

"Religion a Weariness to the Natural Man"  
*Parochial and Plain Sermons* vol. VII sermon 2  
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July 27, 1828

"He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." Isaiah liii. 2.

1 "RELIGION is a weariness;" such is the judgment commonly passed, often avowed,  
2 concerning the greatest of blessings which Almighty God has bestowed upon us. And  
3 when God gave the blessing, He at the same time foretold that such would be the  
4 judgment of the world upon it, even as manifested in the gracious Person of Him whom  
5 He sent to give it to us. "He hath no form nor comeliness," says the Prophet, speaking  
6 of our Lord and Saviour, "and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should  
7 desire Him." He declared beforehand, that to man His religion would be uninteresting  
8 and distasteful. Not that this prediction excuses our deadness to it; this dislike of the  
9 religion given us by God Himself, seen as it is on all sides of us,—of religion in all its  
10 parts, whether its doctrines, its precepts, its polity, its worship, its social influence,—this  
11 distaste for its very name, must obviously be an insult to the Giver. But the text speaks  
12 of it as a fact, without commenting on the guilt involved in it; and as such I wish you to  
13 consider it, as far as this may be done in reverence and seriousness. Putting aside for  
14 an instant the thought of the ingratitude and the sin which indifference to Christianity  
15 implies, let us, as far as we dare, view it merely as a matter of fact, after the manner of  
16 the text, and form a judgment on the probable consequences of it. Let us take the state  
17 of the case as it is found, and survey it dispassionately, as even an unbeliever might  
18 survey it, without at the moment considering whether it is sinful or not; as a misfortune,  
19 if we will, or a strange accident, or a necessary condition of our nature,—one of the  
20 phenomena, as it may be called, of the present world.

21 Let me then review human life in some of its stages and conditions, in order to impress  
22 upon you the fact of this contrariety between ourselves and our Maker: He having one  
23 will, we another; He declaring one thing to be good for us, and we fancying other  
24 objects to be our good.

25 1. "Religion is a weariness;" alas! so feel even children before they can well express  
26 their meaning. Exceptions of course now and then occur; and of course children are  
27 always more open to religious impressions and visitations than grown persons. They  
28 have many good thoughts and good desires, of which, in after life, the multitude of men  
29 seem incapable. Yet who, after all, can have a doubt that, in spite of the more intimate  
30 presence of God's grace with those who have not yet learned to resist it, still, on the  
31 whole, religion is a weariness to children? Consider their amusements, their  
32 enjoyments,—what they hope, what they devise, what they scheme, and what they  
33 dream about themselves in time future, when they grow up; and say what place religion  
34 holds in their hearts. Watch the reluctance with which they turn to religious duties, to  
35 saying their prayers, or reading the Bible; and then judge. Observe, as they get older,  
36 the influence which the fear of the ridicule of their companions has in deterring them  
37 even from speaking of religion, or seeming to be religious. Now the dread of ridicule,

38 indeed, is natural enough; but why should religion inspire ridicule? What is there absurd  
39 in thinking of God? Why should we be ashamed of worshipping Him? It is  
40 unaccountable, but it is natural. We may call it an accident, or what we will; still it is an  
41 undeniable fact, and that is what I insist upon. I am not forgetful of the peculiar  
42 character of children's minds: sensible objects first meet their observation; it is not  
43 wonderful that they should at first be inclined to limit their thoughts to things of sense. A  
44 distinct profession of faith, and a conscious maintenance of principle, may imply a  
45 strength and consistency of thought to which they are as yet unequal. Again, childhood  
46 is capricious, ardent, light-hearted; it cannot think deeply or long on any subject. Yet all  
47 this is not enough to account for the fact in question—why they should feel this distaste  
48 for the very subject of religion. Why should they be ashamed of paying reverence to an  
49 unseen, all-powerful God, whose existence they do not disbelieve? Yet they do feel  
50 ashamed of it. Is it that they are ashamed of themselves, not of their religion; feeling the  
51 inconsistency of professing what they cannot fully practise? This refinement does not  
52 materially alter the view of the case; for it is merely their own acknowledgment that they  
53 do not love religion as much as they ought. No; we seem compelled to the conclusion,  
54 that there is by nature some strange discordance between what we love and what God  
55 loves. So much, then, on the state of boyhood.

56 2. "Religion is a weariness." I will next take the case of young persons when they first  
57 enter into life. Here I may appeal to some perhaps who now hear me. Alas! my  
58 brethren, is it not so? Is not religion associated in your minds with gloom, melancholy,  
59 and weariness? I am not at present going so far as to reprove you for it, though I might  
60 well do so; if I did, perhaps you might at once turn away, and I wish you calmly to think  
61 the matter over, and bear me witness that I state the fact correctly. It is so; you cannot  
62 deny it. The very terms "religion," "devotion," "piety," "conscientiousness,"  
63 "mortification," and the like, you find to be inexpressibly dull and cheerless: you cannot  
64 find fault with them, indeed, you would if you could; and whenever the words are  
65 explained in particulars and realized, then you do find occasion for exception and  
66 objection. But though you cannot deny the claims of religion used as a vague and  
67 general term, yet how irksome, cold, uninteresting, uninviting, does it at best appear to  
68 you! how severe its voice! how forbidding its aspect! With what animation, on the  
69 contrary, do you enter into the mere pursuits of time and the world! What bright  
70 anticipations of joy and happiness flit before your eyes! How you are struck and dazzled  
71 at the view of the prizes of this life, as they are called! How you admire the elegancies  
72 of art, the brilliance of wealth, or the force of intellect! According to your opportunities  
73 you mix in the world, you meet and converse with persons of various conditions and  
74 pursuits, and are engaged in the numberless occurrences of daily life. You are full of  
75 news; you know what this or that person is doing, and what has befallen him; what has  
76 not happened, which was near happening, what may happen. You are full of ideas and  
77 feelings upon all that goes on around you. But, from some cause or other, religion has  
78 no part, no sensible influence, in your judgment of men and things. It is out of your way.  
79 Perhaps you have your pleasure parties; you readily take your share in them time after  
80 time; you pass continuous hours in society where you know that it is quite impossible  
81 even to mention the name of religion. Your heart is in scenes and places when  
82 conversation on serious subjects is strictly forbidden by the rules of the world's

83 propriety. I do not say we should discourse on religious subjects, wherever we go; I do  
84 not say we should make an effort to discourse on them at any time, nor that we are to  
85 refrain from social meetings in which religion does not lie on the surface of the  
86 conversation: but I do say, that when men find their pleasure and satisfaction to lie in  
87 society which proscribes religion, and when they deliberately and habitually prefer those  
88 amusements which have necessarily nothing to do with religion, such persons cannot  
89 view religion as God views it. And this is the point: that the feelings of our hearts on the  
90 subject of religion are different from the declared judgment of God; that we have a  
91 natural distaste for that which He has said is our chief good.

92 3. Now let us pass to the more active occupations of life. Here, too, religion is  
93 confessedly felt to be wearisome, it is out of place. The transactions of worldly business,  
94 speculations in trade, ambitious hopes, the pursuit of knowledge, the public occurrences  
95 of the day, these find a way directly to the heart; they rouse, they influence. It is  
96 superfluous to go about to prove this innate power over us of things of time and sense,  
97 to make us think and act. The name of religion, on the other hand, is weak and  
98 impotent; it contains no spell to kindle the feelings of man, to make the heart beat with  
99 anxiety, and to produce activity and perseverance. The reason is not merely that men  
100 are in want of leisure, and are sustained in a distressing continuance of exertion, by  
101 their duties towards those dependent on them. They have their seasons of relaxation,  
102 they turn for a time from their ordinary pursuits; still religion does not attract them, they  
103 find nothing of comfort or satisfaction in it. For a time they allow themselves to be idle.  
104 They want an object to employ their minds upon; they pace to and fro in very want of an  
105 object; yet their duties to God, their future hopes in another state of being, the revelation  
106 of God's mercy and will, as contained in Scripture, the news of redemption, the gift of  
107 regeneration, the sanctities, the devotional heights, the nobleness and perfection which  
108 Christ works in His elect, do not suggest themselves as fit subjects to dispel their  
109 weariness. Why? Because religion makes them melancholy, say they, and they wish to  
110 relax. Religion is a labour, it is a weariness, a greater weariness than the doing nothing  
111 at all. "Wherefore," says Solomon, "is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom,  
112 seeing he hath no heart to it?" [Prov. xvii. 16.]

113 4. But this natural contrariety between man and his Maker is still more strikingly shown  
114 by the confession of men of the world who have given some thought to the subject, and  
115 have viewed society with somewhat of a philosophical spirit. Such men treat the  
116 demands of religion with disrespect and negligence, on the ground of their being  
117 unnatural. They say, "It is natural for men to love the world for its own sake; to be  
118 engrossed in its pursuits, and to set their hearts on the rewards of industry, on the  
119 comforts, luxuries, and pleasures of this life. Man would not be man if he could be made  
120 otherwise; he would not be what he was evidently intended for by his Maker." Let us  
121 pass by the obvious *answer* that might be given to this objection; it is enough for my  
122 purpose that it is *commonly urged*, recognizing as it does the fact of the disagreement  
123 existing between the claims of God's word, and the inclinations and natural capacities of  
124 man. Many, indeed, of those unhappy men who have denied the Christian faith, treat  
125 the religious principle altogether as a mere unnatural, eccentric state of mind, a peculiar  
126 untoward condition of the affections to which weakness will reduce a man, whether it

127 has been brought on by anxiety, oppressive sorrow, bodily disease, excess of  
128 imagination or the like, and temporary or permanent according to the circumstances of  
129 the disposing cause; a state to which we all are liable, as we are liable to any other  
130 mental injury, but unmanly and unworthy of our dignity as rational beings. Here again it  
131 is enough for our purpose, that it is allowed by these persons that the love of religion is  
132 unnatural and inconsistent with the original condition of our minds.

133 The same remark may be made upon the notions which secretly prevail in certain  
134 quarters at the present day, concerning the unsuitableness of Christianity to an  
135 enlightened age. Men there are who look upon the inspired word of God with a sort of  
136 indulgence, as if it had its use, and had done service in its day; that in times of  
137 ignorance it awed and controlled fierce barbarians, whom nothing else could have  
138 subdued; but that from its very claim to be divine and infallible, and its consequent  
139 unalterableness, it is an obstacle to the improvement of the human race beyond a  
140 certain point, and must ultimately fall before the gradual advancement of mankind in  
141 knowledge and virtue. In other words, the literature of the day is weary of Revealed  
142 Religion.

143 5. Once more; that religion is in itself a weariness is seen even in the conduct of the  
144 better sort of persons, who really on the whole are under the influence of its spirit. So  
145 dull and uninviting is calm and practical religion, that religious persons are ever exposed  
146 to the temptation of looking out for excitements of one sort or other, to make it  
147 pleasurable to them. The spirit of the Gospel is a meek, humble, gentle, unobtrusive  
148 spirit. It doth not cry nor lift up its voice in the streets, unless called upon by duty so to  
149 do, and then it does it with pain. Display, pretension, conflict, are unpleasant to it. What  
150 then is to be thought of persons who are ever on the search after novelties to make  
151 religion interesting to them; who seem to find that Christian activity cannot be kept up  
152 without unchristian party-spirit, or Christian conversation without unchristian  
153 censoriousness? Why, this; that religion is to them as to others, taken by itself, a  
154 weariness, and requires something foreign to its own nature to make it palatable. Truly it  
155 is a weariness to the natural man to serve God humbly and in obscurity; it is very  
156 wearisome, and very monotonous, to go on day after day watching all we do and think,  
157 detecting our secret failings, denying ourselves, creating within us, under God's grace,  
158 those parts of the Christian character in which we are deficient; wearisome to learn  
159 modesty, love of insignificance, willingness to be thought little of, backwardness to clear  
160 ourselves when slandered, and readiness to confess when we are wrong; to learn to  
161 have no cares for this world, neither to hope nor to fear, but to be resigned and  
162 contented!

163 I may close these remarks, by appealing to the consciences of all who have ever set  
164 about the work of religion in good earnest, whoever they may be, whether they have  
165 made less, or greater progress in their noble toil, whether they are matured saints, or  
166 feeble strugglers against the world and the flesh. They have ever confessed how great  
167 efforts were necessary to keep close to the commandments of God; in spite of their  
168 knowledge of the truth, and their faith, in spite of the aids and consolations they receive  
169 from above, still how often do their corrupt hearts betray them! Even their privileges are

170 often burdensome to them, even to pray for the grace which in Christ is pledged to them  
171 is an irksome task. They know that God's service is perfect freedom, and they are  
172 convinced, both in their reason and from their own experience of it, that it is true  
173 happiness; still they confess withal the strange reluctance of their nature to love their  
174 Maker and His Service. And this is the point in question; not only the mass of mankind,  
175 but even the confirmed servants of Christ, witness to the opposition which exists  
176 between their own nature and the demands of religion.

177 This then is the remarkable fact which I proposed to show. Can we doubt that man's will  
178 runs contrary to God's will—that the view which the inspired word takes of our present  
179 life, and of our destiny, does not satisfy us, as it rightly ought to do? that Christ hath no  
180 form nor comeliness in our eyes; and though we see Him, we see no desirable beauty  
181 in Him? That holy, merciful, and meek Saviour, the Eternal, the Only-begotten Son of  
182 God, our friend and infinite benefactor—He who left the glory of His Father and died for  
183 us, who has promised us the overflowing riches of His grace both here and hereafter,  
184 He is a light shining in a dark place, and "the darkness comprehendeth it not." "Light is  
185 come into the world and men love darkness rather than light." The nature of man is  
186 flesh, and that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and ever must so remain; it never can  
187 discern, love, accept, the holy doctrines of the Gospel. It will occupy itself in various  
188 ways, it will take interest in things of sense and time, but it can never be religious. It is at  
189 enmity with God.

190 And now we see what must at once follow from what has been said. If our hearts are by  
191 nature set on the world for its own sake, and the world is one day to pass away, what  
192 are they to be set on, what to delight in, then? Say, how will the soul feel when, stripped  
193 of its present attire, which the world bestows, it stands naked and shuddering before the  
194 pure, tranquil, and severe majesty of the Lord its God, its most merciful, yet  
195 dishonoured Maker and Saviour? What are to be the pleasures of the soul in another  
196 life? Can they be the same as they are here? They cannot; Scripture tells us they  
197 cannot; the world passeth away—now what is there left to love and enjoy through a long  
198 eternity? What a dark, forlorn, miserable eternity that will be!

199 It is then plain enough, though Scripture said not a word on the subject, that if we would  
200 be happy in the world to come, we must make us new hearts, and begin to love the  
201 things we naturally do not love. Viewing it as a practical point, the end of the whole  
202 matter is this, we must be changed; for we cannot, we cannot expect the system of the  
203 universe to come over to us; the inhabitants of heaven, the numberless creations of  
204 Angels, the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the  
205 noble army of Martyrs, the holy Church universal, the Will and Attributes of God, these  
206 are fixed. We must go over to them. In our Saviour's own authoritative words: "Verily,  
207 verily, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." [John iii. 3.] It is  
208 a plain matter of self-interest, to turn our thoughts to the means of changing our hearts,  
209 putting out of the question our duty towards God and Christ, our Saviour and  
210 Redeemer. "He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we see Him, there is no beauty  
211 that we should desire Him." It is not His loss that we love Him not, it is our loss. He is  
212 All-blessed whatever becomes of us. He is not less blessed because we are far from

213 Him. It is we who are not blessed, except as we approach Him, except as we are like  
214 Him, except as we love Him. Woe unto us, if in the day in which He comes from Heaven  
215 we see nothing desirable or gracious in His wounds; but instead, have made for  
216 ourselves an ideal blessedness, different from that which will be manifested to us in  
217 Him. Woe unto us, if we have made pride, or selfishness, or the carnal mind, our  
218 standard of perfection and truth; if our eyes have grown dim, and our hearts gross, as  
219 regards the true light of men, and the glory of the Eternal Father. May He Himself save  
220 us from our self-delusions, whatever they are, and enable us to give up this world, that  
221 we may gain the next;—and to rejoice in Him, who had no home of His own, no place to  
222 lay His head, who was poor and lowly, and despised and rejected, and tormented and  
223 slain!