

Doing Glory to God in Pursuits of the World
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St. John Henry Newman
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"Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Cor. x. 31.

1 WHEN persons are convinced that life is short, that it is unequal to any great purpose, that it
2 does not display adequately, or bring to perfection the true Christian, when they feel that the
3 next life is all in all, and that eternity is the only subject that really can claim or can fill their
4 thoughts, then they are apt to undervalue this life altogether, and to forget its real importance.
5 They are apt to wish to spend the time of their sojourning here in a positive separation from
6 active and social duties: yet it should be recollected that the employments of this world, though
7 not themselves heavenly, are, after all, the way to heaven—though not the fruit, are the seed of
8 immortality—and are valuable, though not in themselves, yet for that to which they lead: but it is
9 difficult to realize this. It is difficult to realize both truths at once, and to connect both truths
10 together; steadily to contemplate the life to come, yet to act in this. Those who meditate, are
11 likely to neglect those active duties which are, in fact, incumbent on them, and to dwell upon the
12 thought of God's glory, till they forget to act to His glory. This state of mind is chided in figure in
13 the words of the holy Angels to the Apostles, when they say, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye
14 gazing up into heaven?" [Acts i. 11.]

15 In various ways does the thought of the next world lead men to neglect their duty in this; and
16 whenever it does so we may be sure that there is something wrong and unchristian, not in their
17 thinking of the next world, but in their manner of thinking of it. For though the contemplation of
18 God's glory may in certain times and persons allowably interfere with the active employments of
19 life, as in the case of the Apostles when our Saviour ascended, and though such contemplation
20 is even freely allowed or commanded us at certain times of each day; yet that is not a real and
21 true meditation on Christ, but some counterfeit, which makes us dream away our time, or
22 become habitually indolent, or which withdraws us from our existing duties, or unsettles us.

23 Yet the thought of the world unseen is apt to do so in various ways, and the worst way of all is
24 when we have taken up a notion that it *ought* to do so. And indeed this is a temptation to which
25 persons who desire to be religions are exposed in one shape or another in every age, and in
26 this age as well as in times past. Men come to fancy that to lose taste and patience for the
27 businesses of this life is renouncing the world and becoming spiritually-minded. We will say a
28 person has been thoughtless and irreligious; perhaps openly so; or at least careless about
29 religion, and though innocent of any flagrant sin, yet a follower of his own will and fancy, and
30 unpractised in any regular and consistent course of religion. He has, perhaps, been outwardly
31 respectful to sacred things and persons, but has had no serious thoughts about the next world.
32 He has taken good and evil—religion and the world—as they came, first one and then the other,
33 without much consideration. He has been fond of gaiety and amusements, or he has been
34 deeply interested in some pursuit or other of time and sense,—whether it be his own trade or
35 profession, or some of the studies and employments now popular. He has fallen in with the
36 ways of the company in which he has found himself; has been profane with the profane; then,
37 again, has had for a season religious impressions, which in turn have worn away. Thus he has
38 lived, and something has then occurred really to rouse him and give him what is called a serious
39 turn. Such a person, man or woman, young or old, certainly does need to take a serious turn,
40 does require a change; and no one but must be very glad to hear that a change has taken

41 place, though at the same time there may be changes not much better than the change which
42 happened to him, whose soul, in our Lord's language, was but "swept and garnished;" not really
43 changed in a heavenly way, and having but the semblance of faith and holiness upon it.

44 Now the cases I am speaking of are somewhat like that which our Saviour seems to speak of in
45 the passage referred to. When a man has been roused to serious resolutions, the chances are,
46 that he fails to take up with the one and only narrow way which leads to life. The chances are
47 that "then cometh the wicked one," and persuades him to choose some path short of the true
48 one—easier and pleasanter than it. And *this* is the kind of course to which he is often seduced,
49 as we frequently witness it; viz. to feel a sort of dislike and contempt for his ordinary worldly
50 business as something beneath him. He knows he must have what Scripture calls a spiritual
51 mind, and he fancies that to have a spiritual mind it is absolutely necessary to renounce all
52 earnestness or activity in his worldly employments, to profess to take no interest in them, to
53 despise the natural and ordinary pleasures of life, violating the customs of society, adopting a
54 melancholy air and a sad tone of voice, and remaining silent and absent when among his
55 natural friends and relatives, as if saying to himself, "I have much higher thoughts than to
56 engage in all these perishing miserable things;" acting with constraint and difficulty in the things
57 about him; making efforts to turn things which occur to the purpose of what he considers
58 spiritual reflection; using certain Scripture phrases and expressions; delighting to exchange
59 Scripture sentiments with persons whom he meets of his own way of thinking; nay, making
60 visible and audible signs of deep feeling when Scripture or other religious subjects are
61 mentioned, and the like. He thinks he lives out of the world, and out of its engagements, if he
62 shuts (as it were) his eyes, and sits down doing nothing. Altogether he looks upon his worldly
63 occupation simply as a burden and a cross, and considers it all gain to be able to throw it off;
64 and the sooner he can release himself from it, and the oftener, so much the better.

65 Now I am far from denying that a man's worldly occupation *may* be his cross. Again, I am far
66 from denying that under circumstances it may be right even to retire from the world. But I am
67 speaking of cases when it is a person's duty to remain in his worldly calling, and when he does
68 remain in it, but when he cherishes dissatisfaction with it: whereas what he ought to feel is
69 this,—that *while* in it he is to glorify God, not *out* of it, but *in* it, and *by means* of it, according to
70 the Apostle's direction, "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The Lord
71 Jesus Christ our Saviour is best served, and with the most fervent spirit, when men are not
72 slothful in business, but do their duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call them.

73 Now what leads such a person into this mistake is, that he sees that most men who engage
74 cheerfully and diligently in worldly business, do so from a worldly spirit, from a low carnal love of
75 the world; and so he thinks it is *his* duty, on the contrary, *not* to take a cheerful part in the
76 world's business at all. And it cannot be denied that the greater part of the world is *absorbed* in
77 the world; so much so that I am almost afraid to speak of the duty of being active in our worldly
78 business, lest I should seem to give countenance to that miserable devotion to the things of time
79 and sense, that love of bustle and management, that desire of gain, and that aiming at influence
80 and importance, which abound on all sides. Bad as it is to be languid and indifferent in our
81 secular duties, and to account this religion, yet it is far worse to be the slaves of this world, and
82 to have our hearts in the concerns of this world. I do not know any thing more dreadful than a
83 state of mind which is, perhaps, the characteristic of this country, and which the prosperity of
84 this country so miserably fosters. I mean that ambitious spirit, to use a great word, but I know no
85 other word to express my meaning—that low ambition which sets every one on the look-out to
86 succeed and to rise in life, to amass money, to gain power, to depress his rivals, to triumph over
87 his hitherto superiors, to affect a consequence and a gentility which he had not before, to affect

to have an opinion on high subjects, to pretend to form a judgment upon sacred things, to choose his religion, to approve and condemn according to his taste, to become a partizan in extensive measures for the supposed temporal benefit of the community, to indulge the vision of great things which are to come, great improvements, great wonders: all things vast, all things new,—this most fearfully earthly and grovelling spirit is likely, alas! to extend itself more and more among our countrymen,—an intense, sleepless, restless, never-wearied, never-satisfied, pursuit of Mammon in one shape or other, to the exclusion of all deep, all holy, all calm, all reverent thoughts. *This* is the spirit in which, more or less (according to their different tempers), men do commonly engage in concerns of this world; and I repeat it, better, far better, were it to retire from the world altogether than thus to engage in it—better with Elijah to fly to the desert, than to serve Baal and Ashtoreth in Jerusalem.

But the persons I speak of, as despising this world, are far removed from the spirit of Elijah. To flee from the world, or strenuously to resist it, implies an energy and strength of mind which they have not. They do neither one thing nor the other; they neither flee it, nor engage zealously in its concerns; but they remain in the midst of them, doing them in an indolent and negligent way, and think this is to be spiritually minded; or, as in other cases, they really take an interest in them, and yet speak as if they despised them.

But surely it is possible to "serve the Lord," yet not to be "slothful in business;" not over devoted to it, but not to retire from it. We may do *all things* whatever we are about to God's glory; we may do all things *heartily*, as to the Lord, and not to man, being both active yet meditative; and now let me give some instances to show what I mean.

1. "Do all to the glory of God," says St. Paul, in the text; nay, "whether we eat or drink;" so that it appears nothing is too slight or trivial to glorify Him in. We will suppose then, to take the case mentioned just now; we will suppose a man who has lately had more serious thoughts than he had before, and determines to live more religiously. In consequence of the turn his mind has taken he feels a distaste for his worldly occupation, whether he is in trade, or in any mechanical employment which allows little exercise of mind. He now feels he would rather be in some other business, though in itself his present occupation is quite lawful and pleasing to God. The ill-instructed man will at once get impatient and quit it; or if he does not quit it, at least he will be negligent and indolent in it. But the true penitent will say to himself; "No; if it be an irksome employment, so much the more does it suit *me*. I deserve no better. I do not deserve to be fed even with husks. I am bound to afflict my soul for my past sins. If I were to go in sackcloth and ashes, if I were to live on bread and water, if I were to wash the feet of the poor day by day, it would not be too great an humiliation; and the only reason I do not, is, that I have no call that way, it would look ostentatious. Gladly then will I hail an inconvenience which will try me without any one's knowing it. Far from repining, I will, through God's grace, go cheerfully about what I do not like. I will deny myself. I know that with His help what is in itself painful, will thus be pleasant as done towards Him. I know well that there is no pain but may be borne comfortably, by the thought of Him, and by His grace, and the strong determination of the will; nay, none but may soothe and solace me. Even the natural taste and smell may be made to like what they naturally dislike; even bitter medicine, which is nauseous to the palate, may by a resolute will become tolerable. Nay, even sufferings and torture, such as martyrs have borne, have before now been rejoiced in and embraced heartily from love to Christ. I then, a sinner, will take this light inconvenience in a generous way, pleased at the opportunity of disciplining myself, and with self-abasement, as needing a severe penitence. If there be parts in my occupation which I especially dislike, if it requires a good deal of moving about and I wish to be at home, or if it be sedentary and I wish to be in motion, or if it requires rising early and I like to rise late, or if it

135 makes me solitary and I like to be with friends, all this unpleasant part, as far as is consistent
136 with my health, and so that it is not likely to be a snare to me, I will choose by preference. Again,
137 I see my religious views are a hindrance to me. I see persons are suspicious of me. I see that I
138 offend people by my scrupulousness. I see that to get on in life requires far more devotion to my
139 worldly business than I can give consistently with my duty to God, or without its becoming a
140 temptation to me. I know that I ought not, and (please God) I will not, sacrifice my religion to it.
141 My religious seasons and hours shall be my own. I will not countenance any of the worldly
142 dealings and practices, the over-reaching ways, the sordid actions in which others indulge. And
143 if I am thrown back in life thereby, if I make less gains or lose friends, and so come to be
144 despised, and find others rise in the world while I remain where I was, hard though this be to
145 bear, it is an humiliation which becomes me in requital for my sins, and in obedience to God;
146 and a very slight one it is, merely to be deprived of worldly successes, or rather it is a gain. And
147 this may be the manner in which Almighty God will make an opening for me, if it is His blessed
148 will, to leave my present occupation. But leave it without a call from God, I certainly must not.
149 On the contrary, I will work in it the more diligently, as far as higher duties allow me."

150 2. A second reason which will animate the Christian will be a desire of letting his light shine
151 before men. He will aim at winning others by his own diligence and activity. He will say to
152 himself, "My parents" or "my master" or "employer shall never say of me, Religion has spoiled
153 him. They shall see me more active and alive than before. I will be punctual and attentive, and
154 adorn the Gospel of God our Saviour. My companions shall never have occasion to laugh at any
155 affectation of religious feeling in me. No; I will affect nothing. In a manly way I will, with God's
156 blessing, do my duty. I will not, as far as I can help, dishonour His service by any strangeness or
157 extravagance of conduct, any unreality of words, any over-softness or constraint of manner; but
158 they shall see that the fear of God only makes those who cherish it more respectable in the
159 world's eyes as well as more heavenly-minded. What a blessed return it will be for God's
160 mercies to me, if I, who am like a brand plucked out of the burning, be allowed, through His
161 great mercy, to recommend that Gospel to others which He has revealed to me, and to
162 recommend it, as on the one hand by my strictness in attending God's ordinances, in
163 discountenancing vice and folly, and by a conscientious walk; so, on the other hand, by all that
164 is of good report in social life, by uprightness, honesty, prudence, and straightforwardness, by
165 good temper, good-nature, and brotherly love!"

166 3. Thankfulness to Almighty God, nay, and the inward life of the Spirit itself, will be additional
167 principles causing the Christian to labour diligently in his calling. He will see God in all things.
168 He will recollect our Saviour's life. Christ was brought up to a humble trade. When he labours in
169 his own, he will think of his Lord and Master in His. He will recollect that Christ went down to
170 Nazareth and was subject to His parents, that He walked long journeys, that He bore the sun's
171 heat and the storm, and had not where to lay His head. Again, he knows that the Apostles had
172 various employments of this world before their calling; St. Andrew and St. Peter fishers, St.
173 Matthew a tax-gatherer, and St. Paul, even after his calling, still a tent-maker. Accordingly, in
174 whatever comes upon him, he will endeavour to discern and gaze (as it were) on the
175 countenance of his Saviour. He will feel that the true contemplation of that Saviour lies *in* his
176 worldly business; that as Christ is seen in the poor, and in the persecuted, and in children, so is
177 He seen in the employments which He puts upon His chosen, whatever they be; that in
178 attending to his own calling he will be meeting Christ; that if he neglect it, he will not on that
179 account enjoy His presence at all the more, but that while performing it, he will see Christ
180 revealed to his soul amid the ordinary actions of the day, as by a sort of sacrament. Thus he will
181 take his worldly business as a gift from Him, and will love it as such.

182 4. True humility is another principle which will lead us to desire to glorify God in our worldly
183 employments if possible, instead of resigning them. Christ evidently puts His greater blessings
184 on those whom the world despises. He has bid His followers take the lowest seat. He says that
185 he who would be great must be as the servant of all, that he who humbleth himself shall be
186 exalted; and He Himself washed His disciples' feet. Nay, He tells us, that He will gird Himself,
187 and serve them who have watched for Him; an astonishing condescension, which makes us
188 almost dumb with fear and rejoicing. All this has its effect upon the Christian, and he sets about
189 his business with alacrity, and without a moment's delay, delighting to humble himself, and to
190 have the opportunity of putting himself in that condition of life which our Lord especially blest.

191 5. Still further, he will use his worldly business as a means of keeping him from vain and
192 unprofitable thoughts. One cause of the heart's devising evil is, that time is given it to do so. The
193 man who has his daily duties, who lays out his time for them hour by hour, is saved a multitude
194 of sins which have not time to get hold upon him. The brooding over insults received, or the
195 longing after some good not granted, or regret at losses which have befallen us, or at the loss of
196 friends by death, or the attacks of impure and shameful thoughts, these are kept off from him
197 who takes care to be diligent and well employed. Leisure is the occasion of all evil. Idleness is
198 the first step in the downward path which leads to hell. If we do not find employment to engage
199 our minds with, Satan will be sure to find his own employment for them. Here we see the
200 difference of motive with which a religious and a worldly-minded man may do the same thing.
201 Suppose a person has had some sad affliction, say a bereavement: men of this world, having
202 no pleasure in religion, not liking to dwell on a loss to them irreparable, in order to drown
203 reflection, betake themselves to worldly pursuits to divert their thoughts and banish gloom. The
204 Christian under the same circumstances does the same thing; but it is from a fear lest he should
205 relax and enfeeble his mind by barren sorrow; from a dread of becoming discontented; from a
206 belief that he is pleasing God better, and is likely to secure his peace more fully, by not losing
207 time; from a feeling that, far from forgetting those whom he has lost by thus acting, he shall only
208 enjoy the thought of them the more really and the more religiously.

209 6. Lastly, we see what judgment to give in a question sometimes agitated, whether one should
210 retire from our worldly business at the close of life, to give our thoughts more entirely to God. To
211 wish to do so is so natural, that I suppose there is no one who would not wish it. A great many
212 persons are not allowed the privilege, a great many are allowed it through increasing infirmities
213 or extreme old age; but every one, I conceive, if allowed to choose, would think it a privilege to
214 be allowed it, though a great many would find it difficult to determine *when* was the fit time. But
215 let us consider what is the reason of this so natural a wish. I fear that it is often not a religious
216 wish, often only partially religious. I fear a great number of persons who aim at retiring from the
217 world's business, do so under the notion of their then enjoying themselves somewhat after the
218 manner of the rich man in the Gospel, who said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many
219 years." If this is the predominant aim of any one, of course I need not say that it is a fatal sin, for
220 Christ Himself has said so. Others there are who are actuated by a mixed feeling; they are
221 aware that they do not give so much time to religion as they ought; they do not live by rule; nay,
222 they are not satisfied with the correctness or uprightness of some of the practices or customs
223 which their way of life requires of them, and they get tired of active business as life goes on, and
224 wish to be at ease. So they look to their last years as a time of retirement, in which they
225 may *both* enjoy themselves *and* prepare for heaven. And thus they satisfy both their conscience
226 and their love of the world. At present religion is irksome to them; but then, as they hope, duty
227 and pleasure will go together. Now, putting aside all other mistakes which such a frame of mind
228 evidences, let it be observed, that if they are at present *not* serving God with all their hearts, but
229 look forward to a time when they shall do so, then it is plain that, when at length they do put
230 aside worldly cares and turn to God, if ever they do, that time must necessarily be a time of

231 deep humiliation, if it is to be acceptable to Him, not a comfortable retirement. Who ever heard
232 of a pleasurable, easy, joyous repentance? It is a contradiction in terms. These men, if they do
233 but reflect a moment, must confess that their present mode of life, supposing it be not so strict
234 as it should be, is heaping up tears and groans for their last years, not enjoyment. The longer
235 they live as they do at present, not only the more unlikely is it that they will repent at all; but
236 even if they do, the more bitter, the more painful must their repentance be. The only way to
237 escape suffering for sin hereafter is to suffer for it here. Sorrow here or misery hereafter; they
238 cannot escape one or the other.

239 Not for any worldly reason, then, not on any presumptuous or unbelieving motive, does the
240 Christian desire leisure and retirement, for his last years. Nay, he will be content to do without
241 these blessings, and the highest Christian of all is he whose heart is so stayed on God, that he
242 does not wish or need it; whose heart is so set on things above, that things below as little excite,
243 agitate, unsettle, distress, and seduce him, as they stop the course of nature, as they stop the
244 sun and moon, or change summer and winter. Such were the Apostles, who, as the heavenly
245 bodies, went out "to all lands," full of business, and yet full too of sweet harmony, even to the
246 ends of the earth. Their calling was heavenly, but their work was earthly; they were in labour
247 and trouble till the last; yet consider how calmly St. Paul and St. Peter write in their last days. St.
248 John, on the other hand, was allowed in a great measure, to retire from the cares of his pastoral
249 charge, and such, I say, will be the natural wish of every religious man, whether his ministry be
250 spiritual or secular; but, not in order to *begin* to fix his mind on God, but merely because, though
251 he may contemplate God as truly and be as holy in heart in active business as in quiet, still it is
252 more becoming and suitable to meet the stroke of death (if it be allowed us) silently, collectedly,
253 solemnly, than in a crowd and a tumult. And hence it is, among other reasons, that we pray in
254 the Litany to be delivered "from *sudden* death."

255 On the whole, then, what I have said comes to this, that whereas Adam was sentenced to
256 labour as a punishment, Christ has by His coming sanctified it as a means of grace and a
257 sacrifice of thanksgiving, a sacrifice cheerfully to be offered up to the Father in His name.

258 It is very easy to speak and teach this, difficult to do it; very difficult to steer between the two
259 evils,—to use this world as not abusing it, to be active and diligent in this world's affairs, yet not
260 for this world's sake, but for God's sake. It requires the greater effort for a minister of Christ to
261 speak of it, for this reason; because he is not called upon in the same sense in which others are
262 to practise the duty. He is not called, as his people are, to the professions, the pursuits, and
263 cares of this world; his work is heavenly, and to it he gives himself wholly. It is a work which, we
264 trust, is not likely to carry him off from God; not only because it is His work, but, what is a more
265 sure reason, because commonly it gains no great thanks from men. However, for this reason it
266 is difficult for Christian ministers to speak about your trial in this matter, my brethren, because it
267 is not theirs. We are tried by the command to live out of the world, and you by the command to
268 live in it.

269 May God give us grace in our several spheres and stations to do His will and adorn His
270 doctrine; that whether we eat and drink, or fast and pray, labour with our hands or with our
271 minds, journey about or remain at rest, we may glorify Him who has purchased us with His own
272 blood!