

Richard Baxter--Christian Hypocrisy--the Business of This Life

by John Newton

John Newton reflects on Richard Baxter's teachings about authentic Christian living and the dangers of hypocrisy.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Acts 20:35, Romans 12:2, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 3:17, 1 Peter 2:21

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Newton reflects on a sermon by Mr. Baxter, acknowledging his greatness despite theological disagreements. He emphasizes the need for Christians to shine their light in the world for God's glory and the benefit of others. Newton humbly admits to struggling with selfishness and a lack of spiritual generosity, recognizing the gap between his preaching and personal shortcomings. He describes the ideal Christian as one who mirrors Christ in spirit and action, being zealous for God's glory, humble, patient, meek, and cheerful in all circumstances.

Transcript

January 26, 1775.

Dear Sir,

I lately read a sermon of Mr. Baxter's (in the fifth volume of the Morning Exercises) on Matt. v. 16. My mind is somewhat impressed with the subject, and with his manner of treating it. Some of Mr. Baxter's sentiments in divinity are rather cloudy; and he sometimes, upon that account, met with but poor quarter from the staunch Calvinists of his day. But, by what I have read of him, where he is quiet, and not ruffled by controversy, he appears to me, notwithstanding some mistakes, to have been one of the greatest men of his age, and, perhaps, in fervour, spirituality, and success, more than equal, both as a minister and a Christian, to some twenty taken together, of those who affect to undervalue him in this present day. There is a spirit in some passages of his Saint's Rest, his Dying Thoughts, and others of his practical treatises, compared with which, many modern compositions, though well written and well meant, appear to me to a great disadvantage. But I was speaking of his sermon. He points out the way at which we should aim to let our light shine in the world, for the glory of God, and the conviction and edification of men. I have mentioned where it is to be found, that, if you have the Morning Exercises, or they should come in your way, you may look at it. I think you would like it. The perusal suggested to me some instruction, and much

reproof.

Alas! my friend, are we not too often chargeable with a sad, shameful selfishness and narrowness of spirit, far, very far different from that activity, enlargement, and generosity of soul, which such a Gospel as we have received might be expected to produce? For myself, I must plead guilty. It seems as if my heart was always awake, and keenly sensible to my own concernments, while those of my Lord and Master affect me much less forcibly, at least, only by intervals. Were a stranger to judge of me by what I sometimes say in the pulpit, he might think that, like the angels, I had but two things in view, to do the will of God, and to behold His face. But, alas! would he not be almost as much mistaken, as if, seeing Mr. G in the character of a tragedy-hero, he should suppose him to be the very person whom he only represents? I hope Satan will never be able to persuade me that I am a mere hypocrite and stage-player; but sure I am that there is so much hypocrisy in me, so many littlenesses and self-seekings insinuating into my plan of conduct, that I have humbling cause to account myself unworthy and unprofitable, and to say, "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord."

I have some tolerable idea of what a Christian ought to be, and it is, I hope, what I desire to be. A Christian should be conformable to Christ in his spirit and in his practice; that is, he should be spiritually minded, dead to the world, filled with zeal for the glory of God, the spread of the Gospel, and the good of souls. He should be humble, patient, meek, cheerful, thankful under all events and changes. He should account it the business and honour of his life to imitate Him who pleased not Himself, Who went about doing good, and has expressed to us the very feelings of His heart, in that divine aphorism, which surpasses all the fine admired sayings of the philosophers, as much as the sun outshines a candle, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The whole deportment of a Christian should show, that the knowledge of Jesus, which he has received from the Gospel, affords him all he could expect from it: a balm for every grief, an amend for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for everything which he is called to do or suffer, and a principle sufficient to constitute the actions of every day, even in common life, acts of religion. He should (as the children of this world are wise to do in their generation) make every occurrence through which he passes, subservient and subordinate to his main design. Gold is the worldly man's god, and his worship and service are uniform and consistent, not by fits and starts, but from morning to night; from the beginning to the end of the year, he is the same man. He will not slip an opportunity of adding to his purse to-day, because he may have another to-morrow, but he heartily and eagerly embraces both; and, so far as he carries his point, though his perseverance may expose him to the ridicule or reproach of his neighbours, he thinks himself well paid, and says, *Populus me sibilat; at mihi plaudo Ipse domi, simul ac nummos contemplor area.*

I am, &c.

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