

THE  
CHRISTIAN  
AND THE WORLD

LETTERS

BY

JOHN NEWTON

## Letters by John Newton

# The Christian and the world.

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# The Christian and the world

November, 1776

Dear sir,

My London journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of seeing you in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time—but afford me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half hour we were together by ourselves prolonged to half a day. The subject you were pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad would I be, were I able to offer you anything satisfactory upon it. There is no doubt but *first religious impressions* are usually mingled with much of a legal spirit; and that *conscience* at such a time, is not only tender—but misinformed and scrupulous. And I believe, as you intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feel a liberty from many fetters we had imposed upon ourselves, we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme.

It seems to me—that no person can adjust and draw the line exactly for another. There are so many particulars in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advice is mixed with such defects, that it is not right to expect others to be absolutely guided by our rules, nor is it safe for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others. But the Scripture undoubtedly furnishes sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstance; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be led in the right way, in the path of judgment. "Show me the path where I should walk, O Lord; point out the right road for me to follow. Lead me by Your truth and teach me, for You are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in You." Psalm 25:4-5

By frequent prayer, and close acquaintance with the Scripture, and a habitual attention to the frame of our hearts, there is a certain delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment to be acquired, which renders a proper judgement concerning the nature and limits of the *Adiaphora*, (questionable things) as they are called, or how near we may go to the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love to Christ is the clearest and most persuasive factor; and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his Word is in our eye—we seldom make great mistakes!

And I believe the over-doings of a young convert, proceeding from an honest simplicity of heart, and a desire of pleasing the Lord, are more acceptable in his sight—than a certain coolness of conduct which frequently takes place afterward, when we are apt to look back with pity upon our former weakness, and secretly to applaud ourselves for our present greater attainments in knowledge, though perhaps (alas that it should ever be so!) we may have lost as much in warmth, as we have gained in light.

From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude, the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeable to these views, though the Scripture does not enumerate or infallibly decide for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn; yet it furnishes us with some general rules, which, if rightly applied, will perhaps go a good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please God than man. Some of these rules I will just mark to you: Rom. 12:1-2; 1Co. 8:13, and 1Co. 10:31; 2Co. 6:17; Eph. 4:30; Eph. 5:11, Eph. 5:15, Eph. 5:16; 1Th. 5:22; Eph. 6:18 : to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isa. 22:12; Luke 21:34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar

passages of Scripture (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number) will bring a Christian under such restrictions as follow.

To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, whatever has a tendency to dampen and indispose spiritual mindedness; for such things, if they are not condemned as sinful per se; if they are not absolutely unlawful; yes though they are, when duly regulated, lawful and right (for often our chief snares are entwined with our blessings); yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to deaden our hearts to Divine things, of which each person's experience must determine, there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance, wrong to us; and let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our gold—to pay us with pebbles. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if anything can be pursued, allowed, or rested in, as a tolerable substitute for it.

For the sake of the church, and the influence that example may have upon his fellow-Christians, the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things—not because they are unlawful—but because they are harmful to others. Thus the Apostle, though strenuous for the right of his Christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the use, so as to eat no meat, rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience.

Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some public amusements, as a concert or oratorio, and return from thence with a warm heart to my closet (the possibility of which, in my own case, I greatly question); yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker brother than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful—but because I did it. In which case I should suspect, that, though I received no harm—they would.

I have known and conversed with some who have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline, from imitating others, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kinds of compliances.

It seems that an obligation of this sort of self-denial, rises and is strengthened in proportion to the weight and influence of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I would think it sinful to hunt for partridge—but, as a minister, I no more dare do it, than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offense to some, and be pleaded for as a license by others.

There is a duty, and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace, in our necessary converse among them. This seems to require, that, though we should not be needlessly singular—yet, for their instruction, and for the honor of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of singularity, and show ourselves called to be a *separated people*: that, though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up (in which we cannot be too exact)—yet we are not of this world—but belong to another community, and act from other principles, by other rules, and to other ends, than the generality of those about us.

I have observed that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions, and sentiments, and places of worship— provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such compliances, and have thought, that, if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits, professors

would not, in such numbers, and so often, run among them to get relief from the burden of time hanging upon their hands.

As our Lord Jesus is the great representative of his people in heaven, he does them the honor to continue a succession of them as his representatives upon earth. Happy are those who are favored with most of the holy unction, and best enabled to manifest to all around them, by their spirit, tempers, and conversation, what is the proper design and genuine effect of his Gospel upon the hearts of sinners.

In our way of little life in the country, serious people often complain of the snares they meet with from worldly people, and yet they must mix with them to get a livelihood. I advise them, if they can, to do their business with the world as they do it in the rain. If their business calls them abroad, they will not leave it undone for fear of being a little wet; but then, when it is done, they presently seek shelter, and will not stand in the rain for pleasure. Just so, providential and necessary calls of duty, which lead us into the world, will not hurt us, if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our *cross*—is not so likely to be our *snares*. But if that spirit, which we should always watch and pray against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself—then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:16. The value of **time** is to be taken into the account. Time is a precious talent, and our Christian profession opens a wide field for the due improvement of it. Much of it has been already lost—and therefore we are exhorted to redeem it.

Many things which custom pleads for, will not be suitable to a Christian, for this one reason—that they are not consistent with the simplest notion of the redemption of time. It is generally said—that we need relaxation. I allow it in a sense—the Lord Himself has provided it; and because our spirits are too weak to be always upon the wing in meditation and prayer, He has appointed to all men, from the king downwards, something to do in a secular way.

And when everything of this sort in each person's situation is properly attended to, if the heart is in a right state—spiritual concerns will present themselves, as affording the noblest, sweetest, and most interesting relaxation from the cares and toils of life. On the other hand, secular work will be the best relaxation and unbending of the mind from pious exercises. Between the two, perhaps there ought to be but little mere leisure time. A life, in this sense divided between God and the world, is desirable, when one part of it is spent in retirement, seeking after and conversing with Him whom our souls love; and the other part of it employed in active services for the good of our family, friends, the church, and society, for His sake. Every hour which does not fall in with one or other of these views, I apprehend is *lost* time.

The day in which we live seems likewise to call for something of a peculiar spirit in the Lord's people. It is a day of abounding sin, and I fear a day of impending judgment. The world, as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, is secure. We are soon to have a day of apparent humiliation; but the just causes for it are not confined to one day—but will exist, and too probably increase, every day. If I am not mistaken in the *signs of the times*, there never was, within the annals of the English history, a period in which the spirit and employment described Eze. 9:4, could be more suitable than the present, "Go throughout the city—and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." The Lord calls for mourning and weeping—but the words of many are stout against him! New kinds of evil are invented almost daily; and the language of those who bear the greatest sway in what is called *the polite circle*, I mean, the interpretative

language of their hearts, is like that of the rebellious Jews, Jer. 44:16-17, etc., "As for the word which you have spoken—we will not hearken unto you at all!"

In short, things are coming to a point, and it seems to be almost putting to the vote whether the *Lord* or *Baal* is God. In this state of affairs, methinks we cannot be too explicit in avowing our attachment to the Lord, nor too careful in avoiding an improper relationships with those who are in confederacy against him. We know not how soon we may greatly need that mark of providential protection which is given to those who sigh and cry for our abominations.

Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honorable, comfortable, and safe (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean), to be thought by some too scrupulous and precise—than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely contrary to a Divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the genius of the Gospel, or conformable to the mind which was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people. The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where the law of what is called *custom* is the only law which may not be violated with impunity, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded—that those who do fear him must hold their tongues though they should hear his name blasphemed—can hardly be a Christian's voluntary chosen ground. Yet I fear these characters will apply to every kind of social amusement or assembly in the kingdom.

As to *family connections*, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their friends often live as it were—in *two elements*, there is a *mutual awkwardness*, which makes their interactions rather dry and tedious. But upon that account they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of civility and affection; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is something considerable given up by one or the other; and I think Christians ought to be very cautious what concessions they make upon this account. But, as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given you such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not be dogmatic; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts and to the general tenor of Scripture.

# Combating worldliness

October 3, 1778.

Dear Madam,

You would have me tell you what are the best means to be used by a young person, to prevent the world, with all its seductive and insnaring scenes, from drawing the heart aside from God. It is an important question; but I apprehend your own heart will tell you, that you are already possessed of all the information concerning it which you can well expect from me. I could only attempt to answer it from the Bible, which lies open to you likewise.

If your heart is like mine, it must confess, that when it turns aside from God it is seldom through ignorance of the proper means or motives which should have kept us near him—but rather from an evil principle within, which prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to light already received.

I could offer you rules, cautions, and advises in abundance; for I find it comparatively easy to preach to others. But if you should farther ask me, how you shall effectually reduce them to practice; I feel that I am so deficient, and so much at a loss in this matter myself, that I know not well what to say to you. Yet something must be said.

In the first place, then, I would observe, that though it is our bounded duty, and the highest privilege we can propose to ourselves, to have our hearts kept close to the Lord; yet we must not expect it absolutely or perfectly, much less all at once. We shall keep close to him in proportion as we are solidly convinced of the infinite disparity between him and the things which would presume to stand in competition with him, and the *folly*, as well as *ingratitude*, of departing from him. But these points are only to be learned by experience, and by smarting under a series of painful disappointments in our expectations from creatures. Our *judgments* may be quickly satisfied that his favor is better than life, while yet it is in the power of a *mere trifle* to turn us aside.

The Lord permits us to feel our weakness, that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready in words to confess that we are weak, we do not so properly know it, until that secret, though unallowed, dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves is brought to the trial, and fails us. To be humble, and, like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us, as to cry to him continually to hold us up that we may be safe—is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with him.

But how shall we attain this humble frame of spirit? It must be, as I said, from a real and sensible conviction of our weakness and vileness, which we cannot learn (at least I have not been able to learn it) merely from books or preachers. The providence of God concurs with his Holy Spirit in his merciful design of making us acquainted with ourselves. It is indeed a great mercy to be preserved from such declensions as might fall under the notice of our fellow-creatures; but when they can observe nothing of consequence to object to us, things may be far from right with us, in the sight of Him who judges not only actions—but the thoughts and first motions of the heart. And indeed could we for a season so cleave to God as to find little or nothing in ourselves to be ashamed of, we are such poor creatures, that we should presently grow vain and self-sufficient, and expose ourselves to the greatest danger of falling.

There are, however, means to be observed on our part; and though you know them, I will repeat the principal, because you desire me. The first is **Prayer**; and here,

above all things, we should pray for humility. It may be called both the guard of all other graces, and the soil in which they grow.

The second, Attention to the **Scripture**. Your question is directly answered in Psa. 119:9, "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word and following its rules." The *precepts* of the Word are our rule and delight the *promises* our strength and encouragement. The *good* recorded of the saints is proposed for our encouragement; their *miscarriages* are as land-marks set up to warn us of the rocks and shoals which lie in the way of our passage.

The study of the whole scheme of Gospel salvation, respecting the person, life, doctrine, death, and glory of our Redeemer, is appointed to form our souls to a spiritual and divine taste. And so far as this prevails and grows in us, the trifles which would draw us from the Lord, will lose their influence, and appear, divested of the glare with which they strike the senses—as mere vanity and emptiness.

The third grand means is, **Consideration** or Recollection; a careful regard to those temptations and snares, to which, from our tempers, situations, or connections, we are more immediately exposed, and by which we have been formerly hindered. It may be well in the morning, before we leave our chambers, to forecast, as far as we are able, the probable circumstances of the day before us. Yet the observance of this, as well as of every rule that can be offered, may dwindle into a mere form. However, I trust the Lord, who has given you a desire to live to him, will be your guard and teacher. There is none who teaches like him.



# A Christian's attainments in the present life

February, 1772

Dear sir,

I have been sitting perhaps a quarter of an hour with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter. A detail of the confused incoherent thoughts which have successively passed through my mind, would have more than filled the sheet; but your patience, and even your charity for the writer, would have been tried to the uttermost, if I could have penned them all down. At length my suspense reminded me of the Apostle's words, Gal. 5:17, "You cannot do the things that you would." This is a *humbling* but a *just* account of a **Christian's attainments in the present life**, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given his people a *desire* and *will* aiming at *great* things; without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians. But they cannot do as they would—their best desires are weak and ineffectual; not absolutely so (for he who works in them to will, enables them in a *measure* to do likewise)—but in comparison with the mark at which they *aim*.

So that, while they have great cause to be *thankful* for the desire he has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be *ashamed* and *abased* under a sense of their *continual defects*, and the *evil mixtures* which taint and debase their best endeavors. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could—but in which, from first to last, he finds a humiliating inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

**He would willingly enjoy God in prayer.** He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in His judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honor and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things which are in heaven, that he should stoop so much lower, to afford his gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth! The Christian can bid others to expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind and greater in degree than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say—You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him who cares for you. By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him—you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week's converse with the best of men, or the most studious perusal of many books! And in this light, he would consider prayer, and improve it for himself. But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad to omit with a just excuse? The chief pleasure he derives from the performance, is to think that his task is finished! He has been drawing near to God with his *lips*, while his *heart* was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is *dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief*.

**The like may be said of reading the Scripture.** He believes it to be the Word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet, while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day—he cannot do as he would! It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged, than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his

*privilege* frequently dwindles into a *task*. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

**He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ.** Glad he is, indeed—of those occasions which recall the Savior to his mind; and with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon the ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would! Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting him out of our thoughts, of whom we say, *He is the Beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion*. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could, we would set him always before us; his love would be the delightful theme of our hearts, *from morn to noon—from noon to dewy eve*.

But though we aim at this good—evil is present with us! We find we are *renewed but in part*, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, *To take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh*.

**He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of Divine Providence.** He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God—and the good of those who fear him. He does not doubt that the hairs of his head are all numbered; that the blessings of every kind which he possesses, were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him, by the bounty and special favor of the Lord whom he serves—that afflictions spring not out of the ground—but are fruits and tokens of Divine love, no less than his comforts; that there is a need-be, whenever for a season, he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt, than of what he sees with his eyes! And there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often, when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress—he cannot do what he would! He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond! Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! how much weakness and inconsistency even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! and what reason have we to confess, that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God, we are not under the *law*—but under *grace*. And even these distressing effects of the *remnants of indwelling sin*, are over-ruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned more from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on him, who is appointed as our Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. **The more vile we are in our own eyes—the more precious Christ will be to us!** A deep repeated sense of the *evil of our hearts*, is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation to Christ—where it is due.

Again, a sense of these evils will (when hardly anything else can do it) reconcile us to the thoughts of *death*; yes, make us desirous to depart, that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep-rooted in our nature, that (like the leprous house) the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not until then—we shall be able to do the thing that we would! When we see Jesus, we shall be transformed into his image, and be done with sin and sorrow forever!

LETTER

March, 1772

Dear sir,

My last letter turned upon the Apostle's thought, Gal. 5:17, "You cannot do the things that you would." In the parallel place, Romans 7:19, there is another clause subjoined, "The evil *evil* I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." This, added to the former, would complete the *dark side of my experience*. Permit me to tell you a little part (for some things *must* not, *cannot* be told), not of what I have *read*—but of what I have *felt*, in illustration of this passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and evil imaginations, but this evil is present with me. My heart is like a highway, like a city without walls or gates! Nothing is so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid—but it can obtain access to my heart—at any time, or in any place! Neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table, exempt me from their intrusion! I sometimes compare my *words* to the treble of an instrument, which my *thoughts* accompany with a kind of bass, or rather anti-bass, in which every rule of harmony is broken, every possible combination of discord and confusion is introduced, utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the intended melody. Ah! what music would my praying and preaching often make in the ears of the Lord Almighty, if he listened to them as they are mine only! By men, the upper part only (if I may so speak) is heard; and small cause there is for self-gratulation, if they should happen to commend, when conscience tells me that they would be struck with astonishment and abhorrence could they but hear the whole!

But if this awful effect of *heart depravity* cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature. Yet, at least, I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment, and best wishes, I find *something within me* which nourishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to startle and flee, as I would if a loathsome toad or a serpent was put in my food, or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart (at least *my heart*) be—which can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency! Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, with out the least affectation of humility, (however fair his *outward* conduct appears) subscribe himself *less than the least of all saints—the very chief of sinners!*

I would not be influenced by a principle of SELF on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such a conduct, as clearly as I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought *ten feet tall*, and I know that a desire of *being thought wise or good*, is equally contrary to reason and truth. I would be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures supposed I had such a desire; and therefore I fear the very principle of SELF, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The **pride** of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own; because their good opinion of me depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this *dead fly* taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than *gilded sins!*

I would not indulge vain reasoning concerning the counsels, ways, and providences of God; yet I am prone to do it. That the Judge of all the earth will do right—is to me as evident and necessary as that two plus two make four. I believe that he has a sovereign right to do what he will with his own, and that this *sovereignty* is but another name for the unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness. But my reasoning are often such, as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formally renounced them! I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit, that would account for

everything, and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend. What an evil is this—for a potsherd of the earth, to contend with its Maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible—yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty with God—when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable!

I would not cleave to a *covenant of works*; it should seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I have reasons enough to deter me from this. Yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, *Enter not into judgment with your servant, O Lord*. I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners—and it is the main pleasure and business of my life, to set forth the necessity and all-sufficiency of the Mediator between God and man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his alone. But here, as in everything else, I find a vast difference between my *judgment* and my *experience*. I am invited to take the *water of life freely*—yet often discouraged, because I have nothing with which to *pay* for it.

If I am at times favored with some liberty from the above-mentioned evils, it rather gives me a more favorable opinion of myself, than increases my admiration of the Lord's goodness to so unworthy a creature! And when the returning tide of my corruptions convinces me that I am still the same, an unbelieving *legal* spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed! At least, I feel a weariness of being indebted to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness; and I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my desires after an increase of sanctification, arises from a secret wish that I might not be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him.

This is only a *faint sketch of my heart*—it would require a *volume*, rather than a *letter*, to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I choose to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is *grievous*, it is not *desperate*; I have a gracious and infallible Physician! I shall not die—but live, and declare the works of the Lord!

# What a Christian *ought* to be

September, 1772

Dear sir,

Weak, unskillful, and unfaithful, as I am in practice—the Lord has been pleased to give me some idea of what a Christian ought to be, **and of what is actually attainable in the present life**, by those whom he enables earnestly to aspire towards the prize of their high calling. They who are versed in mechanics can, from a knowledge of the combined powers of a complicated machine, make an exact calculation of what it is able to perform, and what resistance it can counteract. But who can compute the possible effects of that combination of principles and motives revealed in the Gospel, upon a heart duly impressed with a sense of their importance and glory?

When I was recently at Mr. Cox's Museum, while I was fixing my attention upon some curious movements, imagining that I saw the whole of the artist's design, the person who showed it touched a little spring, and suddenly a thousand new and unexpected motions took place—and the whole piece seemed animated from the top to the bottom. I would have formed but a very imperfect judgment of it—had I seen no more than what I saw at first. I thought this might, in some measure, illustrate the vast difference that is observable among professors, even among those who are, it is to be hoped, sincere.

There are people who appear to have a true knowledge (in part) of the nature of Gospel religion—but seem not to be apprised of its properties in their extent. If they have attained to some hope of their acceptance, if they find at seasons some communion with God in the means of grace, if they are in measure delivered from the prevailing and corrupt customs of the world—they seem to be as satisfied, as if they were possessed of all. These are indeed great things. The profession of too many, whose sincerity, charity would be unwilling to impeach—is *greatly blemished*, notwithstanding their hopes and their occasional comforts—by the breaking forth of unsanctified tempers, and the indulgence of vain hopes, anxious cares, and selfish pursuits.

Far, very far, am I from that unscriptural sentiment of *sinless perfection* in fallen man. To those who have a due sense of the spirituality and ground of the Divine precepts, and of what passes in their own hearts—causes of humiliation and self-abasement on the account of sin will never be lacking. Yet still there is a liberty and privilege attainable by the Gospel, beyond what is ordinarily thought of. Permit me to mention two or three particulars, in which those who have a holy ambition of aspiring to them, shall not be altogether disappointed.

**A delight in the Lord's all-sufficiency, to be satisfied in him as our present and eternal portion.** This, in the sense in which I understand it, is not the effect of a present warm frame—but of a deeply rooted and abiding principle; the habitual exercise of which is to be estimated by the *comparative indifference* with which other things are regarded. The soul thus principled, is not at leisure to take or to seek satisfaction in anything but what has a known subservience to this leading taste. Either the Lord is present—and then he is to be rejoiced in; or else he is absent—and then he is to be sought and waited for. They are to be pitied, who, if they are at some times happy in the Lord, can at other times be happy without him, and rejoice in broken cisterns, when their spirits are at a distance from the Fountain of living waters.

I do not plead for an **absolute indifference to temporal blessings**. God gives us all things richly to enjoy; and a capacity of relishing them, is his gift likewise; but then

the consideration of his love in bestowing all our temporal blessings, should exceedingly enhance the value, and a regard to his will should regulate their use. Nor can they all supply the lack of that which we can only receive immediately from himself. This principle likewise moderates that inordinate *fear* and *sorrow* to which we are liable, upon the prospect or the occurrence of great trials, for which there is a sure support and resource provided in the all-sufficiency of infinite goodness and grace. What a privilege is this—to possess God in all things while we have them—and all things in God when they are taken from us!

**An acquiescence in the Lord's will—founded in a persuasion of his wisdom, holiness, sovereignty, and goodness.** This is one of the greatest privileges and brightest ornaments of our profession. So far as we attain to this—we are secure from disappointment. Our own limited views, and short-sighted purposes and desires, may be, and will be, often over-ruled; but then, our main and leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done, and must be accomplished. How highly does it befit us, both as *creatures* and as *sinner*s—to submit to the appointments of our Maker! And how necessary is it to our peace!

This great attainment is too often unthought of, and overlooked. We are prone to fix our attention upon the *second causes* and *immediate instruments* of events; forgetting that whatever befalls us, is according to God's purpose, and therefore must be right and seasonable in itself, and shall in the outcome, be productive of good. From hence arise impatience, resentment, and secret repining, which are not only sinful—but tormenting! Whereas, if all things are in his hand; if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and if he has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view, to which everything that happens is subordinate and subservient—then we have nothing to do—but with patience and humility to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy outcome. The path of present duty is marked out; and the concerns of the next and every following hour—are in his hands. How happy are those who can resign all to him, see his hand in every dispensation, and believe that he chooses better for them—than they could possibly choose for themselves!

**A single eye to his glory—as the ultimate scope of all our undertakings.** The Lord can design nothing short of his own glory—nor should we. The constraining love of Christ has a direct and marvelous tendency, in proportion to the measure of faith, to mortify the corrupt principle, SELF, which for a season is the grand spring of our conduct and by which we are too much biased after we know the Lord. But as *grace* prevails, *self* is renounced. We feel that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; and that it is our duty, our honor, and our happiness, to be the servants of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To devote soul and body, every talent, power, and faculty, to the service of his cause and will; to let our light shine (in our several situations) to the praise of his grace; to place our highest joy in the contemplation of his adorable perfections; to rejoice even in tribulations and distresses, in reproaches and infirmities—if thereby the power of Christ may rest upon us, and be magnified in us; to be content, yes glad, *to be nothing*—that he may be all in all; to obey him, in opposition to the threats or solicitations of men; to *trust* him, though all outward appearances seem against us; to *rejoice* in him, though we should (as will sooner or later be the case) have nothing else to rejoice in; to live above the world, and to have our hearts in heaven; to be like the angels, finding our own pleasure in performing his—this is the prize, the mark of our high calling, to which we are encouraged with a holy ambition continually to aspire! It is true, we shall still fall short; we shall find that, when we would do good, evil will be present with us. But the attempt is glorious, and shall not be *wholly* in vain. He who gives us thus to *desire*, will enable us to *perform* with growing success, and teach us to profit, even by our mistakes and imperfections.

O blessed man! who thus fears the Lord; who delights in his Word, and derives his principles, motives, maxims, and consolations, from that unfailing source of light and strength. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf is always green, and fruit abundant. The *wisdom* of God shall direct his plans, and inspire his counsels. The *power* of God shall guard him on every side, and prepare his way through every difficulty. He shall see mountains sink into plains—and streams spring up in the dry wilderness. The Lord's enemies will be his enemies; and they may be permitted to fight against him—but they shall not prevail, for the Lord is with him to deliver him. The conduct of such a one, though in a narrow and retired sphere of life, is of more real excellence and importance, than the most splendid actions of kings and conquerors, which fill the annals of history! And if the God whom he serves is pleased to place him in a more public light, his labors and cares will be amply compensated, by the superior opportunities afforded him of manifesting the power and reality of true religion, and promoting the good of mankind.

I hope I may say, that I *desire* to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am sure I must say, that what I have written is far from being my *actual experience*. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth, were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the *law*—but under *grace*. The *Gospel* is a dispensation for *sinners*, and we have an Advocate with the Father. There is the unshaken ground of hope. A reconciled Father, a prevailing Advocate, a powerful Shepherd, a compassionate Friend, a Savior who is able and willing to save to the uttermost! He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust; and has opened for us a new and blood-besprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.

# The advantages of a state of poverty

My dear Friend,

I confess myself almost ashamed to write to you. You are pinched by poverty, suffer the lack of many things; and your faith is often sharply tried, when you look at your family, and perhaps can hardly conceive how you shall be able to supply them with bread to the end of the week. The Lord has appointed me a different lot. I am favored, not only with the necessities but with the comforts of life. Now I could easily give you plenty of good advice: I could tell you, it is your duty to be patient, and even thankful, in the lower state; that if you have bread and water, it is more than you deserve at the Lord's hands; and that, as you are out of hell, and made a partaker of the hope of the Gospel, you ought not to think anything hard that you meet with on the way to heaven. If I should say thus, and say no more, you would not dispute the truth of my assertions. But as coming from me, who lives at ease, to you, who are beset with difficulties, you might question their propriety, and think that I know but little of my own heart, and could feel but little for your distress. You would probably compare me to one who would think himself a mariner because he had studied the art of navigation by the fire-side, though he had never seen the sea. Yet I hope, by my frequent converse with the Lord's poor (for I live in the midst of an afflicted and poor people), I have made some observations, which, though not strictly the fruit of my own experience, may not be wholly unseasonable or unacceptable to you.

Whether the rich or the poor, who live without God in the world, are most to be pitied, is not easy to determine. It is a dreadful case to be miserable in both worlds; but yet the parade and seeming prosperity in which some live for a few years will be no abatement, but rather a great aggravation, of their future torment. A madman is equally to be pitied, whether he is laid upon a bed of down, or a bed of straw. **Madness is in the heart of every unregenerate sinner; and the more he possesses of this world's goods, he is so much the more extensively mischievous.** Poverty is so far a negative good, to those who have no other restraint, that it confines the effects of the evil heart within narrower bounds, and the small circle of their immediate connections: whereas the rich, who live under the power of sin, are unfaithful stewards of a larger trust, and by their pernicious influence are often instrumental in diffusing profaneness and licentiousness through a country or a kingdom; besides the innumerable acts of oppression, and the ravages of war, which are perpetrated to gratify the insatiable demands of luxury, ambition, and pride.

But, to leave this; if we turn our eyes from the false maxims of the world, and weigh things in the balance of the sanctuary, I believe we shall find, that *poor Christians*, though they have many trials which call for our compassion, have some advantages above those of the Lord's people to whom he has given a larger share of the good things of the present life. Why else does the Apostle say, "God has chosen the poor?" or why do we see, in fact, that so few of the rich, or wise, or mighty, are called? Certainly he does not choose them because they are poor; for "he is no respecter of persons."

Rather I think we may say, that, knowing what is in the hearts of his people, the nature of the world through which they are to pass, and what circumstances are best suited to manifest the truth and efficacy of his grace, he has, in the general, chosen poverty as the best state for them. Some exceptions he has made, that the sufficiency of his grace may be made known in every state of life; but, for the most part, they are a poor and afflicted people: and in this appointment he has had a regard to their *honor*, their *safety*, and their *comfort*. I have room for but a very brief illustration of these particulars.



Sanctified poverty is an **honorable** state; not so indeed in the judgment of the world; the rich have many friends, the poor are usually despised. But I am speaking of that honor which comes from God only. The poor, who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," are honored with the nearest external conformity to Jesus their Savior; who, though he was Lord of all, was pleased for our sakes to make himself so poor, that he had not where to lay his head, and submitted to receive assistance from the contributions of his followers; Luke 8:3. By this astonishing humiliation, he poured contempt upon all human glory, and made the state of poverty honorable; and now "he who reproaches the poor, despises his Maker."

And as he was, so were his Apostles in the world. They were not only destitute of rank, titles, and estates—but were often in hunger and nakedness, and had no certain dwelling-place. To infer from hence, as some have done, that riches, and the accommodations of life, are unsuitable to the state of a Christian, is the mark of a superstitious and legal spirit. There were in those days several believers that were in a state of affluence; as, for instance, Theophilus, whom Luke addresses by a title of honor, 'most noble or excellent'; the same which Paul ascribes to the Roman Governor. But we may safely infer, that that state of life in which our Lord was pleased to converse with men, and which was the lot of his Apostles, and most favored servants, is honorable in the sight of God.

Again: Poverty is honorable, because it affords a peculiar advantage for glorifying God, and evidencing the power of his grace, and the faithfulness of his promises, in the sight of men. A believer, if rich, lives by faith; and his faith meets with various trials. He himself knows by whom he stands; but it is not ordinarily so visible to others, as in the case of the poor. When ministers speak of the all-sufficiency of God to those who trust in him, and the certain effect of the principles of the Gospel, in supporting, satisfying, and regulating the mind of man, the poor are the best and most unsuspected witnesses for the truth of their doctrine. If we are asked, 'Where do these wonderful people live, who can delight themselves in God, esteem a day in his courts better than a thousand, and prefer the light of his countenance to all earthly joy?'—we can confidently send them to the poor of the flock. Among the number who are so called, there are some who will not disappoint our appeal. Let the world, who refuse to believe the preachers, believe their own eyes; and when they see a poor person content, thankful, rejoicing, admiring the Lord's goodness for affording him what they account hard fare, and, in the midst of various pressures, incapable of being bribed by offers, or terrified by threats, to swerve a step from the path of known duty—let them acknowledge that this is the finger of God. If they harden themselves against this evidence, "neither would they be persuaded though one should arise from the dead."

And as poverty is an honorable, so it is comparatively a safe state. True, it is attended with its peculiar temptations; but it is not near so suitable to draw forth and nourish the two grand corruption's of the heart, self-importance, and an idolatrous cleaving to the world, as the opposite state of riches. Those who are rich in this world, and who know the Lord and their own hearts, feel the wisdom and propriety of the Apostle's charge, "Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in uncertain riches." If poor believers consider the snares to which their rich brethren are exposed, they will rather pray for and pity, than envy them. Their path is slippery; they have reason to cry continually, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe!" for they live in the midst of the hurries and vanities of the world, are engaged in a large sphere of action, and are incessantly exposed to interruptions and snares. The behavior of all around them reminds them of their supposed consequence: and, by the nature of their situation, they are greatly precluded from plain dealing and friendly advice.

But the poor are not surrounded with flatterers, nor teased with impertinences. They meet with little to stimulate their pride, or to pander to their vanity. They not only believe in their judgments, but are constrained to feel, by the experience of every

day, that this world cannot afford them rest. If they have food and clothing, and grace therewith to be content, they have reason to be thankful for an exemption from those splendid cares, and delusive appearances, which are the inseparable attendants of wealth and worldly distinction; and which, if not more burdensome, are, humanly speaking, much more dangerous, and greater impediments to the progress of a spiritual life, than the ordinary trials of the poor.

The believing poor have likewise, for the most part, the advantage in point of spiritual comfort; and that principally in two respects. First, As they are called to a life of more immediate dependence upon the promise and providence of God (having little else to trust to), they have a more direct and frequent experience of His interposition in their favor. Obadiah was a servant of God, though he lived in the court of Ahab. He, doubtless, had his difficulties in such a situation; but he was not in poverty. He had not only enough for himself in a time of dearth, but was able to impart to others. We may believe, that he well knew he was indebted to the Lord's goodness for his provision; but he could hardly have so sweet, so strong, so sensible an impression of God's watchful care over him as Elijah had, who, when he was deprived of all human support, was fed by the ravens.

Such of the Lord's people who have estates in land, or thousands in the bank, will acknowledge, that even the bread they eat is the gift of the lords bounty; yet having a moral certainty of a provision for life, I would think that they cannot exercise faith in the Divine Providence, with respect to their temporal supplies, so distinctly as the poor, who, having no friend or resource upon earth, are necessitated to look immediately to their Father who is in heaven for their daily bread.

And though it is not given to the world to know what a fellowship is carried on between heaven and earth, nor with what acceptance the prayers of the poor and afflicted enter into the ears of the Lord of hosts; yet many of them have had such proofs of his attention, wisdom, faithfulness, power, and love, in supplying their needs, and opening them a way of relief, when they have been beset with difficulties on all sides, as have been no less certain and indisputable, I had almost said no less glorious—than the miracles which he wrought for Israel when he divided the Red Sea before them, and gave them food from the clouds. Such evidences of the power of faith, the efficacy of prayer, and the truth of the Scriptures (preferable to mountains of gold and silver, and for which the state of poverty furnishes the most frequent occasions), are a rich overbalance for all its inconveniences.

But, Secondly, I apprehend that the humble and believing poor have, in general, the greatest share of those consolations which are the effect of the light of God's countenance lifted up upon the soul, of his love shed abroad in the heart, or of a season of refreshment from His presence. By such expressions as these, the Scripture intimates that "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" a description of which those who have tasted it will not require, and those who are strangers to it could not understand. This joy is not always the companion of faith, not even of strong faith; but it is that which a believer, whether rich or poor, incessantly thirsts after; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly good is but vanity and disappointment. The Lord imparts this joy to his people, in season and measure, as he sees fit; but his poor people have the largest share.

**They have little comfort from the world, therefore he is pleased to be their comforter.** They have many trials and sufferings; and he with whom they have to do knows their situation and pressures: he has promised to make their strength equal to their day, and to revive their fainting spirits with heavenly cordials. When it is thus with them, they can say, with Jacob, "I have enough;" or, as it is in the original, "I have all." This makes hard things easy, and the burden light, which the flesh would otherwise complain of as heavy. This has often given a sweeter relish to bread and water, than the sensualist ever found in the most lavish and expensive

refinements of luxury. Blessed are the poor who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him. They often enjoy the most lively foretastes of the glory which shall be revealed.

Have not you, my friend, found these things true in your own experience? Yes! the Lord has sanctified your crosses, and supported you under them. Hitherto he has helped you, and he will be with you to the end. As you have followed him upon earth, you will before long follow him to heaven. You are now called to "sow in tears, there you shall reap in joy, and God shall wipe all tears from your eyes." In the mean time, be thankful that he honors you, in appointing you to be a witness for the truth and power of his grace, in the midst of an unbelieving world.

It is true, that even where the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. You have sharp trials, which, for the present, cannot be joyous, but grievous; and you have, doubtless, felt the depravity of your nature, and the subtlety of Satan, at some times prompting you to impatience, envy, and distrust. But these evils are not peculiar to a state of poverty; you would have been exposed to the same had you lived in affluence—along with many others, from which you are now exempted: for riches and poverty are but comparative terms, and it is only the grace of God can teach us to be content in any possible situation of life. The rich are as prone to desire something which they have not, as the poor; and those who have most to lose, have most to fear. That a man's life (the happiness of his life) "consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses," is an aphorism founded upon the highest authority, and confirmed by universal experience and observation.

In a word, you are not poor, but rich. The promises are your inheritance; heaven is your home; the angels of the Lord are ministering spirits, who rejoice to watch over you for good; and the Lord of angels himself is your sun and shield, and everlasting portion. It is impossible that you, to whom he has given Himself, his Son, his Spirit, his grace, his kingdom, can lack anything which is truly good for you. If riches were so, he could pour them upon you in abundance, as easily as he provides you your daily bread. But these, for the most part, he bestows on those who have no portion but in the present life. You have great reason to rejoice in the lot he has appointed for you, which secures you from numberless imaginary needs and real dangers, and furnishes you with the fairest opportunities for the manifestation, exercise, and increase of the graces he has implanted in you. Influenced by these views, I trust you can cheerfully say,  
What others value, I resign:  
Lord, 'tis enough that you are mine.

I commend you to the blessing of our covenant God, and to Jesus our Savior, "who, when He was rich, made himself poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be rich."

## The comforts and snares of social and relative affections

Alas! how difficult do we find it to observe a proper medium between overvaluing and undervaluing our creature-comforts; especially those of social and relative life. The mutual affection which does, or should exist, between husband and wife, parents and children, and proportionally between other family connections, or our intimate and tried friends, constitute our chief temporal pleasures. These are almost the only pleasures this earth can afford, which are very interesting to an intelligent and serious mind. For these the *voluptuary* has little relish—*sensuality* has blunted his feelings, and his gratifications are scarcely superior to those of the brutes.

Such people are not at present concerned in the subject of this paper, nor can they well understand it. I write for those who possess and value the *comforts of domestic life*, acknowledge the goodness of the Lord in bestowing and preserving them, who wish to make them additional motives for gratitude and praise—but are often apprehensive that their attachments to God's gifts, should withdraw their thoughts from the great Giver, and encroach upon that supreme regard which is only due to himself.

A disposition to love the *creature* more than the *Creator*—is undoubtedly a part of a proof of our natural depravity. This evil principle, described by the apostle under the names of the *Flesh*, the *Old Man*, and *Indwelling Sin*, however weakened and mortified in a true believer—is not extirpated. The opposition between nature and grace, flesh and spirit, renders the Christian life a state of constant warfare. They are opposite, contrary, contradictory one to the other; no peace or truce can exist between them. The effects of this conflict extend to every faculty. When **grace** is in exercise, the motions of sin are noticed, checked and lamented—but they are always sufficiently strong to render our best intentions and best actions defective and polluted. And particularly, to depreciate and adulterate the finest feelings of humanity, and to turn our glory into shame. Thus our *comforts* often become our snares; and that which should be for our health proves an occasion of falling.

We cannot be too watchful against this propensity; it should prompt us to daily humiliation, and much prayer. But the Lord is not a hard master; he gives us all things richly to enjoy; not to raise, and then disappoint our expectations—but, within the limits his wisdom prescribes, to *gratify* them. Ignorance and superstition misrepresent him. Under their influence multitudes think to please them by self-invented austerities and mortifications, and suppose they shall be acceptable to him, in proportion as they make themselves miserable. But, on the contrary, we are assured that he delights in our prosperity—so far as it is consistent with our safety; and that he does not willingly afflict His own children, who love and serve him. He has placed us in a world, in which

(considered as his world) everything is beautiful in its season, proper use, and due subordination, to our chief good; though considered as *man's world*, our apostasy has filled it with confusion and misery.

Contemplate his goodness in a *rural situation*. Light colors, and prospects, are suited to please the eye. The singing of birds, the lowing of the cattle, the bleating of the sheep, and in general, the inarticulate tones of all the animal tribes, are soothing and grateful to the ear. During a great part of the year, the scent of blossoms and flowers perfumes the air, and regales the sense of smelling. *Food* is a necessary means for the preservation of life, and would be so if it were no less unpalatable than the most nauseous drugs. But we are furnished with a profusion and variety of foods, which, while they satisfy our hunger, and recruit our strength, are likewise grateful to the palate, and accommodated to the different tastes of different people. Nay, he has not only given us *food*—but *fruits*. These are certainly not *needful* for the support of life, nor are they *forbidden* like the fruit of the tree of knowledge—but are freely presented for our use.

Things might have been so constituted, that all our sensations from external objects would have been disagreeable and painful. But God is good. We would live in the midst of continual enjoyments if we obeyed his precepts, and observed his regulations; which, however contrary to the evil dispositions of our fallen nature, amount to no more than the kind admonition, "Do yourself no harm!" For there is not a single restriction enjoined by the Scripture, with which it would not be *our best interest* to comply, if the authority of God was wholly out of the question. But sin, where it prevails, dishonors God, abuses his gifts, and throws all into confusion. Intemperance, riot, and disorderly passions, have filled the earth with woe!

Thus, as we are creatures formed for society, and cannot live, either with safety or comfort, in a solitary state, it has pleased God in his goodness—to make us susceptible to social affections, which sweeten our fellowship with each other, and combine duty with pleasure. Parents are certainly bound by the law of nature to take care of their own children, and to provide for them; especially in the helpless state of infancy, when they are utterly unable to take care of themselves. This would often be a irksome task, if they did not feel *an instinctive tenderness* for their infant offspring at first sight, which makes that delightful, which might otherwise be troublesome.

It is likewise the appointment of God, that the successive generations of mankind should be perpetuated by marriage. As this is the nearest of all natural relations, so when the union is properly formed and conducted, it is the most interesting and endeared. This union, by the will of God, is in itself indissoluble until death makes a separation, excepting in the single case of marital unfaithfulness. But the marriage state when entered into without a regard to God, to the rules of his Word, and a dependence upon his blessing, is seldom productive of an abiding

union of hearts; and if this is lacking, the case of either party may be compared to that of a dislocated limb, which is indeed still united to the body—but, not being in its proper place and connection, is useless and painful itself, and the cause of pain and uneasiness to the whole body.

Even the marriages of those who come together, and live together, in the fear of the Lord, are subject to heavy troubles—doubled in wedlock, and frequently multiplied in children—they have a larger share of cares, duties, and anxieties, than those who live single; yet they are comparatively happy. And I think, all things considered, they have the most favored lot. They love the Lord, they seek his presence and blessing, and they do not seek in vain. They love each other, they have one faith, one aim, one hope. Their mutual affection, intimacy, and perfect confidence, greatly enhance the value and relish of the comforts in which they participate, and alleviate the weight of their burdens and trials. Love sweetens labor, and blunts the sting of sorrow. The vicissitudes of life give energy to prayer; and repeated supports and deliverances, in answer to prayer, afford new motives and causes for praise and thanksgiving.

But still they are jealous of themselves, lest those affectionate feelings, which greatly assist them in discharging their social and relative duties with attention and cheerfulness, should become *excessive* and *idolatrous*. And, as I have already observed, they have reason to be always on their guard, lest that which is lawful and right in itself, should, by being indulged in an immoderate degree, become ensnaring and hurtful.

A true believer is, for the most part, rather *shocked*, than *seduced*—by temptations to gross evils; his heart recoils at the proposal. He thinks with Joseph, "How can I do this wickedness, and sin against God? The believer's chief danger, lies in *the abuse of lawful things*.

The relation we stand in to **God**, as his intelligent creatures, from whom we derive all that we have or are, and on whom we depend for every breath we draw, makes it our indispensable duty to love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. And, as we have broken this law of our creation, he has in mercy been pleased to claim us for his own by a new and more endearing title. He has redeemed us to himself—by His blood. He has bought us with a price, and paid his life as a ransom for our souls. When a sinner is enabled to feel the force of this argument, he needs no more—the love of Christ constrains him. From that moment he is made willing to devote himself, and his all—to him who died for him. But the flesh strives against the Spirit; he is still a poor creature. He cannot do the things *that* he would, nor *as* he would; otherwise every thought of His heart should be in absolute subjection to his Lord and Savior.

The Lord, who knows our frame, and of what we are made, is unspeakably merciful to our infirmities—but he will not admit a *rival*. The believer knows and acknowledges, that whatever he

possesses, which is not held and improved in subordination and subservience to the will and glory of him from whom he received it—is so far an idol! And the consciousness of his proneness to afford these *intruders* an undue share in his affections, often makes him confess to the Lord with Job, "Behold, I am vile!" though his outward conduct in the sight of men may be unblamable and exemplary.

Yet perhaps some people may be overburdened with this apprehension. The gospel is not designed to make us stoics—it allows full room for those social feelings which are so necessary and beneficial in our present state, though it teaches and enjoins their due regulations. It is the duty, no less than the privilege, of husbands, to love their wives, even as their own selves; yes, even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it. These expressions are very strong; they imply great love, tenderness, and sympathy. When the Lord said to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love," he did not reprove him for loving his child; and Abraham's prompt obedience, when commanded to offer up his beloved son, was a proof that, though his love to Isaac was *strong*, it was not *inordinate*. And the apostle declares, "that, if any man provides not for those of his own household—he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." He is to provide for them, if in his power, in preference to others, which plainly intimates that they are preferably entitled to his love. Friendship, likewise, between those who are joint partakers of grace, is very consistent with true religion. Such was the friendship between David and Jonathan. And though our Lord loved all his disciples, one of them is honored with a peculiar distinction, as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

God formed us originally for himself, and endued the human mind with a capacity which he alone can fill. But, when he dwells in the heart, there is still room for innumerable objects of happiness, in their proper subordinate order. When a woman marries, she may continue to love her own parents and relatives as formerly; she may extend her affection and regard to the parents and friends of her husband; in a course of years the number of those whom she loves and values may be greatly increased, without interfering with each other, or with that love which she owes to her husband. But there is a different and special regard due to him, which if she should transfer to another person, she would be criminal. Thus we may love, and we ought to love, our husbands, wives, children, parents, and friends; and, if we consider them as the Lord's gifts—if we seek his blessing in them and upon them—if we hold them at his disposal—if we employ all our influence with them, to engage them to seek and love him supremely—if, when they are removed from us, we are disposed to yield a cheerful submission to his holy will—and if, when things are brought into competition, we rather choose to venture displeasing our dearest friends, than to sin against the Lord—with these *restrictions* we cannot easily love them too much.

But who can come up to this standard? I suppose no person can completely. But we may *aim* at it; we may lament our deficiency;

we may pray for more grace; and by grace we may approximate more and more to it.

It is not necessary to distress ourselves with what may happen; as, how should I behave, if the Lord were to take the desire of my eyes from me suddenly? We are to live *today*—and to leave *tomorrow* with him. If we presume that we could support such a stroke, we should probably find it too heavy for us. But this we may say, The Lord is all-sufficient, and he is faithful. He has promised *strength according to the day*. He permits me to call upon him in the time of trouble, and I trust, when the time of trouble shall come—he will enable me to pray for that help from him, without which I know I must sink; for in myself I am weaker than a bruised reed. In the meantime I endeavor to cast all my care upon him who cares for me.

For the rest, we are in the Lord's school—the school of the cross. His daily providential dispensations are suited to wean our attachment from everything here on earth, and to convince us that this world cannot be our rest—for it is polluted. Our roses grow on thorns, our honey bears a sting. Frequently our sharpest trials—spring from our choicest comforts. Perhaps, while we are admiring our *gourd*—a *worm* is secretly preying upon its root. As every bitter thing is sweetened to a believer, so there is some bitter thing mingled with every sweet. This is wisely and mercifully ordered by our heavenly Father. It is necessary. With such *hearts* as we have, and in such a *world* as we live in—much discipline is needful to keep us from *sleeping* upon the *enchanted ground*.

But the time is short. It will not be thus always. We hope soon to be out of the reach of sin and temptation. Happy hour, when sorrow and mourning, hitherto our inseparable companions, shall flee away, to return no more! When joy and gladness shall come forth to meet us, and conduct us to our eternal home! Then those who have loved each other in the Lord upon earth, shall rejoice together before him, shall drink of the rivers of pleasure that are at his right hand, and their happiness shall be unspeakable, uninterrupted, without abatement, and without end!



# Seriously engaged about trifles

November, 1775

Dear sir,

In the midst of the hurries and changes of this unsettled state—we glide along swiftly towards an unchangeable world; and shall soon have as little connection with the scenes we are now passing through, as we have with what happened before the Flood! All which appears great and interesting in the present life, abstracted from its influence upon our internal character, and our everlasting destiny—will soon be as unreal as a dream of the night. This we know and confess; but, though our *judgments* are convinced, it is seldom that our *hearts* are duly affected by the thought. And while I find it easy to write in this moralizing strain, I feel myself disposed to be *seriously engaged about trifles*—and *trifling in the most serious concerns*—as if I believed the very contrary!

It is with good reason the Lord challenges as his own prerogative, the full knowledge of the deceitfulness, desperate wickedness, and latent depths of the human heart, which is capable of making even his own people so shamefully inconsistent with themselves, and with their acknowledged principles.

I find that, when I have something agreeable in expectation, that my **imagination** paints and prepares the scene beforehand, hurries me over the intervening space of time, as though it were a useless blank, and anticipates the pleasure I propose. Many of my thoughts of this kind are mere waking dreams; for perhaps the opportunity I am eagerly waiting for, never happens—but is swallowed up by some unforeseen disappointment; or if not, something from within or without prevents its answering the idea I had formed of it.

Nor does my imagination confine itself within the narrow limits of *probabilities*; it can busy itself as eagerly in ranging after dreams and impossibilities, and engage my attention to the ideal pursuit of things which are never likely to happen. In these respects *my imagination travels with wings*; so that if the wildness, the multiplicity, the variety of the *phantoms* which pass through my mind in the space of a winter's day, were known to my fellow-creatures, they would probably deem me, as I am often ready to deem myself—but a more sober and harmless kind of lunatic!

But if I endeavor to put this active, roving power in a right track, and to represent to myself those scenes, which, though not yet present, I know will soon be realized, and have a greatness which the most enlarged exercise of my powers cannot comprehend. But if I would fix my thoughts upon the hour of death, the end of the world, the coming of the omniscient Judge, or similar subjects—then my imagination is presently tame, cold, and jaded, travels very slowly, and is soon wearied in the road of truth; though in the *fairy fields of uncertainty and folly* it can skip from mountain to mountain!

Mr. Addison supposes, that the *imagination alone*, as it can be differently affected, is capable of making us either inconceivably happy, or inconceivably miserable. I am sure it is capable of making us miserable, though I believe it seldom gives us much pleasure—but such as is to be found in a *fool's paradise*! But I am sure, that were my outward life and conduct perfectly free from blame, the *disorders* and *defilement* of my imagination are sufficient to constitute me a chief sinner, in the sight of Him to whom the *thoughts* and *intents* of the heart are continually open—and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity!

Upon this head I cannot but lament how universally, almost, **education** is suited, and as it were designed—to add to the stimulus of depraved nature. A cultivated

imagination is commended and sought after as a very desirable talent, though it seldom means more than the possession of a large stock of other people's dreams and fables, with a certain quickness in compounding them, enlarging upon them, and exceeding them by inventions of our own. Poets, painters, and even historians, are employed to assist us, from our early years—in forming an habitual relish for *shadows* and *colorings*, which both indispose for the *search of truth*, and even unfit its for its reception, unless proposed just in our own way!

The best effect of the *Belles Letters* upon the imagination, seems generally expressed by the word *Taste*. And what is this *taste*—but a certain disposition which loves to be humored, soothed, and flattered, and which can hardly receive or bear the most important truths, if they are not decorated and set off with such a delicacy and address, as taste requires? I say the most important truths; because truths of a *secular* importance strike so closely upon the senses, that the decision of taste perhaps is not waited for.

Thus, if a man is informed of the birth of his child, or that his house is on fire, the message takes up his thoughts, and he is seldom much disgusted with the *manner* in which it is delivered. But what an insuperable bar is the refined taste of many, to their profiting by the preaching of the Gospel, or even to their hearing it? Though the subject of a gospel discourse is weighty, and some just representation given of the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of Christ; yet, if there is something amiss in the elocution, language, or manner of the preacher, people of taste must be possessed, in a good measure, of grace likewise—if they can hear him with tolerable patience. And perhaps three fourths of those who are accounted the most sensible and judicious in the auditory, will remember little about the sermon—but the tone of the voice, the awkwardness of the attitude, the obsolete expressions, and the like; while the poor and simple, not being encumbered with this *hurtful accomplishment*, receive the messenger as the Lord's servant, and the truth as the Lord's Word, and are comforted and edified.

But I stop. Some people would say, that I must suppose you to have but little taste, or else much grace, or I should not venture to trouble you with such letters as mine.

# Enjoyment of the pleasures of the present life

True religion is necessary, in order to the best enjoyment of the pleasures of the present life.

Dear Sir,

Though I truly love you, and have no reason to doubt of the reality of your friendship to me; yet I cannot but apprehend, that notwithstanding our mutual regard, and my frequent attempts to be witty (if I could) for your diversion, there is a something in most of my letters (which I cannot, dare not wholly suppress) that disgusts and wearies you, and makes you less inclined to keep up a frequent fellowship than you would otherwise be. Rather than lose you, I will spare you as much as I can; but at present you must bear with me, and allow me full scope. You have given me a challenge, which I know not how to pass over; permit me for this time to preach again, and to take some passages in your letter for my text.

In the present debate I will accept your compliment, and suppose myself to be, as you say, a man of sense. You allow, then, that all the sense is not on your side. This, indeed, you cannot deny; for whatever becomes of me, it is needless to tell you, that Hale, Boyle, and other great names I could mention, were men of as great penetration and judgment, had as good opportunities and took as much pains to be informed of the truth, as any of the advocates for infidelity can pretend to. And you cannot, with any modesty or consistence, absolutely determine that they had not as good grounds for thinking themselves right, as you can have for concluding they were wrong.

But, declining the advantage of human authority, I am content the point should rest between you and me. And here I beg you to observe, that I have one evident advantage over you in judging, namely, that *I have experienced the good and evil on both sides*, and you only on one side. If you were to send me an inventory of your pleasures; how charmingly your time runs on, and how dexterously it is divided between the coffee-house, play-house, the card-table, and tavern, with intervals of balls, concerts, etc.; I would answer, that most of these I have tried over and over, and know the utmost they can yield, and have seen enough of the rest, most heartily to despise them all. I profess I had rather be a worm crawling on the ground, than to bear the name of 'man' upon the poor terms of whiling away my life in an insipid round of such insignificant and unmanly trifles!

I will return your own expression—I believe you to be a person of sense; but, alas! how do you prostitute your talents and capacity, how far do you act below yourself, if you know no higher purpose of life than these childish dissipations, together with the more serious business of rising early and sitting up late to amass money, that you may be able to enlarge your expenses! I am sure, while I lived in these things I found them unsatisfying and empty to the last degree; and the only advantage they afforded (miserable are those who are forced to deem it an advantage) was, that they often relieved me from the trouble and burden of thinking. If you have any other pleasures than these, they are such as must be evil and inconvenient even upon your own plan; and therefore my friendship will not allow me to bring them into the account. I am willing to hope you do not stoop still lower in pursuit of satisfaction. Thus far we stand upon even ground. You know all that *a life of pleasure* can give, and I know it likewise.

On the other hand, if I should attempt to explain to you the source and streams of my best pleasures—such as a comfortable assurance of the pardon of my sins, a habitual communion with the God who made heaven and earth, a calm reliance on the Divine Providence, the cheering prospect of a better life in a better world, with

the pleasing foretastes of heaven in my own soul; should I, or could I, tell you the pleasure I often find in reading the Scripture, in the exercise of prayer, and in that sort of preaching and conversation which you despise;—I doubt not but you would think as poorly of my happiness as I do of yours. But here lies the difference, my dear friend; you condemn that which you have never tried. You know no more of these things than a blind man does of colors; and, notwithstanding all your flourishes, I defy you to be at all times able to satisfy yourself that things may not possibly be as I have represented them.

Besides, what do I lose upon my plan, that should make me so worthy of your pity? Have you a quicker relish in the prudent use of temporal comforts? Do you think I do not eat my food with as much pleasure as you can do, though perhaps with less cost and variety? Is your sleep sounder than mine? Have not I as much satisfaction in social life? It is true, to join much with the mirthful, fluttering tribe, who spend their days in laugh and sing-song, is equally contrary to my duty and inclination. But I have friends and acquaintance as well as you. Among the many who favor me with their esteem and friendship, there are some who are people of sense, learning, wit, and (what perhaps may weigh as much with you) of fortune and distinction. And if you should say, "Yes, but they are all enthusiasts like yourself," you would say nothing to the purpose; since, upon your maxim, that "happiness is according to opinion," it cannot be an objection, but the contrary, to have my acquaintance to my own taste. Thus much for the brighter side of your situation.

Let me add one thing more: I know you have thoughts of marriage: do you think, if you should enter into this relation, your principles are calculated to make you more happy in it than I am? You are well acquainted with our family life. Do you propose to know more of the peace and heart-felt joy of domestic union than I have known, and continue to know to this hour? I wish you may equal us; and if you do, we shall still be as before, but upon even ground, I need not turn Deist, to enjoy the best and the most that this life can afford.

But I need not tell you, that the present life is not made up of pleasurable incidents only. Pain, sickness, losses, disappointments, injuries, and affronts with men; will, more or less, at one time or other, be our lot. And can you bear these trials better than I? You will not pretend to it. Let me appeal to yourself: How often do you toss and disquiet yourself, like a wild bull in a net, when things cross your expectations? As your thoughts are more engrossed by what you see, you must be more keenly sensible of what you feel. You cannot view these trials as appointed by a wise and heavenly Father in subservience to your good; you cannot taste the sweetness of his promises, nor feel the secret supports of his strength in an hour of affliction; you cannot so cast your burden and care upon him, as to find a sensible relief to your spirit thereby; nor can you see his hand engaged and employed in effecting your deliverance. Of these things you know no more than of the art of flying; but I seriously assure you, and I believe my testimony will go farther with you than my judgment, that they are realities, and that I have found them to be so. When my worldly concerns have been most thorny and discouraging, I have once and again felt the most of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

However, I may state the case still lower. You do pretty well among your friends; but how do you like being alone? Would you not give something for that happy secret, which could enable you to pass a rainy day pleasantly, without the assistance of business, company, or amusement? Would it not mortify you greatly to travel for a week in an unfrequented road, where you should meet with no lively incidents to recruit and raise your spirits? Alas! what a poor scheme of pleasure is yours, that will not support an interval of reflection!

What you have heard is true; I have a few friends who meet at my house once a week, and we spend an hour or two in worshipping the God who made us. And can

this move your indignation, or your compassion? Does it show a much nobler spirit, a more refined way of thinking, to live altogether without God in the world? If I kept a card-party at those times, it would not displease you. How can you, as a person of sense, avoid being shocked at your own unhappy prejudice? But I remember how it was once with myself, and forbear to wonder. May He who has opened my eyes, open yours! He only can do it. I do not expect to convince you by anything I can say as of myself; but if God is pleased to make use of me as his instrument, then you will be convinced. How would I then rejoice! I would rejoice to be useful to anyone, but especially daily to you, whom I dearly love. May God show you your true self, and your true taste; then you will attentively listen to what you disdain to hear of—his goodness in providing redemption and pardon for the chief of sinners, through him who died upon the cross for sins not his own. Keep this letter by you at my request; and when you write, tell me that you receive it in good part.

# On Female Dress

Women who profess godliness, and who have the care of young people of their own gender, are perhaps in no point more blamable, than in the *example* which some of them set, and the liberty which perhaps a greater number allow, of undue conformity to the world, in the article of 'dress'. Few ministers touch upon this subject in their public discourses; and indeed, it is not very easy to treat it with propriety from the pulpit. Yet whatever is unsuitable to the Christian profession, whatever is an inlet to temptation and productive of evil consequences, should in some way or other be dealt with, by those who have the honor of the gospel, and the welfare of their fellow-creatures at heart. I make no further apology, for offering a few hints, which I hope will not give offence, and which I pray, so far as they are agreeable to the Holy Scripture, and confirmed by experience and observation, may be attended to.

I have no doubt that many godly parents who desire to see their children brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, give them many excellent lessons in the nursery. They endeavor to impress their tender minds with a sense of their sinful state by nature, of the evil of pride, and of the vanity of the world. But, when their children begin to appear in public view, for lack of due reflection, or resolution, or both, they either encourage, or at least permit them, to form habits, which have a direct tendency to counteract all the benefits which might otherwise be hoped for, from the instruction of their early years.

I am certainly no connoisseur in the article of 'dress'; but I know how I am affected by what I see—and I can hear what other people say. A *simple neatness*, according to different situations in life, seems a tolerable definition of a befitting dress.

But Christian women should aim to comply with the apostle's advice, to adorn themselves in modest apparel, with decency and propriety. When he adds, "Not with gold or pearls or expensive clothes," I do not think it necessary to take this restriction so rigidly, as to affirm, that such ornaments are, universally, and without exception, unlawful. I think this is one of the many expressions in Scripture, which are to be understood in a *comparative* sense. Thus, when our Lord declares, "That unless a man hates parents, wife, children, and his own life—he cannot be my disciple;" we are sure he does not contradict, what, by his authority, is expressly enjoined in many other passages, that we should pay a due regard to our relations. He only teaches us, that whenever our dearest temporal concerns stand in competition with what we owe to Him—they must be given up and renounced.

If clothes are considered merely as a covering for the body, and a defense from the cold, it will be difficult to draw the line, and to determine exactly between what is necessary, and what is

superfluous. But it is more for the honor of the gospel, that a woman professing godliness should be distinguished from others, by modesty, sobriety, and good works, than by the shape of her hat, or the color of her garment.

Yet even to ladies of the greatest affluence, who love and fear the Lord, I will venture to suggest a word of caution. To you I say nothing of the expense—you can, as the phrase is, *very well afford it*. And, if in other respects, you are generous and bountiful, ready to distribute, and willing to share—the cost of what you choose to wear is of no great consideration. But a careful attention to 'dress' will cost you much of what is more valuable than **money**—that is, your precious **time**! It will too much occupy your thoughts, and that at the seasons when you would wish to have them otherwise engaged. And it certainly administers fuel to that latent fire of **pride** and **vanity**, which is inseparable from our fallen nature, and is easily blown up into a blaze!

I hope you will not be among the first of those, who are eager to catch at, and give sanction to every new fashion; nor is it necessary, if the style is decent and modest, that you should be the very last to adopt it. But there should be something in your dress, to indicate, that, though you do not affect a needless and scornful singularity, (which is often the source of censoriousness and envy,) yet your heart is not set upon these little things. If a woman, when going to public worship, looks in the mirror, and contemplates, with a secret self-delight, the figure which it reflects to her view—I am afraid she is not in the frame of spirit most suitable for one, who is about to 'cry for mercy as a miserable sinner'.

There are likewise women, who, we would hope, are pious, and therefore, of course, benevolent. But an attachment to dress, and a desire to approach, as near as they can, to the standard of those who are their superiors in fortune, blunt their compassionate feelings, and deprive them of the usefulness, comfort, and honor—which they might otherwise attain. The expense of their dress is so great, compared with the smallness of their income, that when they have decorated themselves to their mind, they have little or nothing to spare for the relief of the poor. I doubt not—but they take it for granted, that, upon the supposition that our Lord and Savior was again upon earth in a state of poverty and humiliation, as when he walked in the streets of Jerusalem, and they knew that he needed a garment, when they were about to spend their spare money in some useless piece of finery, they would gladly forego their purpose for the honor of assisting him. But the heart is deceitful. If we live in the neglect of present duty, we have no right to suppose we would act better in different circumstances. He has said, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me." And, if we are inattentive to the needs of those whom he appoints to be his representatives, we cannot be sure that we would be properly attentive to himself, if he was with us in person, and in a low obscure condition.

But I am not so much concerned by observing the materials, as by the *manner* of female dress, by what we call the *fashion*, and the eagerness with which every changing fashion, however improper, is adopted, by people whose religious profession might lead us to hope they had no time to attend to such trifles. If some allowance is to be made for youth on this head, it is painful to see mothers, and possibly sometimes grandmothers, who seem, by the gaudiness and levity of their attire, very unwilling to be sensible that they are growing older!

It may be a sufficient censure of some fashions—to say they are ridiculous. Their chief effect is to disfigure the female form. And perhaps the inventors of them had no worse design, than to make a trial, how far they could lead 'the passive unthinking many' in the path of absurdity. Some fashions, which seem to have been at first designed to hide a personal deformity, have obtained a general prevalence with those who had no such deformity to hide. We are informed, that Alexander had a wry neck, and therefore his courtiers carried their heads on one side, that they might appear to be in the king's fashion. We smile at this servility, in people who lived in Macedonia twenty centuries before we were born; yet it is little less general among ourselves in the present day.

The improprieties of 'the tyranny of fashion' are not simply ridiculous. They are serious evils in a religious view; and, to speak of them in the gentlest terms, they are signs of a careless, inconsiderate spirit, very unsuitable to a professed regard to the gospel. We are required to attend to the things that are lovely and of a good report. Every willful deviation from this rule is sinful. Why should a godly woman, or one who wishes to be thought so, make herself ridiculous, or hazard a suspicion of her character, to please and imitate an ungodly world?

But the worst of all the fashions are those, which are evidently calculated to allure the eyes, and to draw the attention of men. Is it not strange that modest and even pious women should be drawn into an immodest compliance? Yet I have sometimes been in company with ladies of whose modesty I have no doubt, and of whose piety I entertained a good hope, when I have been embarrassed, and at a loss which way to look. They are indeed noticed by the men—but not to their honor nor advantage. The manner of their dress gives encouragement to vile and insidious men, and exposes them to dangerous temptations. Their immodesty has often proved the first step into the road which leads to misery and ruin. They are pleased with the *flattery of the worthless*, and go on without thought, "like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life!" But honest and sensible men regard their exterior, as a warning signal, not to choose a companion for life, from among people of this light and volatile turn of mind.

How far does the richest dress which studious vanity, can procure from the spoils of birds, beasts, and insects, fall short of the delicate texture and elegance, and the beautiful tints, which we



admire in a flower or a butterfly! "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these!" The resemblance is chiefly in the frailty of the wearer. Soon, and perhaps suddenly—the body, now adorned with so much extravagance and care, must be deposited in the grave, and be food for worms!

An attention to ornament and dress is peculiarly unseasonable at present. The dark aspect of the times rather requires a spirit of humiliation and abasement. The judgments of God are abroad, his hand is lifted up. We know not what is before us—but we have reason to fear dreadful tokens of his displeasure for our national sins. Perhaps the day is coming when the words of the prophet, "Tremble you women that are at ease, be afflicted you careless ones," may be no less applicable to us, than they were to the Israelites of old.

I earnestly request my fair readers carefully to peruse the following: "The LORD will judge the women of Jerusalem, who walk around with their noses in the air, with tinkling ornaments on their ankles. Their eyes rove among the crowds, flirting with the men. The Lord will send a plague of scabs to ornament their heads. Yes, the LORD will make them bald for all to see! The Lord will strip away their artful beauty—their ornaments, headbands, and crescent necklaces; their earrings, bracelets, and veils of shimmering gauze. Gone will be their scarves, ankle chains, sashes, perfumes, and charms; their rings, jewels, party clothes, gowns, capes, and purses; their mirrors, linen garments, head ornaments, and shawls. Instead of smelling of sweet perfume, they will stink. They will wear ropes for sashes, and their well-set hair will fall out. They will wear rough sackcloth instead of rich robes. Their beauty will be gone. Only shame will be left to them." Isaiah 3:16-24

# True patriotism!

Dear friend,

Allow me to say, that it excites both my wonder and concern, that a *Christian minister* such as yourself, should think it worth his while to attempt *political reforms*. When I look around upon the present state of the nation, such an attempt appears to me, to be no less vain and foolish, than it would be to paint the *cabin*—while the *ship* is sinking! Or to decorate the *parlor*—while the *house* is on fire!

When our Lord Jesus was upon earth, He refused to get involved in disputes or politics, "Friend, who appointed Me a *judge* or arbitrator over you?" Luke 12:14. "My kingdom is not of this world! If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight!" John 18:36. God's children belong to a kingdom which is not of this world; they are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and a part of their Scriptural character is, that they are the "quiet in the land." Psalm 35:20.

Satan has many contrivances to amuse people, and to divert their thoughts from their real danger!

My dear sir, my prayer to God for you is—that He may induce you to employ the talents He has given you, in pointing out *sin* as the great cause and source of every existing evil; and to engage those who love and fear Him, (instead of wasting time in political speculations, for which very few of them are competent,) to sigh and cry for our abounding abominations, and to stand in the breach, by prayer, that God's wrath may yet be averted, and our national mercies prolonged! This, I think, is **true patriotism**—the best way in which people in private life may serve their country.

I consider the ungodly as *saws* and *hammers* in the hand of the Lord. So far as they are *His instruments*, they will succeed—but not an inch further! Their wrath shall praise Him, and be subservient to His designs!

If *our lot* is so cast that we can exercise our ministry free from stripes, fines, imprisonments, and death—it is *more* than the gospel has promised to us! If Christians were quiet when under the cruel governments of Nero and other wicked persecutors, when they were hunted down like wild beasts—then *we* ought to be not only *quiet* but very *thankful* now! It was then accounted an *honor* to suffer for Christ and the 'offence of the cross'!

Those are to be greatly pitied, who boast of their 'liberty'—and yet they do not consider that they are in the *most deplorable bondage* as the slaves of *sin* and *Satan*, under the curse of God's law and His eternal wrath! Oh! for a voice to reach their hearts, that they may know their true and dreadful state—and seek deliverance from their horrific thralldom! May you and I labor to direct them to the *one thing*, which is absolutely needful, and abundantly sufficient.

If I had the wisdom or influence to soothe the angry passions of mankind—I would gladly employ them! But I am a stranger and a pilgrim here in this world. My charter, my rights and my treasures, are all in heaven—and there my *heart* ought to be. In a very short time, I may be removed (and perhaps suddenly) into the unseen and eternal world—where all that now causes so much *bustle upon earth*—will be of no more importance to me—than the events which took place among the antediluvians!

*In the hour, when death shall open the door into eternity*—many things which now assume an 'air of importance', will be found as light and unsubstantial as a child's

dream!

How crucial then, is it for me—to be found watching, with my lamp burning, diligently engaged in my proper calling! For the Lord has not called me to set *governments* right—but to *preach the gospel*, to proclaim the glory of His name, and to endeavor to win souls! "Let the dead bury their own dead—but *you go and proclaim the kingdom of God!*" Luke 9:60. Happy is that servant, whom his Master finds so doing, when He returns!

As you have forced me to respond—both *duty* and *love* have obliged me to be faithful and free in giving you my thoughts.

I recommend you to the care and blessing of the great Shepherd and Savior; and remain for His sake, your affectionate friend and brother,  
John Newton

# On eating and drinking

April 11, 1795

**"Whatever you eat or drink** or whatever you do—you must do all for the glory of God!" 1 Corinthians 10:31

"There was a rich man who would dress in purple and fine linen, **feasting lavishly every day.**" Luke 16:19

A sinner, considered as such, is not only destitute and incapable of spiritual blessings—but has forfeited all right to the comforts, and even the necessities, of the present life. It is of mere mercy that he is permitted to breathe the air, or walk upon the ground. But Jesus the Savior has not only brought life and immortality to light, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe in his name—but he has removed the curse which sin had entailed upon the lower creation. And now, to them, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if received with thankfulness and moderation; for all is sanctified to their use by the Word of God and prayer. But these, which, in distinction from the communications of his grace, we call *common mercies*, are equally derived from his bounty, and the effects of his mediation.

We are therefore bound by gratitude, as well in the ordinary actions of life, as in those of the most importance, whether we eat or drink—to do all with a regard to his love, and with a view to his glory.

It is to be feared, that this apostolic rule is too much disregarded by many professors of the gospel. However they may seem to differ from the world, by a stated and orderly attendance upon the ordinances, they are not easily distinguished upon many other occasions; particularly at their meals. The people of the world can scarcely exceed them in the cost, care, profusion, and variety with which their tables are covered. I am willing to allow some regard to a person's situation in life; but perhaps the excess is more frequently observable among people in trade, or, as we say, *in the middle classes*, than at the tables of the opulent.

A friend of mine, since deceased, told me, that, when he was a young man, he once dined with the late Dr. Butler, at that time Bishop of Durham; and, though the guest was a man of fortune, and the interview by appointment, the provision was no more than a simple meal. The Bishop apologized for his *plain fare*, by saying, "That it was his way of living; that he had been long disgusted with the fashionable expense of time and money in entertainments, and was determined that it should receive no countenance from his example." The economy of this truly venerable prelate was not the effect of stinginess; for I have been assured, that, though he was some time possessed of the princely revenue of Durham, he might be said to die poor, leaving little

more money than was necessary to discharge his debts, and pay for his funeral. But we may accommodate to him, what the apostles said of themselves on another occasion, "He did not think it fit to leave the Word of God, and to serve tables."

And at the tables of some gentlemen of very respectable characters and affluent fortunes, who do me the honor to notice me, I have often seen little more than I would have thought it right to have had at my own, if they had favored me with their company. It is at least certain, that the *waste* and *parade* of which I complain, are by no means confined to those, who, according to the common phrase, *can best afford it*.

When ministers of the gospel are invited, they may sometimes have reason to suppose, that some part of the reception they meet with, may be intended as a mark of regard and attention to them; and it has the appearance of ingratitude to blame our friends for their kindness.

But some of us would be better pleased to be treated less sumptuously, and in a way more conformable to the simplicity of our Christian profession! We would not wish to be considered as *avowed epicures*, who cannot dine well without a variety of delicacies—and, if we could suppose, that such cost and variety were designed to remind us how much better we fare abroad than at home—we might think it rather an insult than a compliment. I have known, in some families, the mistress of the house has been, like Martha, too much encumbered with cares and anxieties in making preparation for her friends. They could not see her so soon as they have wished, and, when she has appeared, she could not wholly conceal the discomposure she has felt from some unexpected incident, which has more or less disconcerted the projected arrangement of her feast.

Such things may be common among those who live without God in the world; but they should be carefully avoided by those who make a profession, that, whether they eat or drink—they do all for his glory. Often we cannot avoid the thought, "This dish, unnecessary in itself, or unnecessarily expensive, might have been well spared, and the money given to the poor!" For there is not a day, in which some of the dear people of God do not find a difficulty in providing bread for their children.

Perhaps there is no one circumstance in the history of our Savior so little laid to heart, so generally overlooked, by those who acknowledge him as their Master and their Lord—as that state of poverty to which he submitted, while upon earth. He had no home, he had not a piece of silver to pay his tax; he was hungry when he went to the fig-tree; and when he sat, like a weary, obscure traveler, by the well-side, he was thirsty; he asked for a little water, and seemed upon the point of being refused. He wrought no miracle solely for his own relief; but he felt for the necessitous, and miraculously fed them by thousands; not with dainties, which would have been equally easy to him—but, finding a few loaves and fish among them, he satisfied their needs

without changing their diet. Yes, after his resurrection, when he had taken possession of all power and authority both in heaven and in earth, he condescended to dine with his disciples upon broiled fish and bread, which he likewise provided for them.

Alas! the **rich followers of this poor Savior** have more reason to be ashamed of their gorgeous apparel, their fine houses, their elegant furniture, and their sumptuous feastings, than to value themselves upon such trifles! They are unavoidable appendages to people in some situations; but, I believe, those who have drank deeply into our Lord's spirit, account them rather burdens than benefits.

I know several people, whose ability to do much more in this way if they pleased, than they do, is not disputed; and whose acknowledged benevolence and bounty secure them from the suspicion of being restrained by covetousness. I have often wished that a number of these would form themselves into a society, for the express and avowed purpose of discountenancing, by their example and influence, that *sinful, shameful conformity to the world*, which spreads like a gangrene, is the reproach of the gospel, and threatens the utter extinction of vital religion in multitudes who profess it.

# Separated from the ungodly world

May 24, 1774

Dear sir,

What a mercy it is, to be separated in spirit, conversation, and interest—from the ungodly world! Where all are alike by nature—but grace makes a happy and unspeakable difference! Believers were once under the same influence of that evil spirit who still works in the children of disobedience; each pursuing different paths—but all equally remote from truth and peace; some hatching cockatrice eggs, others weaving spiders' webs. These two general heads, of *evil* and *vanity*, include all the schemes, aims, and achievements of which man is capable—until God is pleased to visit the heart with his grace.

The busy part of mankind are employed in multiplying evils and miseries. The more retired, speculative, and curious, are amusing themselves with what will hereafter appear as unsubstantial, unstable, and useless, as a cobweb! Death will soon sweep away all which the philosophers, the scientists, the mathematicians, the antiquarians, and other *learned triflers*, are now weaving with so much self-applauded address. Nor will the fine-spun dresses, in which the moralist and the self-righteous clothe themselves, be of more advantage to them, either for ornament or defense, than the web of a spider.

It is given only to a few, to know their present state and future destination. These build upon the immovable *Rock of ages* for eternity. These are trees springing from a living root, and bear the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. These alone are awake, while the rest of the world are in a deep sleep, indulging in vain dreams; from which likewise they will shortly awake. But, O with what consternation, when they shall find themselves irrecoverably divorced from all their *delusive attachments*, and compelled to appear before that God to whom they have lived strangers, and to whom they must give an account! O for a thousand tongues, to proclaim in the ears of thoughtless mortals, that important aphorism of our Lord, "Only one thing is needful!" Yet a thousand tongues would be, and are, employed in vain—unless so far as the Lord is pleased to send the watchman's warning, by the power and agency of his own Spirit.

I think the poet tells us, that Cassandra had the gift of truly foretelling future events; but she was afterwards laid under a painful embarrassment, that nobody would believe her words. Such, with respect to the bulk of their hearers, is the lot of Gospel ministers. They are enlightened to see, and sent forth to declare, the dreadful consequences of sin; but, alas, how few believe their report!

To illustrate our grief and disappointment, I sometimes suppose there was a dangerous river in the way of travelers, over which there is a bridge, which those who can be prevailed upon may pass with safety. By the side of this bridge watchmen are placed, to warn passengers of the danger of the waters; to assure them, that all who attempt to go through them inevitably perish; to invite, entreat, and beseech them, if they value their lives—to cross the bridge. Methinks this should be an easy task—yet if we should see, in fact, the greater part stopping their ears to the friendly importunity, many so much offended by it, as to account the watchman's care impertinent, and only deserving of scorn and ill-treatment, hardly one in fifty betaking themselves to the friendly bridge, the rest eagerly plunging into the waters, from which none return, as if they were determined to see who would be drowned first—this spectacle would be no unfit emblem of the reception the Gospel meets with, from a blinded world.

Gospel ministers are rejected, opposed, vilified; they are accounted troublers of the world, because they dare not, cannot stand silent, while sinners are perishing before their eyes. And if, in the course of many sermons, they can prevail but on one soul to take timely warning, and to seek to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life—they may account it a mercy and an honor, sufficient to overbalance all the labor and reproaches they are called to endure. From the most, they must expect no better reception than the Jews gave to Jeremiah, who told the Prophet to his face, "As to the word you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord—we will not hearken to you at all; but we will certainly do whatever goes forth out of our own mouth!"

Surely, if the Lord has given us any sense of the worth of our souls, any compassion towards them, this must be a painful exercise; and experience must teach us something of the meaning of Jeremiah's pathetic exclamation, "O that my head were waters, and my eyes fountains of tears—that I might weep day and night, for the slain of the daughter of my people!" It is our duty to be thus affected.

Our relief lies in the *wisdom* and *sovereignty* of God. He reveals his salvation to whom he pleases, for the most part to babes; from the bulk of the wise and the prudent—the gospel is hidden. Thus it has pleased him—and therefore it must be right. Yes, he will one day condescend to justify the propriety and equity of his proceedings to his creatures; then every mouth will be stopped, and none will be able to reply against their Judge. Light has come into the world—but men prefer darkness. They hate the light, resist it, and rebel against it. It is true—all do so! And therefore, if all were to perish under the condemnation, their ruin would be their own act. It is of *grace* that any are saved; and in the distribution of that grace, God does what he will with his own—a right which most are ready enough to claim in their own concerns, though they are so unwilling to allow it to the Lord of all.

Many perplexing and acrimonious *disputes* have been started upon this subject; but the redeemed of the Lord are called not to *dispute*—but to admire and rejoice, to love, adore, and obey! To know that he loved us, and gave himself for us, is the constraining argument and motive to love him, and surrender ourselves to him; to consider ourselves as no longer our own—but to devote ourselves, with every faculty, power, and talent, to his service and glory. He deserves our all—for he parted with all for us. He made himself poor, he endured shame, torture, death, and the curse, for us—that we, through him, might inherit everlasting life! Ah! the hardness of my heart, that I am no more affected, astonished, and overpowered, with this thought!