired with love, who prizes Christ, loves the Word, and exhibits humility, sincerity, and thankfulness. Pick up a copy in the church bookstore on Sunday. See some excerpts on the back.



## 3. READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

Ready for some challenging reading? Then grab a cup of coffee, find a quiet place, and spend some time with the likes of Piper, Spurgeon, and a relative unknown named William S. Plumer.

*Peculiar Doctrines, Public Morals, and the Political Welfare* by John Piper  
*The Profit of Godliness In This Life* by C. H. Spurgeon  
*Vital Godliness: A Treatise on Experimental and Practical Piety* by William S. Plumer  
*Have You Set Your Mind On True Godliness?* by Willem Teellinck

## 4. LISTEN TO THE SERMON SERIES "TRAINING FOR GODLINESS"

When was the last time you listened to a sermon by an Anglican minister? Well, here's your chance. Listen to these four highly practical messages by Australian, Mark Calder. He covers four topics: Admitting the Need, Changing the Diet, Purging the Pantry, and Exercise.



The following quotes are taken from Thomas Watson's *The Godly Man's Picture*.

### **A Godly Man Is Like God**

"A godly man bears God's name and image; godliness is Godlikeness. It is one thing to profess God, another thing to resemble him." – Page 32

"God's power makes him mighty; his mercy makes him lovely; but his holiness makes him glorious. The holiness of God is the intrinsic purity of his nature and his abhorrence of sin. A godly man bears some kind of analogy with God in this." – Page 32

"The godly set themselves against evil, both in purpose and in practice. They are fearful of that which looks like sin." – Page 33

"Many pretend to love Christ as a Saviour but hate him as he is the Holy One." – Page 34

### **A Godly Man is Fired with Love to God**

"As faith enlivens, so love sweetens every duty." – Page 30

"A godly man loves God and therefore delights to be in his presence; he loves God and therefore takes comfort in nothing without him." – Page 30

"Let us test our godliness by this touch-stone: Do we love God? Is he our treasure and centre? Can we, with David, call God our 'joy', yes, our 'exceeding joy'? Do we delight in drawing near to him, and 'come before his presence with singing'? Do we love him for his beauty more than his jewels? Do we love him when he seems not to love us?" – Page 31

"Many court him, but few love him. People are for the most part eaten up with self-love; they love their ease, their worldly profit, their lusts, but they do not have a drop of love to God." – Page 31

### **A Godly Man is Moved by Faith**

"Faith enlivens the grace; not a grace stirs up till faith sets it working." – Page 28

"When I believe God's love to me, this makes me weep that I should sin against so good a God." – Page 28

### **A Godly Man is a Man of Knowledge**

"True knowledge brings a man out of love with himself. The more he knows, the more he blushes at his own ignorance." – Page 23

"Though God requires knowledge of God more than burnt offerings, (Hos. 6:6), yet it is a knowledge accompanied by obedience. True knowledge not only improves a Christian's sight, but improves his pace." – Page 24

"Knowledge which is not applied will only light a man to hell. It would be better to live a savage than to die an infidel under the gospel." – Page 26

"Saving knowledge is not by speculation, but by inspiration." – Page 27

# Peculiar Doctrines, Public Morals, and the Political Welfare

Reflections on the Life and Labor of William Wilberforce

By John Piper

Excerpted introduction from a biography on the life of William Wilberforce

If you want to understand and appreciate *The Life and Labor of William Wilberforce*, one of the wisest things you can do is to read his own book, *A Practical View of Christianity* first, and then read biographies. The book was published in 1797 when Wilberforce was 37 years old and had been a member of the British Parliament already for 16 years. The book proved incredibly popular for the time. It went through five printings in six months and was translated into five foreign languages. The book makes crystal clear what drives Wilberforce as a person and a politician. And if you don't see it first in his book, chances are you may not find it clearly in the biographies.

What made Wilberforce tick was a profound Biblical allegiance to what he called the "peculiar doctrines" of Christianity. These, he said, give rise, in turn, to true affections – what we might call "passion" or "emotions" – for spiritual things, which, in turn, break the power of pride and greed and fear, and then lead to transformed morals which, in turn, lead to the political welfare of the nation. He said, "If . . . a principle of true Religion [i.e., true Christianity] should . . . gain ground, there is no estimating the effects on public morals, and the consequent influence on our political welfare."

But he was no ordinary pragmatist or political utilitarian, even though he was one of the most practical men of his day. He was a doer. One of his biographers said, "He lacked time for half the good works in his mind." James Stephen, who knew him well, remarked, "Factories did not spring up more rapidly in Leeds and Manchester than schemes of benevolence beneath his roof." "No man," Wilberforce wrote, "has a right to be idle." "Where is it," he asked, "that in such a world as this, [that] health, and leisure, and affluence may not find some ignorance to instruct, some wrong to redress, some want to supply, some misery to alleviate?" In other words, he lived to do good – or as Jesus said, to let his light shine before men that they might see his good deeds and give glory to his Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

But he was practical with a difference. He believed with all his heart that new affections for God were the key to new morals (or manners, as they were sometimes called) and lasting political reformation. And these new affections and this reformation did not come from mere ethical systems. They came from what he called the "peculiar doctrines" of Christianity. For Wilberforce, practical deeds were born in "peculiar doctrines." By that term he simply meant the central distinguishing doctrines of human depravity, divine judgment, the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross, justification by faith alone, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the practical necessity of fruit in a life devoted to good deeds.

He wrote his book, *A Practical View of Christianity*, to show that the "Bulk" of Christians in England were merely nominal because they had abandoned these doctrines in favor of a system of ethics and had thus lost the power of ethical life and the political welfare. He wrote:

"The fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines insensibly gained strength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Christianity went more and more out of sight, and as might naturally have been expected, the moral system itself also began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment."

He pled with nominally Christian England not to turn "their eyes from the grand peculiarities of Christianity, [but] to keep these ever in view, as the pregnant principles whence all the rest must derive their origin, and receive their best support."

Knowing Wilberforce was a politician all his adult life, never losing an election from the time he was 21 years old, we might be tempted to think that his motives were purely pragmatic – as if he should say, “if Christianity works to produce the political welfare, then use it.” But that is not the spirit of his mind or his life. In fact, he believed that such pragmatism would ruin the very thing it sought, the reformation of culture.

Take the example of how people define sin. When considering the nature of sin, Wilberforce said, the vast Bulk of Christians in England estimated the guilt of an action “not by the proportion in which, according to scripture, [actions] are offensive to God, but by that in which they are injurious to society.” Now, on the face of it that sounds noble, loving, and practical. Sin hurts people, so don’t sin.

Wouldn’t that definition of sin be good for society? But Wilberforce says, “Their slight notions of the guilt and evil of sin [reveal] an utter [lack] of all suitable reverence for the Divine Majesty. This principle [reverence for the Divine Majesty] is justly termed in Scripture, ‘The beginning of wisdom’ [Psalm 111:10].” And without this wisdom, there will be no deep and lasting good done for man, spiritually or politically. Therefore, the supremacy of God’s glory in all things is what he calls “the grand governing maxim” in all of life. The good of society may never be put ahead of this. It dishonors God and defeats the good of society. For the good of society, the good of society must not be the primary good.

A practical example of how his mind worked would be the practice of dueling. Wilberforce hated the practice of dueling – the practice that demanded a man of honor to accept a challenge to a duel when another felt insulted. Wilberforce’s close friend and Prime Minister, William Pitt, actually fought a duel with George Tierney in 1798, and Wilberforce was shocked that the Prime Minister would risk his life and the nation in this way. Many opposed it on its human unreasonableness. But Wilberforce wrote:

“It seems hardly to have been noticed in what chiefly consists its *essential* guilt; that it is a deliberate preference of the favor of man, before the favor and approbation of God, *in articulo mortis* [“at the point of death”], in an instance, wherein our own life, and that of a fellow creature are at stake, and wherein we run the risk of rushing into the presence of our Maker in the very act of offending him.”

In other words, offending God is the essential consideration, not killing a man or imperiling a nation. That is what makes Wilberforce tick. He was not a political pragmatist. He was a radically God-centered Christian who was a politician.

## THE PROFIT OF GODLINESS IN THIS LIFE

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 19, 1870,  
BY C. H. SPURGEON,  
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

**“Bodily exercise profits little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.”**

**1 Timothy 4:8, 9**

YOUR attention will be the more readily given to this passage, because Paul declares it to be a “faithful”—a most true and certain saying—and “worthy of all acceptance,” that is to say, worthy to be received and practiced by us all. Paul has four of these faithful sayings. The first, occurs in 1 Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” The second is our text. The third is in 2 Timothy 2:12, “It is a faithful saying, if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” And the fourth is in Titus 3:8, “This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.”

We may trace a connection between these faithful sayings. The first one lays the foundation of our eternal salvation in the free Grace of God, as shown to us in the mission of the great Redeemer. The next affirms the double blessedness which we obtain through this salvation—the blessings of the upper and nether springs of time and of eternity. The third shows one of the duties to which the chosen people are called—we are ordained to suffer for Christ with the promise that “if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” The last sets forth the active form of Christian service, bidding us diligently to maintain good works. Thus we have the root of salvation in free Grace.

Next, we have the privileges of that salvation in the life which now is, and in that which is to come. And we have also the two great branches of suffering with Christ and serving with Christ, loaded with the fruits of the Spirit. Let us treasure up these faithful sayings. Let them be the guides of our life, our comfort, and our instruction. The Apostle of the Gentiles proved them to be faithful. They are faithful still, not one word shall fall to the ground. They are worthy of all acceptance, let us accept them now and prove their faithfulness. Let these four faithful sayings be written on the four corners of your house.

Today we consider the second of the four, and we will read the text again, “Bodily exercise profits little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” In the days when Paul wrote this Epistle, the Greeks and others paid great attention to physical culture, the development of the muscles, the proportion of the limbs, the production of everything in the body which might conduce to the soundness of manhood. The philosophy of Greece all looked that way, and therefore at the various gymnasia bodily exercises of an athletic and even violent kind were undergone by men with the view of developing the body, and so assisting the soul.

It may be that Timothy, being yet a young man, fancied that there was something in this philosophy. And something, indeed, there is. In the original the Apostle Paul admits that it is so, for the passage might be read thus—“Bodily exercise verily profits a little,” or thus, “Bodily exercise profits for a short time.” Physical training is of some service— attention to it is not sinful nor to be condemned. It is of some use and has its proper place, but still it has no very eminent position in the Christian system. It occupies a place far in the background in the teaching of Christ and His Apostles. It is but a minor part of a complete education. It profits a little, a little, for a little time.

But *godliness*, the worship of God, the fear of God, has a long and wealthy entail of blessing, having the promise both of the life that now is and of that which is to come. Its profiting is not little but great. Its benefit is not confined to the body, but is shared by the body and the soul. It is not limited by this mortal life, but overleaps the grave and brings its largest revenue of profit in the world where graves are all unknown.

This morning I am about to try and speak upon the profit of godliness to a man in this life. We will consider its having the promise of the life to come, in the evening, if God spares us.

With regard to this life, let it be remarked that the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ neither undervalues nor overvalues this present life. It does not sneer at this life as though it were nothing. On the contrary, it ennoble it, and shows the relation which it has to the higher and eternal life. It does not overvalue it by making this life, and the secular pursuits of it, the main object of any man. It puts it into an honorable but yet a secondary place, and says to the sons of men, "Seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness. And all these things shall be added unto you."

It is not, however, very easy to keep to the middle point of exact truth as to a due estimate of this present life—he who does so is taught of God. There are many who undervalue this life—let me mention some of them to you. Those undervalue it who sacrifice it to indulge their passions, or to gratify their appetites. Too many, for the sake of momentary gratifications, have shortened their lives and rendered their latter end bitterly painful to themselves. They conceived that the pleasures of the flesh were better than life. They were mistaken in their estimate. They made but a poor exchange when they chose lust and death, rather than purity and life.

The drunkard has been known to take his cups, though he knew that in so doing he was virtually poisoning himself. The man of hot passions has been seen to plunge into uncleanness, though the consequences of his folly have been plainly set before him. Men who for a morsel of meat, or a flash of merriment, are selling this world as well as the world to come, are fools, indeed. He that would have pleasure must not pursue it too furiously. Temperance is the rule here—moderation and the use, not excess and the abuse—will secure to us the pleasure even of this mortal life. Value not, I pray you, the transient joys which the animal appetites can bring to you. At least value them not so much as to shorten life for their sakes.

Some evidently undervalue their lives because they make them wretched through envy. Others are richer than they are, and they think it a miserable thing to be alive at all while others possess more of this world's goods than they. They walk, they say, and toil while yonder person, who has no more deserts than they, is riding in his chariot. So, indeed, they count the *chariot* the main thing and not the life, and they will not enjoy their life because they cannot have a certain coveted addition which another possesses.

Haman is not grateful for all the mercies of life while unbending Mordecai sits in the king's gate. He counts his honey to be bitterness because he cannot lord it at his will. God gets no thanks at all from the man for the innumerable mercies which he has. These are nothing. He pines for some particular supposed mercy which he has not. He considers that the fact of his being alive, and being favored of God in many respects, is nothing at all to be considered, because he has not all that big avarice might wish for. O poison not life by the envy of others, for if you do so, you miserably undervalue it!

The slaves of avarice undervalue their lives, for they do not care to make life happy, but pinch themselves in order to accumulate wealth. The miser who starves himself in order that he may fill his bags may well be reasoned with in this way—"Is not the life more than the meat, and the body than raiment? Skin for skin, yes, all that other men have will they give for their lives. But you give your life for this wealth, this glittering dust. You are willing to forego all the enjoyments that this life might afford you, that you may have a heap to leave to your uncertain heirs, who will probably squander it, and certainly forget the hands that scraped the hoard together."

Why should I throw away myself for the sake of dying rich? Is it true success in life to have enjoyed nothing, to have poisoned all my existence merely that the world might be informed in a corner of the Illustrated News that I died worth so many thousands of pounds? This is to undervalue life, indeed.

So, also, do they undervalue it who in foolhardiness are ready to throw it away on the slightest pretext. He that for his country's sake, or for the love of his fellow creature, risks life and loses it, truly deserves to be called a hero. But he, who, to provoke laughter and to win the applause of fools, will venture limb and life without need is but a fool himself, and deserves no praise whatever. He undervalues life who will display an art which endangers it, or who will run the risk of it for anything whatever short of the laudable motive of preserving liberty to his country, or life to his fellow men.

Holy Scripture never teaches us to undervalue our own lives. He that said, "You shall not kill," meant that we were not to kill *ourselves* any more than others. We ought to seek by all we can do in the surroundings of our habitations, by our cleanliness, by carefully observing sanitary laws, by never encouraging dangerous exhibitions, and by every other means to show our care of the life that now is, for it is a precious thing.

Yet, my Brethren, there can be such a thing as *overvaluing* this life, and multitudes have fallen into *that* error. Those overvalue it who prefer it to eternal life. Why, it is but as a drop compared with the ocean, if you measure time with eternity. Seventy or eighty years of dwelling here below—what are they when compared with infinite ages of existence in the Presence of the Most High? I reckon that this present life is not worthy to be compared with the Glory that shall be revealed in us.

When men in fearful moments have denied the faith for the sake of saving their lives, they have overvalued this life. When to preserve themselves from the sword, or the fire, or the tortures of the rack, they have denied the name of Jesus, they have made a mistake and exchanged gold for dross. Alas, how many of us, in like condition, might have fallen into the same error? They overvalue this life who consider it to be a better thing than Divine love, for the love of God is better than life—His loving kindness is better than life itself.

Some would give anything for their lives, but they would give nothing for God's love. If their lives were in danger, they would hasten to the physician, but though they enjoy not the love of God they yet sit at ease, and seek not the priceless benefit. They who feel aright think it a cheap thing to die, but an awful thing to live apart from God. They recognize that life would be but death unless God were with us, and that death itself is but the vestibule of life while God is our joy and our strength! Let us never set the present life before Divine love, and never let it be compared even for a moment with the pursuit of God's Glory.

Every Christian man is to feel that he is to take care of his life in comparison with any earthly glory. But if it comes to a choice between God's Glory and his life, he is to have no timorous hesitation in the matter, but at once sacrifice his life freely at his Lord's altar. This has been ever the spirit of true Christians. They have never been anxious to die, nor have they been fearful concerning the loss of life. They have not thrown away their lives—they have known their value too well—but they have not withheld their lives for Christ's sake. They have esteemed Him to be better than life itself. So you see the Scripture teaches us that there is a proper middle course in estimating this present life, and if we follow its instructions, we shall neither undervalue nor overvalue it.

It appears from the text, that godliness influences this present life, puts it in its true position, and becomes profitable to it.

I. First, let me observe that GODLINESS CHANGES THE TENURE OF THE LIFE THAT NOW IS. It has "the promise of the life that now is." I want you to mark the words—"it has the promise of the life that now is." An ungodly man lives, but how? He lives in a very different respect from a godly man. Sit down in the cell of Newgate with a man condemned to die. That man lives, but he is reckoned dead in Law. He has been condemned. If he is now enjoying a reprieve, yet he holds his life at another's pleasure, and soon he must surrender it to the demands of justice. I, sitting by the side of him, breathing the same air, and enjoying what in many respects is only the same life, yet live in a totally different sense. I have not forfeited my life to the Law. I enjoy it as far as the Law is concerned, as my own proper right—the Law protects my life, though it will destroy his. The ungodly man is condemned already, condemned to die, for the wages of sin is death. And his whole life here is nothing but a reprieve granted by the longsuffering of God.

But a Christian man is pardoned and absolved. He owes not his life now to penal justice. When death comes to him it will not be at all in the sense of an infliction of a punishment. It will not be death, it will be the transfer of his spirit to a better state, the slumbering of his body for a little while in its proper couch to be awakened in a nobler likeness by the trump of the archangel. Now, is not life itself changed when held on so different a tenure? To live because I am now protected by the Law—is not that better than to be living at the sufferance of the Law?

To live the life of an absolved man, of a free man, the life of God's own child even in this present life—is not that a different thing from living the life of one to whom each hour measures out a nearer approach to the capital sentence, and to the execution of well-deserved punishment? The first is a life of pleasure—the second, disguise it as you may, is death in life, a life overshadowed with the darkness of eternal wrath.

"Godliness has the promise of the life that now is." That word changes the tenure of our present life in this respect, that it removes in a sense the uncertainty of it. God has given to none of you unconverted ones any promise of the life that now is. You are like squatters on a common who pitch their tents, and by the sufferance of the lord of the manor may remain there for awhile. But at a moment's notice you must up tents and away.

But the Christian has the promise of the life that now is. That is to say, he has the freehold of it. It is life given to him of God, and he really enjoys it. He has an absolute certainty about it. In fact, the life that now is has become to the Christian a foretaste of the life to come. Do you say that it is uncertain to the Christian whether he shall die or live? I grant you in one sense his remaining here is uncertain. Yet this is certain to him—he shall never die until it is best for him to die. He shall never depart this life till he is ripe for the life to come—he shall never, in fact, be removed from his present tabernacle till he himself, if he knew all, would be perfectly willing to be removed.

Willing! Yes, far more! *Overjoyed* that his tabernacle should be dissolved that he might enter into his "House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The tenure is very different between the uncertainty

of the ungodly who has no rights and no legal titles, and the blessed certainty of the child of God who lives by promise. Let me add that this word seems to me to sweeten the whole of human life to the man that has it. Godliness has the promise of life that now is—that is to say, everything that comes to a godly man comes to him by promise. Whereas if the ungodly man has any blessing apparent, it does not come by promise, it comes overshadowed by a terrible guilt which curses his very blessings and makes the responsibilities of his wealth and of his health and position redound to his own destruction. It works as a savor of death unto death through his willful disobedience.

Everything that comes to the Christian comes by promise. He sees his daily bread, and he says, “It has my Father’s mark on it. He said my bread should be given me. Here comes the water from the crystal stream, it is flavored with the love of God. He said my water shall be sure.” He puts on his raiment, and it may not be so comely as the dress of others, but he says, “This is the livery my Father promised me.” He sleeps, and it is beneath the canopy of Divine protection. He wakes and he walks abroad with angels, according to the promise, bearing him up in their hands.

Afflictions come to him by promise, the broad arrow of the great King is set on each one of them, for was it not said of old, “In the world you shall have tribulation, but in Me you shall have peace”? He can see everywhere the trace of Divine faithfulness in the keeping of the Covenant promise. He lives not the life of Ishmael, who by-and-by may be banished to the wilderness with the bondwoman, his mother. No, he lives the life of Isaac, the child of the promise, who is before long to inherit all things, and who even now is the darling child of his father, and rejoices in his father’s love.

There is a vast difference between having the life that now is, and having the promise of the life that now is—having God’s promise about it to make it all gracious, to make it all certain, and to make it all blessed as a token of love from God.

II. It is time that we pass on to THE BENEFIT WHICH GODLINESS BESTOWS IN THIS LIFE. Perhaps the fullness of the text is the fact that the flower of life, the crown of life, the highest blessedness and bliss of life, is secured to us by godliness. I have no doubt you have often heard interpretations of this text, very excellent—and it is not for me to judge or censure them—which lead to the belief that the way to make the best of both worlds is to be a Christian.

I also subscribe to that, but I must demur to the way in which it is generally put. There is an excellent sermon by that notable Divine, Saurin, in which he urges this text as a proof that the best hope of success in the world is enjoyed by the Christian. I demur to that being the teaching of this text. There may be some truth in it, but I do not think it is much to be insisted on. It has been said that he who fears God has the best guarantee of health. It is true, there is nothing in godliness to destroy the health of the body. The true Christian is preserved from many of those passions, and excitements, and indulgences, which tend to produce disease and to bring on early death.

That much is true, but I do not believe that godliness inevitably ensures good health. I believe, rather, that some godly men absolutely require for the highest perfection of their godliness, that they should be visited with sickness. It seems to me to be a very strange theory, to teach that godliness guarantees health, for it would lead to the supposition that all people who are unhealthy must necessarily be or have been deficient in godliness. And this is all the more untenable when we observe that some of the best people we have ever met have been those who have for years been bedridden by affliction which they certainly never brought upon themselves by any kind of sin.

I would say to every young man, there is nothing in the pursuit of godliness that can injure your health, but I would not say to him, “If you are godly you have the promise of being a healthy man,” for I do not believe it, since unhealthiness may come from a thousand other sources besides impropriety of conduct. I will go farther, and affirm that godliness, when carried to its highest and most honorable degree of excellence, might sometimes render it necessary for a man to place himself where he would of necessity become unhealthy. I know that it was the highest godliness which made our missionaries fix their abodes among the fever marshes of Fernando Po and Old Calabar to preach the Gospel.

When I heard from one of our missionaries, as I did personally, that he had at last become so acclimatized that he did not have the fever oftener than about two days out of three, I could not think that godliness in his case necessarily involved *health*. But I gathered that it might so happen that an eminently godly man might feel it necessary to go where he might say, “Farewell, Health, you are not, after all, the promise of the life that now is. I can bear to suffer, I can bear to creep about this world sick and ready to die if I may but have what is better than health—the luxury of winning souls for Christ—the honor and joy of instructing the ignorant in the faith of the crucified Redeemer.”

It were wicked to think that a man has less of godliness who sacrifices his health for Christ’s sake. He certainly would not be the man to miss the promise, and yet if health were such a promise he would

evidently have missed it. Again, we have heard it argued that the godly man has the best prospect of wealth in this world. Now I will also grant that as godliness delivers us from a multitude of expenses into which riot and dissipation would lead us, and as godliness creates habits of sobriety and economy, as godliness beg traders should grow rich, and godly men have much in their favor.

But I also cannot help recognizing that while trade is as it is, there are many things which a Christian man cannot do, and dare not do, which some have done, and are to this day rich for having done them—dirty acts, mean, low, and groveling—which have brought wealth to the creatures who have practiced them. And yet more—I have known the best of Christians, and men, too, whose outward conduct has been fully conformable to their profession—who have lived and died poor. Now, if wealth is the promise of the life that now is, I venture to say that godliness does not infallibly or even generally secure it. The God-fearing man may have as fair an opportunity as any other in the race of life, but all things considered, this is all we can say. It may be that the godly man may be a poor man, and from a dozen circumstances not connected with his religion or his morals, may live and may die poor in this world, but rich in faith.

It has also been said that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, in the sense that a Christian man is the most likely to have a good name, fame, and reputation among his fellow men. That also is true in a measure. In well-regulated society, the believer in Christ, through the holiness of his character, will be had in esteem, and even among the worst of men the excellence of his conduct will command a measure of respect. But for all that, I do not believe that repute among men is the promise of the life that now is—for what is it after all? Good repute among men, if it is deserved, I shall not decry. But if by any chance slander should come and take away the good man's name—and it has often done so—shall I say pity the calumniated saint as one who has lost the promise of the life that now is?

I dare not think it! Far rather would I bid him rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for so persecuted they the Prophets that were before him. And who is the most likely person to be slandered? Is it not the man who is most consistent with his profession, and most zealous in the spread of the faith? The Apostle Paul certainly never accounted riches to be the promise of the life that now is, for he had nothing. He had learned to be poor, and to labor with his hands. He certainly never reckoned health to be the promise of the life that now is, for he was in such circumstances of peril by land and sea, and among false brethren, that his life was in jeopardy for the Gospel. And as to a good name, he never regarded that as the promise of the life that now is, for he was willingly accounted as the off scouring of all things—some thought him mad, others thought him base, his repute with the multitude was gone.

I will repeat what I have said, lest I be misunderstood. Under ordinary circumstances it is true that godliness wears a propitious face both towards health, and wealth, and name—and he who has respect to these things, shall not find himself, as a rule, injured in the pursuit of them by his godliness. But still I disdain altogether the idea that all these three things together are, or even make up a *part* of the promise of the life that now is. I believe some persons have the life that now is in its fullness, and the promise of it in its richest fulfillment, who have neither wealth, health, nor fame. Being blessed with the suffering Master's smile and Presence, they are happier far than those who roll in wealth, who luxuriate in fame, and have all the rich blessings which health includes.

Let me now show you what I think is the promise of the life that now is. I believe it to be an *inward* happiness, which is altogether independent of outward circumstances. It is something richer than wealth, fairer than health, and more substantial than fame. This secret of the Lord, this deep delight, this calm repose, godliness always brings in proportion as it reigns in the heart.

Let us try and show that this is so. A godly man, my Brethren, is one who is at one with his Maker. It must always be right with the creature when it is at one with the Creator. The Creator is Omnipotent, All-Just, All-Holy. When the creature is out of gear with the Creator it will always be dashing itself against the pricks, and wounding itself. As the Creator will not change, if the creature runs not parallel to the Divine will, the creature must suffer, must be unhappy, must be restless. But when godliness puts our will into conformity with the Divine will, the more fully it does so, the more certainly it secures to us happiness even in the life that now is.

I am not happy necessarily because I am in good health, but I am happy if I am content to be out of health when God wills it. I am not happy because I am wealthy, but I am happy if it pleases me to be poor because it pleases God I should be. I am not happy because I happen to be famous, but I am happy if, being all unknown, I count it my highest fame to be accepted in the Beloved. A heart reconciled to the Divine will has full possession of the promise of the life that now is, for such peace with God is perfect happiness where it perfectly exists—conformity to God's will is Heaven below. I pray that godliness may work in all of you a conformity to the Divine will, and then I am sure, whatever your outward lot may be, you will win the promise of the life that now is.

The Christian man starting in life as such is best fitted for this life. He is like a vessel fittingly stored

for all the storms and contrary currents that may await it. The Christian is like a soldier who must gladly go to battle, but he is protected by the best armor that can be procured. He wears the helmet and the breastplate. He wears the entire Divine panoply which heavenly wisdom has prepared to protect him from every dart of his adversaries. He has the promise of the life that already is, just as the man with a good sword and good armor has the best promise of success in battle.

O that God may grant us Grace to know and feel that the best instruments and weapons of the warfare of this life are to be found in the arsenals of holiness, in the armories of confidence in God! In this sense we have again the promise of the life that now is. With a Christian all things that happen to him work for good. Is not this a rich part of the promise of the life that now is? What if the waves roar against him—they speed his boat towards the haven! What if the thunders and lightning come forth? They clear the atmosphere and promote his soul's health.

He gains by his losses, he grows healthy by his sicknesses, he lives by dying, he is enriched by being despoiled of his goods. Do you ask for any better promise than this? Is it not better that all things should work for my good, than that all things should be as I would wish to have them? They might all work my pleasure, and yet might all work my ruin. But now if they do not always please me—yet if they always benefit me—is not this the best promise of the life that now is?

The Christian enjoys his God under all circumstances. That, again, is the promise of the life that now is. I spoke of his being reconciled to God—he is much more than that—he delights himself in his God. He finds God in Nature. The landscape glows for him with a more Divine color than any other eye can see. As for the heavens, with their starry glories, there is a light in them which has not yet been beheld by the natural man. He sees God in his solitude, and peoples his loneliness with the spirits that are akin with the Most High. He is, wherever he may be, never debarred from the society he loves best. A wish will find his God, a tear will bring him his best Beloved.

He has but to sigh and cry when on the bed of sickness, and God comes and makes his bed for him. Blessed man, he has, indeed, the promise of the life that now is, for in it all, and over it all, he sees the Divine love shining for him with a supernal splendor and making earth but the porch of Heaven. This is to have the life that now is in the fullness of the promise. I am sure you will agree with me that the genuine possessor of godliness has the promise of the life that now is in his freedom from many of those cares and fears which rob life of all its luster.

The man without godliness is weighted with the care of every day, and of all the days that are to come—the dread remembrance of the past, and the terror of the future as well. The godly man knows that all the past is forgiven, his transgressions are blotted out. As for the present, he casts that burden on the Lord. As for the future, he would not pry into it with anxious eye, but he leaves God to rule and govern as He wills. He sits down, calmly content that his Father's will is right and good towards him. And as he is thus free from care, so is he free from the fear of men.

Ungodly men, many of them, are servile to their fellow men. It is to them a most important question whether they are smiled upon or frowned at by their fellow worms. The godly man has learned to lift his head above the common race of mankind, and when he lives as he should, he neither thinks a thing the better because men praise it, nor the worse because they censure it. His rule is not popular opinion, nor the dictates of the philosophy of the hour. He believes what God tells him to be true, and what God prescribes he knows to be right. And he does this careless of man's judgment, for none can judge him but his Master. That man has the promise of the life that now is who is in full enjoyment of the sweets of a clear conscience. He can afford to snap his fingers in the face of all mankind and declare that if the heavens themselves should fall, he would do the right, and dare all things for God. Oh, to have the yoke of human judgment from off your neck, and the bondage of man's domineering opinion from off your spirit! This is to receive the promise of the life that now is.

Moreover, the fear of death has gone from the Christian. This with many deprives the life that now is of everything that is happy and consoling. They are afraid in their merriest moments that the skeleton will disturb the feast. And when the dance is merriest, they think they hear the sound of the trumpet that will silence all. But the Christian is not afraid.

To him the prospect of departure is rather joyous than grievous, and the breaking up of this mortal state is an event he looks for as the clearing away of multitudes of sorrows and the bringing in of mighty joys.

Brothers and Sisters, to be free from the fear of death is to make life truly life—and he has it who leans wholly upon Christ—and knows that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Put these things together—peacefulness with his fellow men, peace with God, a sense that all things are working for his good, fearlessness of man's judgment, communion with the Most High—and surely you have described in a few words the very flower of life—the thing that makes it worth while to live.

This does not lie, as I have said before, in accumulated treasure. It does not blush in the rosy cheek. It

does not dwell in the trump of fame. It resides *within*, when the man walks with God and subdues the earth beneath his feet. When the soul communes with the spiritual, and makes the visible to glow in the light of the unseen. When the man's peace and joy all stream from the deep springs of God's love, and the man lives in God, and God lives in him. Herein lies the highest kind of life—it is the flower of the life that now is—and GODLINESS it is that has the promise of it.

I must not detain you longer, except to make an application of the subject to the present assembly. Brothers and Sisters, you who have godliness, and live in the fear of God, let me entreat you to believe that there is provided for you in godliness, comfort, joy, and delight for the life that now is. You need not postpone your feasting upon Christ till you see Him face to face. Feed on Him this day. You need not wait for the joys of the Holy Spirit till you have shaken off this cumbrous clay. The joy of the Lord is your strength today. You need not think that your peace and rest remain as yet in the future, hidden from you. Eternal life with its blessings is a present possession.

They that believe do enter into rest, and may enter into rest *now*. The clusters of Eshcol are before you, brought to you by a Divine hand before you cross the Jordan—

***“The men of Grace have found  
Glory begun below,  
Celestial fruits on earthly ground  
From faith and hope do grow.”***

We do not say that godliness has made all Believers rich, for some here will be content always to be poor. The whole body of the faithful cannot claim that godliness has brought them earthly treasure, for some of the greatest of them have written that if in this life only they had hope, they would have been of all men the most miserable. But without exception, the whole of us can unanimously declare that we have found in godliness the highest happiness, the supreme delight, the richest consolation.

I pray you, therefore, who profess godliness, be not content unless you have the promise of the life that now is. Believe that you can not only make this life sublime, but make it joyous. Believe that you can now be raised up together and made to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. You cannot find a Heaven in things below, for the moth is there, and the rust that corrupts. But you can, while here, if you set your affections upon things above, and not on things on the earth, find Glory begun *within* you, and a young Heaven already shining about your path. The life that now is—claim it! Up, you sons of Israel, and slay the Amalekites that would take away from you your comfort! Arise, you men that fear the Lord, and demand that doubts and fears, like the accursed Canaanites, shall be chased from the land. For the promise of God ought to be believed, and in the believing of it, your peace shall be like a river, and your joy shall overflow.

Another application of the text is this. There is a bearing of it upon the sinner. It is quite certain, O ungodly man, that the promise of the life that now is belongs only to those who are godly. Are you content to miss the cream of this life? I pray you, if you will not think of the life to come, at least think of this. You desire to be happy. You have intelligence enough to know that happiness does not consist in externals, but in the state of your mind. I assure you, and there are thousands of my Brethren who can affirm the same, that after having tried the ways of sin, we infinitely prefer the ways of righteousness for their own pleasure's sake even here, and we would not change with ungodly men even if we had to die like dogs.

With all the sorrow and care which Christian life is supposed to bring, we would prefer it to any other form of life beneath the stars. There is no man like the Christian, after all. Happy are you, O Israel, a people saved of the Lord! We do not come to you and tell you that godliness will make you rich, although there is no need that it should make you poor. We do not tell you it will make you healthy. It certainly will not make you the reverse. But these are not the things with which we would bribe you—these are inferior blessings, which we dare not set before you as worthy of your seeking after in the first instance.

But we do tell you that if you will but seek the Lord while He may be found, and put your trust in His Christ, who came to put away sin, you shall have the happiest, best, noble, most desirable life that can be enjoyed on earth! Now many of you believe this. I know you do. In your hearts you envy Christians—even poor Christians. You feel that you would gladly be as sick or as poor as yonder pious saint, if you might have his hope, if you might have his God. Well, if you know which is best, have which is best. “May I have it?” says one. Who said you might *not*? Does not the Lord invite you to taste and see that He is good? Has not He even *commanded* you, and are not these His Words, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved”? Simply to trust, and to rely—this is to begin the Divine life, and this will introduce you into a nobler sphere than mortals know of. They rejoice when corn and wine fill their barns and their vats, but you will say, “Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon me,” and in that you will

find a richer joy than they. “Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him. And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” God bless you, for Christ’s sake.

[Sermon #946, *The Profit of Godliness in the Life to Come*, is the sermon Brother Spurgeon preached in the evening of June 19, 1870, and is the companion sermon to this one.]

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# Vital Godliness: A Treatise on Experimental and Practical Piety

By William S. Plumer

## General Remarks on Religious Experience

The test of real character is to be sought in each man's experience. He who has never exercised faith, repentance, love, humility, hope, and joy, cannot be profited by his mere theories and speculations on these subjects. All knowledge which is unfelt and inoperative, puffs up the mind and hardens the heart. It is better to have the workings of gracious affections than to be able to define them, or to speak ever so learnedly respecting them. The great use of a large part of divine truth is rightly to affect our minds and hearts, and so to control our practice. It is often doubted whether the present age is remarkable for depth of religious feeling. In many cases ministers preach a low experience.

The consequence is painful laxity in pious practice. Among many professors there is a manifest disinclination to converse on vital subjects in experimental and practical piety. This is a great evil. Although hypocrites may babble on such topics, yet true Christians should not thereby be deterred from telling what God has done for their souls, or from diligently seeking to discover and commend the highest style of holy living. Perhaps on all branches of these subjects there is less preaching than formerly. A minister of this generation said that he had received many hundreds of printed sermons sent out by his brethren, and that among them all he remembered but one on the subject of experimental religion. Yet it is noticeable that when a preacher of ability and sound discrimination discusses any branch of this subject, he is always highly acceptable to the best class of Christians. The testimonies to the necessity of experimental piety are exceedingly numerous. Almost every fit form of expression is employed by inspired writers to teach us this great truth. Thus says David, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in him." Psalm 34: 8. "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul." Psalm 66:16. So Elihu said, "bear with me a little, and I will show you that I have yet to speak on God's behalf." Job 36: 2.

Often in the Scriptures religious experience is expressed by hungering and thirsting, by eating and drinking. Isa. 55: 1; Matt. 5: 6; Song 5: 1 John 6: 53-58. Job, David, and Isaiah all inform us of the power of religious experience in their own case. Job 42:5, 6; Psalm 51; Isa. 6:5. Nor is the testimony of uninspired men on this point less harmonious.

*Richard Baxter* says, "The way to have the firmest belief of the Christian faith is to draw near and taste and try it, and lay bare the heart to receive the impression of it; and then, by the sense of its admirable effects, we shall know that which bare speculation could not discover. Though there must be a belief on other grounds first, so much as to let in the word into the soul, and to cause us to submit our hearts to its operations; yet it is this experience that must strengthen it and confirm it. If any man will do the will of Christ, he shall know that the doctrine is of God. John 7: 17. The melody of music is better known by hearing it than by reports of it, and the sweetness of food is known better by tasting than by hearsay, though upon report we may be drawn to taste and try. So is there a spiritual sense in us of the effects of the gospel on our own hearts, which will cause men to love it and hold it fast against the cavils of deceivers or the temptations of the great deceiver."

*John Owen* says, "Experience is the food of all grace, which it grows and thrives upon. Every taste that faith obtains of divine love and grace, or how gracious the Lord is, adds to its measure and stature. Two things therefore must briefly be declared:

1. That the experience of the reality, excellency, power, and efficacy of the things that are believed, is an effectual means of increasing faith and love.
2. That it is the Holy Spirit which gives us this experience."

*John Newton* says, "Experience is the Lord's school, and they who are taught by him usually learn by the mistakes they make—that they have no wisdom; and by the slips and falls they meet with—that they have no strength."

*Charles Buck* says, "The report of the blessings of the religion of Christ, or the intelligence that provision is made for guilty man, can be of no avail without a real participation of them. We must not perceive only, but we must feel; and feeling, of course we experience."

*Jonathan Edwards* says, "A gracious experience arises from operations and influences which are spiritual, from an inward principle which is divine, a communication of God, a participation of the divine nature: Christ living in the heart, the Holy Spirit dwelling there in union with the faculties of the soul as an internal vital principle, exerting his own proper nature in the exercise of those faculties. Now it is no wonder that that which is divine is powerful and effectual, for it has omnipotence on its side."

The late *John M'Dowell* says, "If we are Christians, we shall delight to meet with our fellow-Christians, and engage with them in conversation on experimental piety. And true religion must either be very low or be entirely lacking in the heart of that person who seldom speaks on the subject, or extends not his conversation beyond the doctrines and forms of religion, or speaks in an uninterested or heartless manner. The Scripture saints, as appears from their history, engaged much in religious conversation."

Yet it is to be regretted that but few modern books treat of this subject. Doctrinal discussions, treatises on the history of the Bible, on branches of Scripture morals, and on church government, are numerous. But rarely do we find able men turning their attention to the work of God in the soul. It was not always so. In the seventeenth century the ablest productions of the greatest minds were on experimental religion. The exceeding popularity of a few books, first published in our own age, shows that so far as there is piety, such reading is in great demand. This will be more and more so as true religion shall prevail. It is admitted that the subject of experimental religion is not free from difficulties. But most of these are theoretical, rather than practical.

Yet those which grow out of the deceitfulness of sin and the temptations of the great adversary, should be carefully studied by all people, by godly teachers in particular, and the consolations of God sought out and administered accordingly. It is also worthy of notice that the best treatises in this department of religious literature are often narratives of the dealings of God with particular people. Religious biography constitutes a very useful and popular part of a well-chosen library. If the time shall come when the memoirs of Halyburton and Brainerd shall be unwelcome to the great body of God's people, then indeed the glory will have departed. *John Newton* remarks that "it is to be lamented that in this enlightened age, so signalized by the prevalence of the spirit of investigation, religion should by many be thought the only subject unworthy of a serious inquiry; and that while in every branch of science they studiously endeavor to trace every fact to its proper and adequate cause, and are cautious of admitting any theory which cannot stand the test of experiment, they treat the use of the term *experimental*, when applied to religion, with contempt."

The tendency of this age is to become vague and superficial. In giving an account of the work of God on one or many, there is a proneness to deal in generals and avoid particulars. In some cases there may be reasons of delicacy for saying little; nor is it necessary to present individuals by name or description of person before the community. But how refreshing it would be to meet with a recent narrative like that which *Edwards* has given of one who is now understood to have been the person who afterwards became his wife. In their narratives of revivals of religion, the old magazines often present quite a contrast to many of our modern journals. This deficiency has sometimes been noticed and a desire for a change expressed, but we seem to be getting further and further from the old paths. Yet let us not be discouraged. Let us labor to banish unreasonable prejudices against this subject as a proper topic of familiar or religious conversation. This will be no easy task. So many ignorant men have spoken things which they ought not, so many weak men have uttered folly, and so many bad men have obtruded their erroneous views upon the attention of others—that some have been quite disgusted with the whole matter. Thus it has come to pass that even in the free church of Scotland a candidate for the ministry is not examined as to his acquaintance with experimental piety, or his motives for seeking the sacred office. *But it is never safe to argue from the abuse of anything against its use.*

Not only in preaching, but in their private walks, pastors might exert a happy influence on this subject. Let them converse freely and fully with those seeking admission to the Lord's table. In their pastoral visits let not this subject be forgotten. Sometimes it may be well to leave particular questions to be answered or talked over on a subsequent interview. It would also be well if all that class of able works which have handled the different branches of this subject were brought into general use in our churches. John Newton has long been a favorite. His writings on experimental religion contributed much to the revival of piety in the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries. John, Owen on 'Indwelling Sin' is more profound than anything Newton ever wrote. One of the best works on the whole subject is Guthrie's Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ. Archibald Alexander on 'Religious Experience' is admirably suited to awaken a fondness for this kind of reading.

**But more than anything else, we always need in the church a copious outpouring of God's Spirit on the hearts of his people, giving them a zest for spiritual things** and a great desire for a full assurance of understanding, of faith and of hope. Many real Christians have made but low attainments, and are too little dissatisfied with their present state. One who should speak and act with the zeal and ardor of Paul, of Knox, of Welsh, of Whitefield, or of Henry Martyn—would by the thoughtless world, be esteemed mad. But wisdom is justified of her children. The truly regenerate and growing Christian will not be offended at sound views on this subject. It may encourage us to study this subject, to remember that, though in unessential particulars there is an endless diversity in the experience of men—yet in all that necessarily belongs to vital piety, there is a substantial agreement. Perhaps a more striking contrast could hardly be found between two men, than between John Newton and Occum the Indian preacher. Yet Newton says of the latter, that "in describing to me the state of his heart, when he was a blind idolater, he gave me in general a striking picture of what my own was in the early part of my own life; and his subsequent views of the gospel corresponded with mine as face answers to face in a mirror." John Owen also says, "As sin works in one, so does it in another; as grace is effectual in one, so is it in another; as he that prays longs for mercy and grace, so do they that join with him. Of the same kind with his hatred of sin, his love to Christ, his laboring after holiness and conformity to the will of God, are also those in other believers. And hence it is that people 'praying in the Spirit' according to their own experience, are oftentimes supposed by everyone in the congregation rather to pray concerning their condition."

Nor is there any way of preserving men from falling into error respecting the true nature of religion, but by bringing them to feel its power. "The head may be strengthened—until the heart is starved." Indeed, infidelity itself will be sure to gain a footing in a community where vital godliness is not experienced. John Owen truly says, "The owning of the Scripture to be the word of God bespeaks a divine majesty, authority, and power to be present in it and with it. Therefore, after men who have for a long time so professed, do find that they never had any real experience of such a divine presence in it by any effects upon their own minds, they grow insensibly regardless of it, or to allow it a very common place in their thoughts. When they have worn off the impressions that were on their minds from tradition, education, and custom, they do for the future rather not oppose it than in any way believe it. And when once a reverence unto the word of God on account of its authority is lost, an assent unto it on account of its truth will not long abide. And all such people, under a concurrence of temptations and outward "occasions, will either reject it or prefer other guides before it."

There is not a doctrine of revelation the power of which ought not to be felt in the human soul. If God is revealed to us in a trinity of persons, as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—it is that we may love and serve and worship him just as he is revealed. If Jesus Christ made a vicarious atonement—that great doctrine is revealed to us that we may rest the whole weight of our salvation upon it. If men are totally depraved—that truth ought to be known and felt, that the whole salvation of the gospel may be sought and secured. Nothing therefore can be more unphilosophical than to charge that experimental religion and wild enthusiasm are synonymous terms.

If men dead in sin are ever to be restored to spiritual life, they must be the subjects of a mighty work of grace; they must be taught of God; they must be born from above; they must be called out of darkness into God's marvelous light; they must be renewed in the inner man. The advantages of experience are felt in all the affairs of life. The truths we know by experience are worth more to a wise man than all he can learn from the demonstrative sciences or the reasonings of others. In all the departments of life, he who has

experience has qualifications denied to the mere theorist or scholar. Religious experience puts us on our guard against the snares of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It teaches us sincerity, self-distrust, and humility. It causes us to abound in all prudence. It gives us a delightful confirmation in the truth. It fits us for doing good to an extent far beyond what we could ever attain by instruction in the letter of God's word.

All the friends of true religion ought carefully to guard against the abuses of religious experience. They should be very careful to avoid all vain boasting, a sin into which men easily fall. They should learn wisely to discriminate between the genuine and the spurious, between effects produced by divine truth on the one hand and by nervous temperament on the other. They should be especially careful not to rely on any past attainments which do not produce present good fruit. **Any exercise of the mind which leads us to dullness in devotion, to carelessness about holy living, to lack of zeal for the salvation of men, is not gracious.**

It may be well here to state that there is nothing gained by substituting, as some seem disposed to do, different terms for that of experience. There is no word better explained in pious literature than the word experience, and such a change of terms is likely to induce confusion.

The early exercises of a soul turning to God have unusual interest, because they are connected with the setting up of Christ's kingdom in the heart. The mind of man has a peculiar delight in contemplating the origin of things, and in seeing them rise to vigor. This is so in the growth of grain, plants, and trees, in the beginning of revolutions, in the founding of empires, and in the early struggles of mind to rise to worth and greatness. But the early history of pious impressions has vast interest—from the fact that it is the soul that is then saved and restored to communion with God. Cecil says, "The history of a man's life, is to himself the most interesting history in the world, next to that of the Scriptures." The reason is that it is a detailed account of what he has learned in the school of experience.

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# Vital Godliness: A Treatise on Experimental and Practical Piety

By William S. Plumer

## Concluding Observations

In closing this work, attention is asked to a few general observations. These may aid in rightly understanding and applying the weighty truths already considered.

### I. The Symmetry of Christian Character.

Whoever has one Christian grace is sure to have others. In the genuine child of God, all the elements of piety are united. He who has strong hope, and no holy fear of God, will soon become presumptuous. He who has strong fears, but no hope in God, will be desperate. Without reverence, love degenerates into fondness; and without love, dread degenerates into aversion. Faith that is not humble can never lay hold of the most precious truths of the gospel; and humility that does not rely on God is but abjectness. Joy that is not chastened with mourning for sin becomes giddy and trifling; while sorrow for sin that joys not in God works death. Peace which, when called to contend for the faith, refuses to stand up for the truth, would betray the cause of Christ; while he who loves contention and hates peace, is carnal and odious. Meekness without courage is but childishness; and courage without meekness is brutality.

There is a close connection between all the qualities that form the Christian character. The elements of one good trait contain the germ of others. Paul speaks of Christian character as a unit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." John says the same: "everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him" No man can love the Father without loving the Son, who was sent by him. He who loves the image of God in the Son, loves the image of God whenever discerned in the humblest Christian. It cannot be otherwise. Anything contrary to this makes hypocrisy and formalism as precious as true piety.

The great defect in all who make a spurious profession of religion is, not that they have not some things about them that look well, but all is out of proportion. They have zeal, but not gentleness; they have boldness, but not meekness. They pretend to more than they actually experience. With all their ardor they display vain-glory and self-sufficiency. Sometimes they excuse iniquity—and smile at sin. Their charity does not "bear all things." They incline to censoriousness. To some they behave crudely; to others they will not speak a civil word; to others they have real hatred. In the beatitudes Jesus Christ described but one character. Where poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, and love of peace are genuine—they are found together. Circumstances will call one grace into more vigorous exercise than another. But if we have truly passed from death unto life, God will enable us in due time to exhibit every Christian temper. Human features out of all proportion are hideous. The same is true of any of the Christian graces.

### II. A Holy Life Alone, Proves Piety Genuine.

'Words are cheap.' Edwards.

'Actions speak louder than words.' Proverbs.

'Practice is the life of piety.' Thomas Watson.

'Even a child is known by his doings.' Solomon.

'Everyone that does righteousness is born of him.' John.

'As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.' James.

'If you love me, keep my commandments.' Jesus Christ.

1. No man is better than his life proves him to be. The best part of mankind are slow in making professions, because they know how hard it is to perform what we promise. The last to engage is often the first to fulfill.

The very existence of such words as truth, frankness, honesty, integrity, faithfulness; and their opposites, falsehood, deception, fraud, and faithlessness—shows that the judgment of mankind on these points is harmonious. All men know that words are mere breath, and deeds only are realities. Profession is not principle. Practice is the best expounder of the heart.

2. God constantly guards men against the sin of not performing their promises. Joshua warned the Israelites on this subject Josh. 24:16, 19. Indeed in so many words Solomon says, "Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God." Eccles. 5:2. See context. Compare Matt. 7:21-27, and 1 John 3:18, 19.

3. As holiness is not natural to man, the Scriptures say explicitly that whoever does righteousness is born of God. 1 John 2:29. He has a new nature, obtained in regeneration. He has the life of God in his soul. Only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. When we see a man working righteousness, warring against sin, and heartily doing the will of God, we know that an almighty power has changed his nature. He is a new creature.

4. Whatever does not lead to a holy life is worthless in the sight of God. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. David walked before God in truth and righteousness, and in uprightness of heart. All religious profession which ends in mere show, is at the best Pharisaism dressed up in evangelical attire. If the heart is not swayed by it, the heart is unchanged. "Little children, don't let anyone deceive you. The person who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. The person who practices sin belongs to the evil one, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning." (1 John 3:7-8). All pretenses to piety which do not lead to a godly life are utterly vain. Men people do not obey God—because they do not love God. They hearken not—because their ears are uncircumcised. There is no folly greater than double-dealing with God. "A hypocrite is hated by the world for pretending to be a Christian; and hated of God for not being one."

All external religious acts may be performed without a spark of love to Christ. "To attend upon public worship is a form complied with, by thousands of the unconverted." How few heartily engage in the work of mortifying sin. When men are this moment devout, and the next carnal; when today they are all zeal for God, and tomorrow all zeal for politics; when they have not respect unto all God's commandments, but seek laxity; when their religious raptures are followed by fleshly frolics—then their religion is vain. Men should therefore be very careful lest they deceive themselves respecting both the reality and the strength of their own piety.

**The daily business of a Christian is to resist the devil, deny himself, overcome the world, crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, imitate Christ, walk with God, and strive to enter in at the strait gate.** It is the heartless who turn back in the day of battle. "The Christian gains no victories without combat." On the other hand, he whose life is holy has the fabric of his peace built upon a rock. God cannot deny him, for that would be denying his own work in the man's soul. **Although we do not enter heaven for our good works, yet we do not enter heaven without good works.**

### **III. True Christians Are Greatly Blessed.**

As the greatest curses are spiritual, so the greatest blessings are also spiritual. Our great needs must be supplied out of God's treasury, or we must suffer eternal loss and undoing. Paul uses no better designation of the privileges of believers, than when he speaks of spiritual blessings. God's mercies to his children are sometimes catalogued. In Psalm 103, David puts forgiveness of sins as the first and pre-eminent blessing. It is entitled to that place. Without pardon we are under an awful curse. God never bestows saving good, on souls left in the chains of condemnation. In more than one place Paul seems to favor the same arrangement. With forgiveness is always connected acceptance in the Beloved. Eph. 1:6. So that believers are no more aliens, strangers, foreigners—but sons, heirs, fellow-citizens. We are brought near by the blood and righteousness of Christ, and so "have right to the tree of life." Rev. 22:14. From our justification flows peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access into all needed grace, joy, hope, triumph in tribulation, patience, experience, boldness, the love of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and salvation full and complete.

Peter gives a catalogue in which he mentions "faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity." Well does he add, "If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Blessed treasury of spiritual good things! Who can tell its value? It is the proof of a godlike temper—and a godlike destiny! Sure of spiritual blessings, men may live in poverty—yet they make many rich. They may have nothing—yet they possess all things. They may be sorrowful—yet they are always rejoicing. They may be dying daily—yet behold, they live. They may be chastened—but they are not killed. Their affections are set on things which do not perish in the using. Their crown is not the less bright or imperishable because it is seen by faith alone. They are sure of wearing it in due season, if they faint not.

Any spiritual blessing is worth more than the most costly temporal good. A devout thought, a pious desire, a holy purpose—is better than a great estate or an earthly kingdom. In eternity it will amount to more, to have given a cup of cold water with right motives to a humble servant of God, than to have been flattered by a whole generation. **God often gives the larger portion of His common bounties to the unconverted. Spiritual blessings are put into elect vessels only.** God's people share the good things of this world with the wicked; but the world has no lot nor part in spiritual good things. The unbelieving sinner has never been pardoned, renewed, sanctified, or savingly taught of God.

The good things of time will soon be gone forever. The very memory of them will embitter the future existence of all who die in their sins. But spiritual blessings will last eternally. Though faith will give way to vision, and hope to fruition, yet fruition and vision are the legitimate consequences of hope and faith. Temporal blessings come in the channel of nature; but spiritual blessings in the channel of grace. The former are of the earth, earthy; the latter are from heaven. God bestows temporal blessings on those who hate him all their days; but spiritual blessings come to believers only, through our Lord Jesus Christ. They cost his life, his toil, his sweat, his agony.

We may form some estimate of the value of spiritual blessings by the promises of the covenant which secures them. Long after his ascension to heaven, Jesus Christ promised to him who overcomes, that he should eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God; that he should be clothed in white raiment; that he should be a pillar in the temple of God, and go no more out; that he should sit with him in his throne; that he should eat of the hidden manna; that He should give him a white stone. How soon our faculties are overcome by attempting to comprehend the fullness of such promises. Let us dwell a moment on the last, "I will give him a white stone."

Blunt thus explains it: "It is generally thought by commentators that this refers to an ancient judicial custom of dropping a black stone into an urn when it is intended to condemn, and a white stone when the prisoner is to be acquitted; but this is an act so distinct from that described, 'I will give you a white stone,' that we are disposed to agree with those who think it refers rather to a custom of a very different kind, and not unknown to the classical reader, according with beautiful propriety to the case before us. In primitive times, when traveling was rendered difficult from lack of places of public entertainment, hospitality was exercised by private individuals to a very great extent; of which indeed we find frequent traces in all history, and in none more than the Old Testament. People who partook of this hospitality and those who practiced it, frequently contracted habits of friendship and regard for each other; and it became a well-established custom among the Greeks and Romans to provide their guests with some particular mark, which was handed down from father to son, and insured hospitality and kind treatment whenever it was presented. This mark was usually a small stone or pebble cut in half, and upon the halves of which the host and the guest mutually inscribed their names, and then interchanged them with each other. The production of this stone was quite enough to insure friendship for themselves or descendants whenever they traveled again in the same direction; while it is evident that these stones required to be privately kept, and the names written upon them carefully concealed, lest others should obtain the privileges instead of the people for whom they were intended. How natural then the allusion to this custom in the words, 'I will give him to eat of the hidden manna!' and having done so—having made himself partaker of my hospitality, having recognized him as my guest, my friend, I will present him with the white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows, but he who receives it. I will give him a pledge of my friendship sacred and inviolable, known only to himself."

#### **IV. Unbelievers are poor indeed.**

It is a dreadful thing to lack bread. Yet man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. It is sad to see a human being without reason. Yet some godly people have become insane, and never waked up in their right mind until they were in the presence of the Lamb. But in his unregenerate state, man's case is far more pitiable. Of all such, Paul says they are without Christ. They have no Savior, no infallible Teacher, no atoning High-priest, no Advocate with God, no King ruling in righteousness over them and their enemies. Without Christ, sinners are nothing. He is all and in all. Well did an ancient say, "I had rather fall with Christ than reign with Caesar." Nonexistence is not so dreadful as a Christless state. "We are captives, and cannot be delivered without the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Fools as we all are, we cannot be instructed without wisdom, and all the treasures of wisdom are hidden in Christ Jesus. All plans and hopes not built on him must fall, for there is no other foundation. All working without him, will be cast into the fire, where it will be consumed. Without him, all riches make themselves wings and fly away. **A dungeon with Christ is a throne; and a throne without Christ, hell.**"

He is life and light, and the delights of the sons of men. Yet unconverted sinners are without him. They are also aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. They have no lot in Jacob. Christ's cause may advance, but it brings no joy to them. His kingdom may be set up in a whole nation, but they care not for that. His honor may be great, but they have no share in it. His praise may be sung in high anthems and hallelujahs, but to them it is as the voice of foreign minstrels. Prayer may be offered for him, but they never heartily join in it. They are not at home in secret devotion, in public worship, or in the celebration of the ordinances. They would be even less at home in the adorations of heaven. They have no inheritance in the church. They are outcasts, castaways, reprobate silver. They are not sons of God. They are not heirs. Their prospects for eternity are no better than if God had no church at all. And so they are strangers from the covenants of promise. They have nothing to rely upon for time, nothing for eternity; nothing for this life, nothing for that which is to come. Their heavens are never spanned by the rainbow of a rich variety of promises, divinely girt together by the faithful word and unimpeachable oath of Him who cannot lie.

One of the most gifted among them, even while living in a gospel land, said, "The present is a fleeting moment, the past is no more, and our prospect of futurity is dark and doubtful." Such men are lost. They have no heavenly guide, no safe rules of conduct, no sure word abiding forever. Of course they are without hope. They may have false dreams of future good, but these will all vanish like the mist. Their delusive expectations are constantly failing. They indulge them only to awake to a keen sense of agonizing misery. They are like the vine of Sodom and the fruit of Gomorrah. To hope, as an anchor to the soul; sure and steadfast; to hope, as entering within the veil; to hope, that does not mock our miseries; to hope, that shall not perish—they are utter strangers. One half hour's exercise of such hope as animates the believer would bring more that deserves the name of happiness, than all the poor sinner has ever enjoyed. Now without gospel hope, at any moment he may be in total and absolute despair.

Such are also without God in the world. A godless man is an undone man, and has a rueful eternity before him, whether he is a godless tyrant, a godless slave, or a godless noble; whether he glitters in gold or crawls in debasement. He has no communion with his Maker, no confidence in Jehovah, no blessing from the Lord, and no righteousness from the God of salvation. When nature is falling headlong, or is smitten with affliction, the believer exults, and shouts, "My Lord and my God!" The poor sinner cannot do this. He has no God; he knows no God; he loves no God; he trusts in no God; he has no hope in God.

How poor and wretched and miserable and lost is an unconverted sinner! How rich and free and undeserved is the mercy which saves sinners! How loud is the call, and how great is the obligation—to do all we can to save dying sinners! How inconceivably, dreadful it will be to go to eternity an unrenewed sinner! How infinite is the debt we owe to him who has given us access to God by his own most precious blood! Were there ever such needs among mortals as the needs of a perishing soul? Oh, sinner, turn and live!

#### **V. Is there not a low state of piety among professing Christians?**

We must answer the question in the affirmative. It cannot be called a distorted view of things to say that piety is in a low state generally, and that in many places truth is fallen in the streets. Among the causes of this state of things, we may notice,

1. The commotions among the nations. "Wars and rumors of wars" mightily distract public attention from all the concerns of eternity. Piety must have time for contemplation. We cannot profitably wait upon God unless we can do so without distraction.

2. Politics. Andrew Fuller says that many "have sacrificed their souls, to take an eager and deep interest in political disputes." He speaks of some whose "whole heart has been engaged in this pursuit. It has been their food and their drink; and this being the case, it is not surprising that they have become indifferent to piety; for these things cannot consist with each other." This is sound speech that cannot be condemned.

3. Love of money. This root has struck very deep into many hearts. Nor are its evil consequences even yet fully seen. The worst is probably yet to come. Without checking any sober, lawful endeavor to secure competence and independence, it must yet be said that a people eagerly pursuing wealth cannot be a very pious people. "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "You cannot serve God and mammon."

4. Fanaticism. Nothing is more opposed to true piety than a wild, heated, ignorant, and furious zeal. It has brought vast discredit on true religion, and has driven many into infidelity and practical atheism. It is like a flame driven by fierce winds through a forest. It consumes whatever it meets. Its unhappy effects are seen and felt for half a century. It brings true religion into disrepute. It awakens distrust of experimental piety. It clothes with suspicion every extraordinary endeavor to promote the knowledge and love of God. It creates a necessity for most painful acts of church discipline, and its whole tendency is to disorder and impiety. To be zealously affected always in a good thing is a great attainment; but a fanatical, fiery, bitter zeal is always followed by evil consequences.

5. The attention of pastors and churches has been unduly withdrawn from their chief work. Pastors are often overworked. Consequently they come not to their work with joyous elasticity of mind. And churches sometimes meddle with things quite out of their line; so that a minister who labors in word and doctrine, who gives himself entirely to prayer and the ministry of the word, is regarded as not up to the times.

6. A low standard of evidence of Christian character. It is our duty to "feed the lambs" and to "comfort the feeble-minded." But the lambs should grow to be sheep. A word to the weary is excellent, if it be in season; but the church should never be so addressed as to make her rest satisfied with low attainments. If the babes are fed on milk all their days and never get a taste of strong meat, they will never be strong men, full of vigor. Scriptural marks of a change of heart should be clearly stated.

7. The neglect of social prayer and godly conference. Have not Christians too much forsaken the assembling of themselves together, that they might speak often one to another?

8. But our greatest lack is in fervent, importunate, united prayer. Oh for a spirit of strong crying unto God! Would the heavens in so many places be as brass if they were pierced by the hearty cries of God's people? There is no substitute for fervent prayer. Let that cease—and religion must decline.

## **VI. Time and eternity.**

Formerly it was customary at public executions to bring an hour-glass to the scaffold with the sand all at one end, and when the prisoner had taken his position, to set the glass before him inverted, and the sands of the last hour of his life began to run. Sometimes the executioner would say to the unhappy man, "Your sands are almost run out!" From this the phrase was transferred to the pulpit, and men were exhorted to speedy repentance because their sands were almost run out. Oh that men would candidly look at the nearness of death and lay hold on eternal life while it is called today.

An old writer says, "I stopped in Clerkenwell churchyard to see a grave-digger at work. He had dug pretty deep, and was come to an old coffin which was quite rotten. In clearing away the moldering wood, the grave-digger found an hour-glass close to the left side of the skull, with the sand in it." This was telling the dead that to them time was no longer. How much more fit to put the hour-glass before the living, and

remind them that their hours will soon all be gone. Why will not men be warned? Why will not the living lay to heart the things which belong to their peace? Between the longest human life and eternity, there is no proportion whatever. "I have lost a day" is a dreadful sound in the ears of one who has a tender conscience. Nothing but a slighted Savior seems to press so heavily on dying sinners as 'murdered time'.

God of mercy, give us grace to improve each hour, so to number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom, and to be always doing some good. Let madness no longer reign within us. The night comes—when no man can work.

## VII. Heaven.

All the souls that God has made are in heaven, earth, or hell. We who are in earth know something about it. Oh that we may never know by experience, the nature of the woes of the pit! If we would be saved, we must learn as we can something of heaven, must breathe something of its spirit, must long for its blessings. Heaven is a **place**. Jesus so calls it. It is a city. It is a heavenly country. It is a better country than any known on earth. It has locality. Of its position in relation to the sun, moon, and planets, we have no information; and we need none; but heaven exists in reality, not merely in imagination.

Heaven is also a **state**, exceedingly pure, holy, excellent. Angels themselves have never attained to a better state. The spirits of just men made perfect, can rise no higher.

The inhabitants of heaven have large measures of clear and certain **knowledge** of the most excellent things. They see God. They see Jesus. They know as they are known. They do not see through a glass darkly, but face to face. They are not liable to errors, mistakes, or misapprehensions. The Lamb himself feeds them, and leads them to fountains of living waters.

The inhabitants of heaven are **happy**. They are full of joy. They never sin, and they never sigh; they never pity one another, nor envy one another, nor grieve at one another, nor are mortified by each other's follies or weaknesses. Their warfare is ended, their turmoils are over, and their conflicts past. They weep no more. Jesus wipes tears from off all faces of his redeemed, and the holy angels never did weep.

Heaven is full of **variety**. It is not all one house; there are many mansions and many holy characters there. The dwellers therein praise much, they exult much, they admire much. They have rest; they never leave; they serve God day and night. In heaven fellowship is perfect, though constantly receiving new and desirable accessions. All unite in loving the Lamb that was slain. Yet there is a great variety in the history and character of its inhabitants. There are angels, who have great power and wisdom and experience. There are patriarchs and prophets and apostles and martyrs and confessors and reformers and kings and shepherds and feeble-minded folk and little children. There the choirs of those redeemed by atoning blood are arrayed in linen white and clean. Choice spirits are constantly joining this throng above.

Let a few words be said of two who have lately passed from earth. One was a dear, talented little creature. Before her departure she said, "I am not afraid to die. I have committed all to Christ. There is in the Bible no phrase so precious to me as, 'the Lord our righteousness.' My pastor is partial to me. Let him not praise me at my burial; let him exalt the Lord's righteousness. When I committed myself to Christ, I did it wholly and unreservedly. I never doubted him since. I may be self-deceived, but of Christ I have no doubt. When I appear at the judgment-bar of God, if I should hear the word, 'Depart,' I would turn with astonishment to Christ, and say, 'Dear Savior, there must be a mistake here. Did I not commit all to you?' Again she said, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." Her last words were, "While I have voice and memory left, I wish to say—the Lord our righteousness. It is sufficient for you all. It is all you need."

In the year 1839, a family was made glad by the birth of a little daughter. Father, mother, two elder sisters, and a large circle of friends rejoiced together. The babe was a bud, promising beauty and fragrance. Early in life, by her charm and warmth of affection, she attached many to her. In her teens, her schoolmates saw her worth, admired and imitated. Her education at school being finished, she noiselessly began to move in the best circles of pious fellowship. Here she attracted the love of aged men and women, and of those

pressed with the cares of middle life, no less than of the young. Without a dash of forwardness, she was often the companion of people thrice her age. Before long divine grace began its blessed work, and on this lovely stock engrafted the Rose of Sharon. Still artless and natural, the work of God's Spirit heightened in her all that was previously charming, and sweetly chastened the exultant joyousness of her youth. Elder sisters married and left the paternal roof. She remained greatly to honor father and mother, and light up the boyhood of a younger brother. On a visit to a friend, she began the ailment that removed her from earth. Her constitution being good, she buffeted disease for a while; but at last she was shut within doors. Her kind and skillful medical attendant for a season thought the danger slight; but God's will was to take her to himself. Alarming symptoms appeared, and about eight o'clock in the morning of a blessed Sabbath day, her good physician found her sinking, and in the sweetest manner told her that she was entering upon her eternal rest. Surprised, but not terrified, she calmly inquired when the change had taken place. At once the work of life rose before her mind. She thought of the Industrial school and of the Sabbath-school. She said, "I have so much work to do; but God knows best." To her brother, who has since followed her, she made the kindest little address. Then turning to her father, she said, "It is sad for you all." On his assenting, and saying, "Yes, my child, but I feel I shall soon meet you in heaven," she said in a clear, audible voice, "I hope so," and gently fell asleep as the Sabbath bells began to ring. One of her pastors says, "This coincidence reminds us of Bunyan's expression respecting what followed the entrance of Christian and Hopeful into the heavenly Jerusalem: 'Then I heard in my dream that all the bells in the city rang again for joy, and that it was said unto them, Enter into the joy of your Lord.' The last earthly sound which echoed in the ear of this dying believer was that of the church-bell; the first which met her ransomed spirit on high was the peal of welcome from the blood-washed throng before the throne."

Dear child, until the heavens be no more, we shall not again see your charming face; but you shall see the face of Jesus. Our hearts were knit together. I love your memory. I love your sincerity. I love the paths marked by your footsteps. "I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me—Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." The names of these young heroes of the cross need not be given. They are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Into the lips of a glorified spirit in heaven Matthew Henry puts these words: "Would you know where I am? I am at home in my Father's house, in the mansion prepared for me there. I am where I would be, where I have long and often desired to be; no longer on a stormy sea, but in a safe and quiet harbor. My work in time is done, I am resting; my sowing time is done, I am reaping; my joy is as the joy of harvest. Would you know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness; grace is swallowed up in glory; the top-stone of the building is brought forth. Would you know what I am doing? I see God; I see him as he is; not as through a glass darkly, but face to face; and the sight is transforming; it makes me like him. I am in the sweet employment of my blessed Redeemer, my Head and my Husband, whom my soul loved, and for whose sake I was willing to part with all. I am here bathing myself at the spring-head of the heavenly pleasure, and joy unutterable; and therefore weep not for me. I am here singing hallelujahs incessantly to him who sits upon the throne, and I rest not day or night from praising him. Would you know what company I have? Blessed company, better than the best on earth. Here are holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am set down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God, with blessed Paul and Peter and James and John and all the saints; and here I meet with many of my old acquaintances that I fasted and prayed with, who got here before me. And lastly, would you consider how long this is to continue? It is a garland that never withers; a crown of glory that fades not away; after millions of millions of ages it will be as fresh as it is now—and therefore weep not for me."

Grace is glory begun; but glory is grace matured, completed, crowned with the fullness of beatific vision. Now unto the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever! Amen!

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# Have You Set Your Mind on True Godliness?

By Willem Teellinck

Excerpted from *The Path of True Godliness*, Year 1621

True godliness shows itself in resolve, and doing your utmost to put that resolve in effect (2 Cor 5:9, Acts 24:16). Surely, it is only mocking God when someone insists that he has a sincere and wholehearted intention to live a godly life and a determination to do so yet at the same time does not take any trouble and is not zealous to live a godly life here and now! If someone announced that from this moment on he will take up [career endeavors in] surgery or the sale of goods and yet day after day you see him do nothing about it, would anyone put stock in his words? Similarly, whoever wants to be regarded as a godly person must not only resolve to live a godly life but must do his utmost to demonstrate that he esteems godliness as his greatest gain.

## **Now this exercise consists of three parts:**

1. We must abstain from and avoid everything that can impede us in the practice of godliness. This was godly David's practice: "I have refrained my feet from every way, that I might keep thy word." (Psalm 119:101) By nature, man is so [focused] that he will, to the best of his ability, endeavor to avoid everything that hinders his reaching a desired goal. We see this clearly in misers, lovers, glory seekers, and all worldly people, once they earnestly set their minds on something. The weightier and more important the matter is, the more zeal and foresight they use to preclude or avoid whatever may hinder them. Since to the godly, godliness means the greatest gain and the most important work, they try most diligently to anticipate and ward off every obstacle in their path.

The man who boasts that he earnestly intends to practice godliness, while at the same time shows no evidence that he abstains from or avoids the hindrances and obstacles to godliness, clearly shows that his intentions are not genuine and that his resolves are merely feigned. Therefore, everyone who wants to demonstrate that he is a godly person should abstain as much as possible from and avoid all hindrances and obstacles to godliness. The chief obstacles and hindrances to true godliness will be discussed in detail as this work continues, for we are obliged to investigate this further in its due place.

2. We must also make use of and strive after everything that can be useful in the practice of godliness. Godly David exerted himself greatly in every respect and availed himself of all known means and tried to add to these, thus enabling him to take hold of and advance in true godliness (see Psalm 119). Human nature is like that. We see that newborn babes by nature clamor for milk that they can feed and strengthen them. Everyday we see the same thing with worldly men: When they have set their minds on something, they leave no stone unturned and use every means to achieve their goal. If they do not succeed in one technique, they try another. If it happens that many means are needed, they take hold of them all in order that they may reach their goal. If worldly men do this now to obtain some puny thing in the world that perishes with use, should not God's children make much more use of every means to advance in true godliness, which brings great gain and eternal satisfaction?

In just this way, does not he who makes no effort and neglects the zealous use of the means that can strengthen him in true godliness show openly that he does not genuinely hold godliness as his greatest gain? Therefore, everyone who would pass for a truly godly person should make diligent use of every means that can promote godliness. The chief means to that end are shown [elsewhere in this book], to which the reader is referred.

3. We must therefore begin to practice all this, not in our own strength, which means absolutely nothing, but in the power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the strength of our life and by whom we can do all things. See how the godly Paul counsels us: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." (Ephesians 6:10). This was his own practice, as it was of all the godly in his time. He therefore says, "For we are his circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3). Take note that before we believed we were powerless and totally unable to do good, and after we believe we are not "sufficient [able] of ourselves to think any thing as of our selves; but our sufficiency [ability] is of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). Therefore, the good that is in us through regeneration serves only to make us more and more inclined to expect and cultivate the good help and power of God. He strengthens us and works all our works for us, even he who "is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Take careful note of this, for surely many a man begins the practice of godliness and then gives up in discouragement and withdraws from his work. Since he began it in his own strength, he makes a mess of things. It's exactly the same thing as when a little child, in his own strength, wants to build a big castle. It is a fact that our own strength means nothing in the building up of the Christian life. Unless the power of the Almighty comes upon us, we cannot build anything that will last. That is why we call it godliness; it reminds us that without God, and his holy help we would never be able to accomplish this work.

How the devil tries to keep this fact hidden from the eyes of men! That is why there are found everywhere so many who now and then put on holy airs as if they henceforth want to be godly, but you see after only a short time that they have returned to the world, having so very quickly lost interest. This happens because they began in their own strength; therefore, they found their work too much for them and quickly tired because they found no more joy in it. Therefore, all students of true godliness who wish to begin this work well and truly wish to bring it to completion must renounce their own strength. They must surrender themselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 2:2) that they may be strengthened through him to hold fast to their good resolutions, to put them into practice, and, indeed, to bring them to full effect. We will [later explain] how the Lord Jesus brings this about in those who deny themselves and cast themselves upon him. All who wish to practice true godliness thoroughly, to their comfort, are advised to take particular notice of what is written there.