

Danger of Delusion

by Charles Finney

True religion consists in supreme ultimate intention, or disinterested benevolence, which begets corresponding feeling and action.

Scripture: Matthew 22:37, Hebrews 2:1

Topics: "True Religion", "Disinterested Benevolence"

Description

Charles Finney warns about the 'Danger of Delusion' in true religion, emphasizing that genuine faith is not merely about emotions, outward actions, or opinions, but rather about a supreme intention to promote the highest good for all beings. He highlights the rarity of understanding true religion, which is essential for its existence in the soul, and stresses the dangers of losing this understanding due to selfishness and societal influences. Finney provides practical steps to retain the true idea and practice of religion, including self-examination of motives, prayer, and a commitment to disinterested benevolence.

Transcript

TEXT--'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip.' Heb. 3:1

In remarking upon this text, I shall attempt to show:

I. WHAT CONSTITUTES TRUE RELIGION.

II. THAT THE TRUE IDEA OF RELIGION IS RARE.

III. THAT THE EXISTENCE OF THE TRUE IDEA OF WHAT CONSTITUTES RELIGION IS INDISPENSABLE TO THE EXISTENCE OF TRUE RELIGION IN THE SOUL.

IV. THE GREAT DANGER OF LOSING THIS IDEA.

V. HOW TO RETAIN THE TRUE IDEA, AND THE PRACTICE OF TRUE RELIGION.

I. What constitutes true religion.

1. It does not consist in any course of outward action. Outward actions, when viewed apart from the intention of the mind, can have no moral character at all. They are always necessitated by the acts of the will. Therefore religion cannot consist in mere outward actions.

2. Moral character does not consist in inward emotions or mere feelings, for these are involuntary states of mind, produced by directing our attention to objects that excite these feelings, by a natural necessity. So that mere feeling or emotion cannot, in itself, possess moral character.

3. True religion cannot consist in opinion, or in holding any system of doctrine. Our opinions are the necessary result of giving or refusing our attention to evidence, and therefore can have no moral character in themselves.

4. True religion does not consist in desire as distinguished from choice. Men often desire what, upon the whole, they do not choose. But desire, as distinguished from choice, can have no moral character, because, it is an involuntary state of mind.

5. But true religion does consist in obedience to the law of God, or in living in conformity with our nature and relations. Universal reason affirms, and no one can doubt, that men are under a moral obligation to understand, as far as possible, their nature and relations, and to conform to them.

Reason also affirms the obligation of all moral beings to exercise disinterested benevolence. By disinterested benevolence is intended the willing of the highest good of being in general, for its own sake--that every good is to be regarded, willed, and treated, according to its relative value, so far as we are able to understand its value. Disinterested benevolence constitutes that which is required by the law of God, and is expressed in the term love. It is choice as distinguished from mere desire. It is willing, as distinguished from mere emotion or feeling. It is willing good for its own sake, as distinguished from willing the good of others for some selfish reason, that is, it is willing the good of being as an end, and not as a means of promoting our own good. It is willing universal good as opposed to willing partial good. It is willing every interest according to its relative value, because it is the willing of good for its own sake, and on account of its intrinsic value. It is synonymous with ultimate intention. By ultimate intention is intended the subjective motive of the mind, or the mind's choice of an ultimate end, to the promotion of which it devotes itself.

Let it then be understood that virtue, or true religion consists always in the supreme ultimate intention of the mind--that a man's character is as his subjective motive, or ultimate intention is. The Bible again and again affirms that all the law is fulfilled in one word, love. And this love, when the term is properly defined and understood, is synonymous with intention, or disinterested benevolence. We therefore judge rightly when we say, that a man's character is as his motive or intention is.

Lest it should be thought from what I have said, that outward action and inward feeling have no necessary connection with true religion, and that it may exist without corresponding feelings and actions, I remark, that the actions of the will, as we know by our own consciousness, necessitate outward actions. If I intend to go to a certain place as soon as I can, that intention will beget those volitions that give motion to the muscles. Therefore while the intention exists, corresponding outward actions must exist. So intentions necessitate corresponding feelings. The attention of the mind is governed by the will. If I intend to feel upon a certain subject, I direct my attention to it, and corresponding feelings are the necessary result. Therefore where intentions exist, corresponding feelings must exist. It should be observed, however, that sometimes outward actions and corresponding feelings cannot be produced by efforts of the will; for example, outward actions cannot be produced, when there is a paralysis of the nerves of voluntary motion. In such cases, the muscles will not obey volition. So where the excitability of the mind is exhausted, emotions will not be the necessary result of giving the attention of the mind to certain subjects which in

other cases would produce them. But except in such cases, feeling and outward action are the certain and necessary results of intention.

Where, therefore, religion exists, it will of necessity manifest itself in corresponding outward actions and inward feelings.

II. The true idea of what constitutes true religion is rare.

This is evident,

1. From the fact that the common notion of men seems to be that true religion consists in emotion or feeling. Consequently when they relate their religious experience, they almost universally give an account of their feelings, or emotions, and so speak of them as to show that they suppose these to constitute religion. And nothing is more common, than to hear persons, in giving an account of what they call their religious experience, pass over entirely, and not so much as once allude to that which constitutes true religion. It is most manifest in such cases, that if they indeed have any true religion, they do not know in what it consists--that if their ultimate intention is really holy, and if they do truly intend to glorify God, and promote the highest good of being, they do not look upon this intention as constituting true religion, but suppose their religion to consist in that class of feelings which are produced by their intention.

2. It is common, and almost universal, for professors of religion to speak of it as something to be experienced by us, rather than to be done, something in which we are passive rather than active. This shows that they do not consider religion as consisting in intention; for who would speak of experiencing an intention? Does any one ever speak of experiencing a choice?

3. It has been a common and almost universal idea that sin and holiness can co-exist in the same mind. But if true religion or holiness consists in supreme or ultimate intention, sin can by no means co-exist with it; for certainly a moral being cannot, at the same time, have a supremely benevolent intention, and a selfish intention. If virtue consists in intention, so must sin. Sin consists universally in a supremely selfish intention, or in aiming at the gratification of self, as the supreme end of life. Selfishness then and true religion, as I have more than once said in former lectures, consist in opposite ultimate intentions, and cannot co-exist in the same mind. When therefore it is supposed that sin and holiness can co-exist in the same mind, it is manifest that the true idea of true religion is not before the mind.

4. The current phraseology of men shows that they suppose religion can really exist in the mind in a dormant state--that like a coal of fire covered up by ashes, it can remain smothered and inactive, and yet be true religion. It is common for all classes of persons to speak of having religion, but not in exercise--that their religion is not active--that it is not in exercise, &c. Now this phraseology shows that at the time they have not the true idea of true religion in their minds, for true religion is nothing else but action, voluntary action, choice, intention. Intention is an act of the mind, and true religion is a supreme ultimate intention, or act of the mind. To talk, then, of a religion not in exercise, a religion not active, is to talk stark nonsense. And when persons use such language, they show to a demonstration, that, at the time, they have not the true idea of religion in their minds.

5. It is very common to hear persons speak of religion as consisting in mere desire, in distinction from choice. Choice always controls the outward conduct. But mere desire, as distinguished from choice, never does. Many persons speak of desiring to live, and act better than they do, and speak of those desires which do not produce corresponding action, as constituting religion. Now, this is a sad and fatal mistake.

6. Only certain gross sins are generally regarded as being inconsistent with the existence of true holiness. It seems to be generally understood that habitual drunkenness, licentiousness, lying, theft, murder, &c., would demonstrate that a person had no true religion. But it does not seem to be at all the general opinion that one form of habitual selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion, as another. Men may transact business on selfish principles; they may live in vanity, in various forms of self-indulgence, and these forms of selfishness may be habitual with them, and yet they may regard themselves, and be regarded by others, as being truly religious. But this cannot be. A man can no more be truly religious, and transact business upon selfish principles, and for selfish reasons, than he could be truly religious, and be drunk every day in the week; for it makes no difference, whether he devotes himself to the promotion of self-gratification in the form of obtaining wealth, or in the form of gratifying appetite for strong drink, or in other sensual indulgences. It matters not whether a woman devotes herself to dress, or to the gratification of licentious appetites. A vain woman can no more be religious than a licentious woman. It does not seem to be understood, or hardly so much as dreamed of by the Church in general, that one form of selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion, as another; and that no form of selfishness whatever can consist with true religion.

7. It often happens that nearly all the reasons urged by ministers and others to induce men to be religious, are mere appeals to their selfishness. Now this shows that often-times religious teachers themselves, have not the true idea of religion developed in their own minds. I might appeal to my readers and ask you, is it common for you to hear true religion accurately defined? Do your teachers make such discriminations as generally to develop in the minds of their congregation, the true idea of what constitutes religion? I hope in many instances they do. And yet I am sure that in many instances they do not. It is the very general fault of religious teachers that they do not succeed in developing in the minds of their hearers the true idea of religion.

8. What is called "revival preaching" often consists very much in appeals to the sensibility of men, while it leaves entirely out of view the idea of what constitutes true religion. In such revivals men are not made disinterestedly benevolent. It is a revival of feeling and not of true religion. There are a great many excitements, often-times, and a great many professed converts, where the idea of disinterested benevolence is not developed, and scarcely a vestige of true religion exists. Every year I live, I am more and more impressed with this, and can have no confidence in the genuineness of those revivals in which the true idea of religion is not thoroughly developed, until it carries the will, and men become truly, disinterestedly benevolent.

9. Sin is often denounced without telling what it is. It is almost always spoken of as something different from selfishness. And when selfishness is spoken of at all as sin, it is only spoken of as being one form of sin. It often happens, that selfishness ceases to be regarded as sin, and very little will be said of it as constituting sin at all, whereas selfishness, under its various modifications, is the whole of sin.

10. Were not the true idea of what constitutes true religion rare, hopes could not possibly be entertained by nor for the great mass of professing Christians. If it were generally understood that religion is nothing else than supreme benevolent intention, that necessarily begets corresponding feeling and action--were it also generally understood that one form of habitual selfishness is just as inconsistent with true religion as another, and that the habitual existence of any form of selfishness whatever, is proof conclusive, of the absence of true religion, how impossible would it be that hopes should be entertained, either by or for the scores of selfish professors, that fill our churches.

11. The common old school notion that sin and holiness consist in the constitutional tastes, or appetites of the mind, and lie back of voluntary intention, is a demonstration that they have not the true idea of religion. By this I do not mean that none of them can be Christians, for they have the idea of supreme benevolent intention, but they do not understand that this constitutes true religion. I trust that many of them know by their own consciousness, what true devotedness to God is, but in theorizing, they make that to constitute virtue, which does not: and hold the "taste scheme," that is, that sin and holiness instead of consisting in choice or ultimate intention, lie in the involuntary appetites and propensities.

12. The words that represent the Christian graces are seldom understood by those that use them; for example, the term love, as used in the law of God, is generally spoken of, as if it meant a mere emotion, or feeling of the mind. Humility is spoken of, as if it consisted in a deep sense of unworthiness, whereas it consists in no such thing. Love, as we have seen, as used in the law of God, means disinterested benevolence. If humility consisted in a sense of unworthiness, the devil might be humble, and doubtless is. Convicted sinners might also be humble, and doubtless are, if this is humility. I scarcely ever in my life, heard a minister speak of humility as if he had any definitely developed idea of what it is. Humility must consist in a willingness to be known and appreciated according to our real character. The same mistakes are made in regard to repentance and faith. Repentance is generally spoken of as if it consisted in emotions of sorrow, whereas it consists in a change of mind, choice, or ultimate intention, and is precisely synonymous with a change of heart. Faith is very commonly spoken of as consisting either in mere intellectual conviction, or in a felt assurance of the truth of a proposition, whereas it consists in an act of the will, or in confiding, or committing the whole being to the influence of truth.

13. The fact that the 7th chapter of Romans has been so generally understood as descriptive of the Christian warfare, is evidence conclusive, that the true idea of true religion is rare. In that chapter the Apostle is speaking of a legal experience, as contrasted with a gospel experience, of which he proceeds to speak in the 8th chapter. And the fact that the Church have so generally stopped short, and claimed the 7th chapter, as descriptive of a Christian's experience, because it was their own experience, shows to what a limited extent the real idea of true religion has been developed.

I might adduce a great many other reasons, showing that the true idea of true religion is a rare idea: but I must pass to say,

III. That the true idea of religion is indispensable to the existence of true religion.

By this, as I have already intimated, I do not mean, that persons may not be religious, and yet in theory make a mistake in regard to what constitutes real religion. But I do mean,

1. That unintelligent action has no moral character.
2. That the true knowledge of God consists in having correct ideas of Him.
3. God cannot be truly loved, worshipped, or served, any farther than He is truly known.
4. True religion, as we have seen, consists in the choice of a right end.
5. This end must be distinctly apprehended by the mind; that is, the idea must be distinctly developed and kept in view.

6. If this end be lost sight of, there can be no true religion; for if the end be not in view, the intention cannot be right. And as virtue consists in intention, it is self-evident, that where the true idea or end to be aimed at is not kept in view, there can be no true religion.

IV. There is great danger of losing the true idea of true religion.

This is evident,

1. From the fact that the true idea of religion is so rare.

2. All ages and nations have manifested a tendency to lose the true idea of God and of true religion. Even the Jews, who had the living oracles of God, had, before the coming of Christ, almost entirely lost the true idea of religion, and supposed it to consist in outward works.

[3.] 4. The selfishness of mankind creates in them a strong tendency to make religion consist in some modification of selfishness, and to overlook the fact, that religion consists in disinterested benevolence.

4. The selfishness of men creates in them a strong tendency to misunderstand the Bible. The Bible every where promises reward to virtue, and threatens vice with endless evil. But the Bible no where makes virtue to consist in aiming at the reward as an end. It always represents virtue as consisting in disinterested benevolence. Now as mankind are selfish, they are extremely liable to make escape from the penalty of sin, and the rewards of virtue, the great and most influential reasons for their attempts to be virtuous. They set up the rewards of virtue as an end--aim at getting to heaven--and set about the service of God for the sake of reward. But this is not virtue. It is only serving for the loaves and fishes. There is not a particle of true benevolence in it. It is amazing to see to what extent men set about what they call the service of God, from purely selfish motives, and really understand the Bible as an appeal to their selfishness.

5. Unconverted men are universally committed to the indulgence of their feelings rather than swayed by the affirmations of their reason, and decisions of their conscience. Consequently there is a strong tendency in them to consider religion as consisting in strongly excited feelings, rather than in conformity to the law of God as revealed in the reason.

6. The selfishness of men with which we are perpetually surrounded, tends strongly to divert the attention from that which constitutes true religion.

7. Among the millions of aims and intentions which men have, but one of them is virtue or true religion. Christ said, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to death, and many there be which go in thereat: while strait, is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it." There is great emphasis in this truth. The wide gate and broad way includes every one that is actuated by any other than a disinterestedly benevolent spirit. While the narrow way includes those only who have a single eye, and are living for one end, namely, the highest good of universal being.

8. In the text the Apostle says, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip." By slip, as it is rendered in the margin, is intended to leak out, to escape. Men are extremely apt to act without considering their ultimate motive, or the great and fundamental reason of their conduct, and therefore to be entirely selfish, without understanding that they are so.

9. Men constantly hear religion represented, in a great variety of ways, as consisting in feelings, in outward courses of conduct, and in almost every thing else, than supreme disinterestedly benevolent intention.

10. Men dislike to retain the true idea of religion just as they dislike to retain the true idea of God.

V. How to retain the true idea and practice of true religion.

1. Inquire after the fundamental reason of your conduct. Reader, do nothing, and commit yourself to no course of action, without raising the inquiry, what is the great fundamental reason by which you are actuated; and suffer not yourself to go forward without the testimony of your own consciousness, that you are disinterestedly benevolent in what you do.

2. Keep Christ's life and temper before you as the great exemplar, the great and powerful instrument of making you benevolent as He was. Faith in the truths of the gospel, unwavering confidence that those things recorded of Christ are true, gives the life and example of Christ the greatest power over you to make you benevolent like Himself.

3. Pray much in the Holy Ghost, and remember, that unless you pray in the Spirit, you are sure to let slip the true idea and practice of true religion.

4. In order to pray in the Holy Ghost, you must watch unto prayer. Unless you watch, you will be sure to grieve the Spirit of God away.

5. Be sure that you neglect no duty. Remember that neglect is just as absolutely a violation of the law of God, as any positive crime is.

6. Maintain a consciousness that you do every thing for the glory of God. This is perfectly practicable. A worldly man is conscious of the great end he has in view in all his ways. He knows why he labors and toils, why he refuses to make this expenditure, and why he makes that speculation.

7. Neither engage nor continue in any business, but for the glory of God. Unless you are conscious that it may be pursued and that you are actually pursuing it, for the glory of God, you cannot be truly religious.

8. Aim not merely at being useful, but at being so in the highest degree. If you are disinterestedly benevolent, it will follow, of course, that you will prefer a greater to a less good, and not satisfy yourself with doing some good, when it is in your power to do more. Therefore remember that unless in your own honest estimation, you are living so as, upon the whole, to promote the highest good you are capable of promoting, you are not in a truly religious state of mind, and if you think you are, it is because you have let slip the true idea of what constitutes true religion. Such inquiries as these should be started and honestly answered. Is my present employment one in which I can be most useful? If not, is there any opening in providence for me to change it for one in which I can be more useful? And in settling these questions, be careful that you are not influenced by any selfish considerations. So on the other hand, take an enlightened view of the subject, before you decide to change your employment, if it be one that is lawful in itself. If your employment be one that is inconsistent with the highest interests of mankind; nay, if it is not one that is useful, you are to abandon it at all events. But if it be one that is useful to men, whether you should exchange it for one that is more useful, must depend upon your qualifications, and all the circumstances of the case. In deciding all these questions, 'your eye is single, your whole body shall be full of light'; but if your eye is evil, in other words, if you are selfish, you will wander on in perpetual error.

You have already lost sight of the true idea of religion, and fallen from all real virtue.

9. If you have not done so, make a public profession of religion. Remember that Christ expressly requires this of you, and that you cannot live in the neglect of this duty, when you have an opportunity to perform it, and still retain the idea and practice of true religion. The very neglect is itself disobedience, and is inconsistent with the existence of true religion.

10. In making a profession of religion, be sure that you are not selfish in joining one or another particular church or denomination. No doubt, as a matter of fact, some persons are guilty of heart apostacy in the very act of making a profession of religion--In uniting with the visible church they actually apostatize from God. Sometimes they are influenced by political motives, sometimes by pecuniary considerations, having an eye upon how their relation to such and such a congregation, will affect their business transactions. Sometimes they are influenced by fear of expense in supporting the gospel, if connected with a particular church or congregation, or, on the other hand, by the hope that in uniting with a particular denomination, their church expenses will be small. Oftentimes, in making a profession of religion, persons are influenced by a regard to the respectability of the church or denomination to which they attach themselves. And indeed there are multitudes of selfish considerations, by which you are in danger of being influenced, and by which, if you are influenced, you really apostatize from God, in the very act of making a public profession of supreme attachment to Him. One of the great reasons why many professed converts immediately backslide, after making a profession of religion, is, that in selecting the church or denomination to which they attach themselves, they were influenced by some selfish consideration, and actually lost both the idea and practice of true religion in making a public profession of it. Be sure, then, always in making a profession of religion, see to it that you are honest, that your eye is single to the glory of God, that you aim at doing the highest good in your power.

11. Avoid sectarianism. Sectarianism is as far as possible from the spirit of true religion. And all the arguments by which the dividing of the Church into different denominations, and continuing them in this state, are supported, are utterly futile, as might easily be shown, were this the place for the discussion.

In recommending it to you, however, to join some church, it is of course expected that you will join some of the existing denominations. The thing intended here, is, that you avoid a sectarian spirit, that you love all Christians as such, that you have no zeal to build up a party, but that you live for the universal Church, the world, and the glory of God.

12. Avoid every form and also the spirit of papacy. There is an alarming tendency in the different protestant denominations to adopt and carry out the fundamental error of papacy. The grand mistake of papacy is this: It assumes that the Bible is not a sufficiently popular standard of morals for the multitude. And that therefore there must be some authoritative exposition of its meaning. It assumes that if the unlearned are allowed to form their own opinions of the meaning of the Bible, it will led to endless divisions and heresies. Consequently the Pope and the decisions of councils were set up as authoritative standards by which the Bible is to be interpreted. The next step of course was to take the Bible out of the hands of common people inasmuch as it had been assumed that they were unable to understand it, and were therefore not allowed to interpret it for themselves. Consequently any thing, with papists, is heresy, that is not consistent with this standard, and in trials for heresy papists are not allowed to appeal from those human standards to the holy scriptures, inasmuch as by the general consent of papists, those standards are an authoritative exposition of what the Bible means. This I say is the fundamental error of papacy. And as I said, there is a growing tendency among all protestant denominations to adopt and carry out this very

error. For example: take the Presbyterian confession of faith. That does not in itself, assume to be an infallible standard. But Presbyterians treat it as such, speak of it as such, and in all their public acts they place it above the Bible. Especially is this tendency increasing since the great division of the Presbyterian church. The time was when multitudes of Presbyterian ministers professed nothing more than to receive the confession of faith as upon the whole a correct system of doctrine, while they did not hesitate to declare publicly and positively that there were several points in that confession, from which they dissented. But so much has been said about the "Standards" of the Church, so many accusations have been made of departure from the "Standards" and so many flat denials of this have been reiterated, that it has come now to be common to treat the confession of faith as an authoritative standard from which if men depart in any particular they are regarded as heretics.

That they give to the confession of faith all the authority which papists attach to decisions of councils and the pope, is evident from the fact that in all the trials that have been had for heresy, the accused is arraigned for dissenting from the "Standards" of the Church and from the holy scriptures. But in no instance that has come to my knowledge, have they allowed the accused to defend himself by an appeal to the scriptures which would set aside the confession of faith. For it is assumed, as far as I know, in all cases, that the confession of faith has settled the meaning of the scriptures. And it is considered as entirely inadmissible to attempt to set aside the confession of faith by an appeal to the Bible. Indeed to such lengths has the Presbyterian church proceeded, to say nothing of other churches, that on trials for heresy, it is assumed both by the accused and the accuser, that the ultimate appeal is to the confession of faith, and consequently the accused feels himself obliged to show that his sentiments are not inconsistent with the confession of faith. Let the trials of Mr. Barnes and Mr. Beecher be looked at as illustrations of this fact. Were they allowed or did they even attempt to justify their sentiments by an appeal to the Bible, or did they defend themselves by attempting to show that what they held was consistent with the "standards?" Were they allowed to say that, whatever the confession of faith might say, such and such was the doctrine of the Bible? By no means.

The fact is that it is high time for the Church to open her eyes upon the appalling fact that the protestant denominations are assuming the truth of the fundamental error of papacy, are talking about their "Standards" and are using their spiritual guillotine wherever and whenever there is a departure from their "standards."

The next step will be to substitute their "convenient manuals of doctrine" and their human standards in the place of the Bible in such a sense as that the laity may as well be deprived of the Bible.

Not long since I received an invitation from the session of a Presbyterian church to come and preach to them upon the condition that I would preach nothing inconsistent with the Bible as interpreted by the confession of faith. I of course treated such an invitation in the manner in which I supposed I was bound to treat it. I felt shocked that matters had come to such a state in the Presbyterian church that they dared to demand of a minister that he should interpret the Bible by their confession of faith. What is this but exalting the confession of faith into the very place of the Pope?

Now beloved, if you intend to preserve the idea and practice of genuine religion, be careful that you do not either in theory or practice adopt the great error of papacy and assume that some human standard is to be regarded as an authoritative exposition of the word of God. Read your Bible. Let the opinions of good men, whether expressed in catechisms, confessions of faith, or in any other way, orally or in writing, have with you what weight they really deserve, but call no man master in your views of theology, and let

inspiration alone be authoritative with you in matters of faith and practice.

13. Aim at nothing short of universal consecration to God. By universal consecration, I intend the devotion of your whole being and of all over which you have control to the service and glory of God. And remember that nothing short of entire consecration is true religion--that if you hold back any thing from God, you are and must be, for the time being, in a state of rebellion against Him.

14. If you would attain the true idea and practice of religion make every thing give place to communion with God. So arrange all your business affairs, as to have ample time for much secret prayer and communion with God. You will never retain the spirit of true religion unless you make as real and as sacred a calculation, in all your movements, to have time for reading your Bible, secret prayer, and communion with God, as you do for taking your daily food. Men do not enter into such business transactions as to have no time to eat. They know very well that they cannot live without eating. Therefore whatever business they engage in, whatever course of life they devote themselves to, they always make calculation to take sufficient time for their meals. Now it should be universally understood that spiritual life can no more continue without regular and frequent seasons of prayer and communion with God, than natural life can continue without daily food.

15. Beware of conferring with flesh and blood. By this I mean, take heed that you do not give way to a spirit of self indulgence in any form; and remember that the moment the indulgence of any appetite or passion, the love of ease, reputation, or any form of self indulgence whatever comes to be consulted by you and suffered to have a controlling influence, you have already let slip, if not the true idea, yet the practice of true religion.

16. Beware of the influence of the customs of society and of your own habits. Examine narrowly all your own voluntary habits of eating, drinking, exercise, rest, conversation, the manner in which you spend your time, hours of rising and retiring, intercourse with friends, and in short the whole round of your habits, private, domestic, public, and see that every thing is just right.

17. Beware of the influence of public sentiment. With many, public sentiment is the rule rather than the law of good. Their inquiry seems to be not what will please God but what will please men. This is as far as possible from true religion.

18. Let the Bible be your companion and the man of your counsel. Make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the mind of the Spirit so far as possible in every passage.

19. Seek the most spiritual instruction within your reach. If you live in the neighborhood of different preachers, hear those who are the most spiritual, and decidedly the most evangelical. Let your reading be of a very select character. Be sure that you do not devour and swallow down the mass of the periodical literature of the day. It is as a general thing so sectarian, that it will poison you to death. Select the most spiritual memoirs, and writings of all kinds within your reach. Acquaint yourselves, as far as possible, with books on natural science. Examine works on anatomy, physiology, natural, mental, and moral philosophy, and such books as will make you thoroughly acquainted with the structure and laws of the universe; for all these things declare the wonderful works of God.

20. Do not shrink from reproach for Christ, and for truth's sake. A great many professors of religion seem afraid even to form an opinion, and much more, publicly to avow it, on any unpopular question. This shows that they have a supreme regard to their own reputation, that they love the praise of men more than the

praise of God. It is a demonstration that they have no true religion.

21. Above all, learn to live by faith upon the Son of God. You will never practice any of the things I have recommended, only as you live by faith. And do not make a mistake and think you live by faith, when you do not know what faith is. To live by faith is not merely to hold the opinion that you are to be pardoned and saved through faith in Christ, but it is to repose continual and implicit confidence in Him, and to really expect him to give you continual grace and help in every time of need, and enable you to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless. It must be a matter of experience with you and not of opinion and profession merely. You must know what it is to be united to Him as the branch is united to the vine, and to receive constant nourishment and spiritual life from Him, as the branch does from the vine. And when you are exhorted to do any thing else, remember that you will not do it aright, only as Christ strengthens you, which strength you are to receive by faith.

22. Learn to walk in the Spirit. If you read the Epistles, you will find much said of walking in the Spirit. You must know what this is by your own experience, or you will not retain the true idea or practice of true religion.

23. Beware of declining on the one hand, into antinomianism, and doing nothing for the conversion of sinners, and on the other, of running into legality, and bustling about with a legal zeal, devoid of the peace and rest of the gospel. Keep at an equal remove from a sickly quietism, on the one hand, and of a bigoted pharisaism on the other.

24. Aim to be all, as a Christian, that you can be, to exert the highest and best influence upon all around you, and upon the world, that is possible. Keep the thought before you, that to be a Christian at all, your aim, end, or supreme intention must be, to devote your whole being, all that you have and are, to the glory of God and the good of the universe. By this I do not mean that you must intend to be holy, for this in reality is nonsense. You must be benevolent, instead of intending to be benevolent. You must intend good, and aim at doing good. This is holiness; and always remember that it is one thing to be holy or benevolent, and quite another to intend to be so. Almost every sinner expects and intends to be holy at some time. It will not do for you to aim to be benevolent, but you must continue to be so.

25. Remember that you are a witness for God, that you are a living epistle known and read of all men, that unless your life and lips bear testimony in accordance with the grace of God, you are a false witness--a perjured wretch.

REMARKS.

1. True religion, in the lowest degree, implies living up to the best light you have. I say this is not to be looked upon as some high and rare attainment in religion, but is in fact essential to the lowest degree of true religion. He that does not habitually live up to the best light he enjoys, lives habitually in sin, and cannot be a Christian. By living up to the best light you have, is intended, that you do every thing which you acknowledge to be duty, and act up to the standard of right which you acknowledge to be your rule of duty. If you allow yourself in any omission or practice which you acknowledge to be wrong, (I mean where this is habitual with you in opposition to occasional,) you are not, and cannot be a Christian, as the Bible is true.

[2.] 3. True religion of course hails every branch of reform that promises glory to God, and good to men.

3. The radical principle of all false religion, whatever be its name, is selfishness. No matter whether it be Judaism, Christianity, Mahommedanism, or by whatever name you call it, the radical principle, that which constitutes the end and aim of every false religionist, is some form of selfishness.

4. You see why it is that study, business, &c., are often a snare to the soul. It is not because persons do too much business for God, but because they do business and study for themselves.

5. The state of the world and of the Church is such, and the general strain of preaching such, that even true converts are very apt soon to let slip the true idea, and consequently to fall from the practice of true religion. They see so little of real benevolence, they hear so little about it, they witness such universal selfishness, that they soon get confused, backslidden, and fall into the snare of the devil. How striking and appropriate, then, is the admonition of the Apostle in the text, 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip.'

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