

Love of Religion, a New Nature
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"If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." Romans vi. 8.

1 TO be dead with Christ, is to hate and turn from sin; and to live with Him, is to have our
2 hearts and minds turned towards God and Heaven. To be dead to sin, is to feel a
3 disgust at it. We know what is meant by disgust. Take, for instance, the case of a sick
4 man, when food of a certain kind is presented to him,—and there is no doubt what is
5 meant by disgust. Consider how certain scents, which are too sweet or too strong, or
6 certain tastes, affect certain persons under certain circumstances, or always,—and you
7 will be at no loss to determine what is meant by disgust at sin, or deadness to sin. On
8 the other hand, consider how pleasant a meal is to the hungry, or some enlivening
9 odour to the faint; how refreshing the air is to the languid, or the brook to the weary and
10 thirsty;—and you will understand the sort of feeling which is implied in being alive with
11 Christ, alive to religion, alive to the thought of heaven. Our animal powers cannot exist
12 in all atmospheres; certain airs are poisonous, others life-giving. So is it with spirits and
13 souls: an unrenewed spirit could not live in heaven, he would die; an Angel could not
14 live in hell. The natural man cannot live in heavenly company, and the angelic soul
15 would pine and waste away in the company of sinners, unless God's sacred presence
16 were continued to it. To be dead to sin, is to be so minded, that the atmosphere of sin (if
17 I may so speak) oppresses, distresses, and stifles us,—that it is painful and unnatural to
18 us to remain in it. To be alive with Christ, is to be so minded, that the atmosphere of
19 heaven refreshes, enlivens, stimulates, invigorates us. To be alive, is not merely to bear
20 the thought of religion, to assent to the truth of religion, to wish to be religious; but to be
21 drawn towards it, to love it, to delight in it, to obey it. Now I suppose most persons called
22 Christians do not go farther than this,—to wish to be religious, and to think it right to be
23 religious, and to feel a respect for religious men; they do not get so far as to have any
24 sort of love for religion.

25 So far, however, they do go; not, indeed, to do their duty and to love it, but to have a
26 sort of wish that they did. I suppose there are few persons but, at the very least, now
27 and then feel the wish to be holy and religious. They bear witness to the excellence of
28 virtuous and holy living, they consent to all that their teachers tell them, what they hear
29 in church, and read in religious books; but all this is a very different thing from acting
30 according to their knowledge. They confess one thing, they do another.

31 Nay, they confess one thing *while* they do another. Even sinners,—wilful, abandoned
32 sinners,—if they would be honest enough to speak as they really in their hearts feel,
33 would own, while they are indulging in the pleasures of sin, while they idle away the
34 Lord's Day, or while they keep bad company, or while they lie or cheat, or while they
35 drink to excess, or do any other bad thing,—they would confess, I say, did they speak
36 their minds, that it is a far happier thing, even at present, to live in obedience to God,
37 than in obedience to Satan. Not that sin has not its pleasures, such as they are; I do not

38 mean, of course, to deny that,—I do not deny that Satan is able to give us something in
39 exchange for future and eternal happiness; I do not say that irreligious men do not gain
40 pleasures, which religious men are obliged to lose. I know they do; if they did not, there
41 would be nothing to tempt and try us. But, after all, the pleasures which the servants of
42 Satan enjoy, though pleasant, are always attended with pain too; with a bitterness,
43 which, though it does not destroy the pleasure, yet is by itself sufficient to make it far
44 less pleasant, even while it lasts, than such pleasures as are without such bitterness,
45 viz. the pleasures of religion. This, then, alas! is the state of multitudes; not to be dead
46 to sin and alive to God, but, while they are alive to sin and the world, to have just so
47 much sense of heaven, as not to be able to enjoy either.

48 I say, when any one, man or woman, young or old, is conscious that he or she is going
49 wrong, whether in greater matter or less, whether in not coming to church when there is
50 no good excuse, neglecting private prayer, living carelessly, or indulging in known sin,—
51 this bad conscience is from time to time a torment to such persons. For a little while,
52 perhaps, they do not feel it, but then the pain comes on again. It is a keen, harassing,
53 disquieting, hateful pain, which hinders sinners from being happy. They *may* have
54 pleasures, but they cannot be *happy*. They know that God is angry with them; and they
55 know that, at some time or other, He will visit, He will judge, He will punish. They try to
56 get this out of their minds, but the arrow sticks fast there; it keeps its hold. They try to
57 laugh it off, or to be bold and daring, or to be angry and violent. They are loud or unkind
58 in their answers to those, who remind them of it either in set words, or by their example.
59 But it keeps its hold. And so it is, that all men who are not very abandoned, bad men as
60 well as good, wish that they were holy as God is holy, pure as Christ was pure, even
61 though they do not try to be, or pray to God to make them, holy and pure; not that
62 they *like* religion, but that they know, they are convinced in their reason, they feel sure,
63 that religion alone is happiness.

64 Oh, what a dreadful state, to have our desires one way, and our knowledge and
65 conscience another; to have our life, our breath and food, upon the earth, and our eyes
66 upon Him who died once and now liveth; to look upon Him who once was pierced, yet
67 not to rise with Him and live with Him; to feel that a holy life is our only happiness, yet to
68 have no heart to pursue it; to be certain that the wages of sin is death, yet to practise
69 sin; to confess that the Angels alone are perfectly happy, for they do God's will perfectly,
70 yet to prepare ourselves for nothing else but the company of devils; to acknowledge that
71 Christ is our only hope, yet deliberately to let that hope go! O miserable state! miserable
72 they, if any there are who now hear me, who are thus circumstanced!

73 At first sight, it might seem impossible that any such persons could be found in church.
74 At first sight, one might be tempted to say, "All who come to church, at least, are in
75 earnest, and have given up sin; they are imperfect indeed, as all Christians are at best,
76 but they do not fall into wilful sin." I should be very glad, my Brethren, to believe this
77 were the case, but I cannot indulge so pleasant a hope. No; I think it quite certain that
78 some persons at least, I do not say how many, to whom I am speaking, have not made
79 up their minds fully to lead a religious life. They come to church because they think it
80 right, or from other cause. It is very right that they should come; I am glad they do. This

81 is good, as far as it goes; but it is not all. They are not so far advanced in the kingdom of
82 God, as to resist the devil, or to flee from him. They cannot command themselves. They
83 act rightly one day, and wrongly the next. They are afraid of being laughed at. They are
84 attracted by bad company. They put off religion to a future day. They think a religious
85 life dull and unpleasant. Yet they have a certain sense of religion; and they come to
86 church in order to satisfy this sense. Now, I say it is right to come to church; but, O that
87 they could be persuaded of the simple truth of St. Paul's words, "He is not a Jew which
88 is one outwardly; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the
89 heart in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God;" [Rom. ii.
90 28, 29.] which may be taken to mean:—He is not a Christian who is one outwardly, who
91 merely comes to church, and professes to desire to be saved by Christ. It is very right
92 that he should do so, but it is not enough. He is not a Christian who merely has not cast
93 off religion; but he is the true Christian, who, while he is a Christian outwardly, is one
94 inwardly also; who lives to God; whose secret life is hid with Christ in God; whose heart
95 is religious; who not only knows and feels that a religious life is true happiness, but
96 loves religion, wishes, tries, prays to be religious, begs God Almighty to give him the will
97 and the power to be religious; and, as time goes on, grows more and more religious,
98 more fit for heaven.

99 We can do nothing right, unless God gives us the will and the power; we cannot please
100 Him without the aid of His Holy Spirit. If any one does not deeply feel this as a first truth
101 in religion, he is preparing for himself a dreadful fall. He will attempt, and he will fail
102 signally, utterly. His own miserable experience will make him sure of it, if he will not
103 believe it, as Scripture declares it. But it is not unlikely that some persons, perhaps
104 some who now hear me, may fall into an opposite mistake. They may attempt to excuse
105 their lukewarmness and sinfulness, on the plea that God does not inwardly move them;
106 and they may argue that those holy men whom they so much admire, those saints who
107 are to sit on Christ's right and left, are of different nature from themselves, sanctified
108 from their mother's womb, visited, guarded, renewed, strengthened, enlightened in a
109 peculiar way, so as to make it no wonder that they *are* saints, and no fault that they
110 themselves are not. But this is not so; let us not thus miserably deceive ourselves. St.
111 Paul says expressly of himself and the other Apostles, that they were "men of like
112 passions" with the poor ignorant heathen to whom they preached. And does not his
113 history show this? Do you not recollect what he was before his conversion? Did he not
114 rage like a beast of prey against the disciples of Christ? and how was he converted? by
115 the vision of our Lord? Yes, in one sense, but not by it alone; hear his own words,
116 "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not *disobedient* unto the heavenly vision." His
117 obedience was necessary for his conversion; he could not obey without grace; but he
118 would have received grace in vain, had he not obeyed. And, afterwards, was he at once
119 perfect? No; for he says expressly, "not as though I had already attained, either were
120 already perfect;" and elsewhere he tells us that he had a "thorn in the flesh, the
121 messenger of Satan to buffet him;" and he was obliged to "bruise his body and bring it
122 into subjection, lest, after he had preached to others, he should be himself a castaway."
123 St. Paul conquered, as any one of us must conquer, by "striving," struggling, "to enter in
124 at the strait gate;" he "wrought out his salvation with fear and trembling," as we must do.

125 This is a point which must be insisted on for the encouragement of the fearful, the
126 confutation of the hypocritical, and the abasement of the holy. In this world, even the
127 best of men, though they are dead to sin, and have put sin to death, yet have that dead
128 and corrupt thing within them, though they live to God; they have still an enemy of God
129 remaining in their hearts, though they keep it in subjection. This, indeed, is what all men
130 now have in common, a root of evil in them, a principle of sin, or what may become
131 such;—what they differ in is this, not that one man has it, another not; but that one lives
132 in and to it, another not; one subdues it, another not. A holy man is by nature subject to
133 sin equally with others; but he is holy because he subdues, tramples on, chains up,
134 imprisons, puts out of the way this law of sin, and is ruled by religious and spiritual
135 motives. Of Christ alone can it be said that He "did no sin, neither was guile found in His
136 mouth." The prince of this world came and found nothing in Him. He had no root of sin
137 in His heart; He was not born in Adam's sin. Far different are we. He was thus pure,
138 because He was the Son of God, and born of a Virgin. But we are conceived in sin and
139 shapen in iniquity. And since that which is born of the flesh, is flesh, we are sinful and
140 corrupt because we are sinfully begotten of sinners. Even those then who in the end
141 turn out to be saints and attain to life eternal, yet are not born saints, but have with
142 God's regenerating and renewing grace to make themselves saints. It is nothing but the
143 Cross of Christ, without us and within us, which changes any one of us from being (as I
144 may say) a devil, into an Angel. We are all by birth children of wrath. We are at best like
145 good olive trees, which have become good by being grafted on a good tree. By nature
146 we are like wild trees, bearing sour and bitter fruit, and so we should remain, were we
147 not grafted upon Christ, the good olive tree, made members of Christ, the righteous and
148 holy and well-beloved Son of God. Hence it is that there is such a change in a saint of
149 God from what he was at the first. Consider what a different man St. Paul was after his
150 conversion and before,—raging, as I just now said, like some wild beast, with
151 persecuting fury against the Church, before Christ appeared to him, and meekly
152 suffering persecution and glorying in it afterwards. Think of St. Peter denying Christ
153 before the resurrection, and confessing, suffering, and dying for Him afterwards. And so
154 now many an aged saint, who has good hope of heaven, may recollect things of himself
155 when young, which fill him with dismay. I do not speak as if God's saints led vicious and
156 immoral lives when young; but I mean that their lower and evil nature was not subdued,
157 and perhaps from time to time broke out and betrayed them into deeds and words so
158 very different from what is seen in them at present, that did their friends know of them
159 what they themselves know, they would not think them the same persons, and would be
160 quite overpowered with astonishment. We never can guess what a man is by nature, by
161 seeing what self-discipline has made him. Yet if we do become thereby changed and
162 prepared for heaven, it is no praise or merit to us. It is God's doing—glory be to Him,
163 who has wrought so wonderfully with us! Yet in this life, even to the end, there will be
164 enough evil in us to humble us; even to the end, the holiest men have remains and
165 stains of sin which they would fain get rid of, if they could, and which keep this life from
166 being to them, for all God's grace, a heaven upon earth. No, the Christian life is but a
167 shadow of heaven. Its festal and holy days are but shadows of eternity. But hereafter it
168 will be otherwise. In heaven, sin will be utterly destroyed in every elect soul. We shall
169 have no earthly wishes, no tendencies to disobedience or irreligion, no love of the world

170 or the flesh, to draw us off from supreme devotion to God. We shall have our Saviour's
171 holiness fulfilled in us, and be able to love God without drawback or infirmity.

172 That indeed will be a full reward of all our longings here, to praise and serve God
173 eternally with a single and perfect heart in the midst of His Temple. What a time will that
174 be, when all will be perfected in us which at present is but feebly begun! Then we shall
175 see how the Angels worship God. We shall see the calmness, the intenseness, the
176 purity, of their worship. We shall see that awful sight, the Throne of God, and the
177 Seraphim before and around it, crying, "Holy!" We attempt now to imitate in church what
178 there is performed, as in the beginning, and ever shall be. In the Te Deum, day by day
179 we say, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." In the Creed, we recount God's
180 mercies to us sinners. And we say and sing Psalms and Hymns, to come as near
181 heaven as we can. May these attempts of ours be blest by Almighty God, to prepare us
182 for Him! may they be, not dead forms, but living services, living with life from God the
183 Holy Ghost, in those who are dead to sin and who live with Christ! I dare say some of
184 you have heard persons, who dissent from the Church, say (at any rate, they do say),
185 that our Prayers and Services, and Holy days, are only forms, dead forms, which can do
186 us no good. Yes, they are dead forms to those who are dead, but they are living forms
187 to those who are living. If you come here in a dead way, not in faith, not coming for a
188 blessing, without your hearts being in the service, you will get no benefit from it. But if
189 you come in a living way, in faith, and hope, and reverence, and with holy expectant
190 hearts, then all that takes place will be a living service and full of heaven.

191 Make use, then, of this Holy Easter Season, which lasts forty to fifty days, to become
192 more like Him who died for you, and who now liveth for evermore. He promises us,
193 "Because I live, ye shall live also." He, by dying on the Cross, opened the Kingdom of
194 Heaven to all believers. He first died, and then He opened heaven. We, therefore, first
195 commemorate His death, and then, for some weeks in succession, we commemorate
196 and show forth the joys of heaven. They who do not rejoice in the weeks after Easter,
197 would not rejoice in heaven itself. These weeks are a sort of beginning of heaven. Pray
198 God to enable you to rejoice; to enable you to keep the Feast duly. Pray God to make
199 you better Christians. This world is a dream,—you will get no good from it. Perhaps you
200 find this difficult to believe; but be sure so it is. Depend upon it, at the last, you will
201 confess it. Young people expect good from the world, and people of middle age devote
202 themselves to it, and even old people do not like to give it up. But the world is your
203 enemy, and the flesh is your enemy. Come to God, and beg of Him grace to devote
204 yourselves to Him. Beg of Him the will to follow Him; beg of Him the power to obey Him.
205 O how comfortable, pleasant, sweet, soothing, and satisfying is it to lead a holy life,—
206 the life of Angels! It is difficult at first; but with God's grace, all things are possible. O
207 how pleasant to have done with sin! how good and joyful to flee temptation and to resist
208 evil! how meet, and worthy, and fitting, and right, to die unto sin, and to live unto
209 righteousness!