

The Religion of the Heart

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and the need for true faith to be evident in the life of a Christian.

Scripture: Matthew 7:21, Matthew 13:20, John 15:18, Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 13:1, Galatians 5:6, James 2:17, 1 Peter 4:14, Revelation 2:4

Topics: "True Faith", "Heart Transformation"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the importance of true faith and genuine love in the religion of the heart, emphasizing the need for humility, sincerity, and a deep connection with Christ. He warns against mere outward religious practices without a transformed heart, highlighting the necessity of faith working by love to produce righteous fruits. Reade urges believers to seek divine illumination, a relish for spiritual things, and a genuine desire to glorify God in all actions, rooted in faith and love for Christ.

Transcript

52. THE RELIGION OF THE HEART

"For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Romans 14:17

If we are faithful, we shall be tried. Every true Christian must carry his cross; he must endure tribulation for Christ's sake. Let all them who would follow the Savior, "sit down, and count the cost." We must prepare for the conflict with Satan and the world. Our blessed Lord has told us what we must expect if we are his faithful followers; "When the world hates you, remember it hated me before it hated you. The world would love you if you belonged to it, but you don't. I chose you to come out of the world, and so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? 'A servant is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you! The people of the world will hate you because you belong to me, for they don't know God who sent me."

Shall we, then, shrink from the cross? Shall we be ashamed to confess Christ crucified? Alas! We would both shrink and be ashamed, if left to ourselves. Nothing but the Spirit of Christ can make us dauntless in our Master's cause. How encouraging are the words of Peter- "Be happy if you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God will come upon you." "So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail

you."

Faith without root will wither away. "The rocky soil represents those who hear the message with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. They believe for a while, but they wilt when the hot winds of testing blow." Mere animal excitement cannot withstand the storm and tempest. It has been quaintly remarked that many will follow religion while she walks in silken slippers; who will forsake her, when she is compelled to walk in iron shoes. When the venerable Cranmer was spreading his hospitable table at Lambeth Palace, he was surrounded by admiring guests; but when enclosed between the dreary walls of a Papal dungeon, few cared to visit him there. Thus it was with Cranmer's Lord and ours. In the hour of his extremity, the disciples forsook him, and fled!

Head knowledge, and zeal for ceremonies, can survive in the sunshine; but they cannot endure the faggot or the rack. No, they shrink beneath the lash of ridicule, and the pointed finger of scorn. Grace alone can render us triumphant over every enemy, and strengthen us in the hour of death and danger. Let us, then, seek for the religion of the heart; that internal principle which will raise us above the agitations of the world, and prepare us for the enjoyment of Christ in glory. "Be faithful unto death," said the glorified Redeemer, "and I will give you a crown of life."

The visible Church abounds with thousands of religious professors, but with comparatively few possessors of real godliness. It is much easier to observe an outward form than to crucify a beloved lust. The Church of Rome, though loaded with ceremonials, is proverbially corrupt. God requires truth in the inward parts. He looks at the heart, and will be worshiped in spirit and in truth. No ordinance can, of itself, confer a benefit apart from the grace of God, and the state of heart of the worshiper. To suppose otherwise, is to return from Protestantism to Popery. The graces of repentance and faith are declared in Scripture to be essential to the right and saving reception of the Gospel. The impenitent and unbelieving cannot partake of the salvation which God has provided. Would it not, therefore, be dangerous to urge men to approach the Lord's Table, without a due preparation of heart; or, to lead them to suppose that they are privileged to come, because they were regenerated in baptism, and consequently are to be regarded as saints, though they give not the least evidence of spiritual regeneration?

True religion is seated in the heart. A man may have very clear notions of the doctrines of grace, but if the grace of those doctrines does not influence his heart, and shine forth in a holy life, all his knowledge will profit him nothing. A person may speak well and fluently upon religion, and yet be quite dead to the power of that Gospel, on which he speaks so well. Something more is requisite to form the true Christian than head-knowledge and religious conversation. And yet, how many, alas! content themselves with these attainments, and imagine themselves to be saved, when in God's estimation they are no better than sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal. Being vainly puffed up, they assume the character of teachers, before they know themselves, or the very first elements of Christianity, even their own ignorance, helplessness, and corruption.

Blessed Savior, deliver me, I humbly beseech you, from spiritual pride and self-confidence. Lead me by the footsteps of your chosen flock, which has ever followed You the Chief Shepherd, through the valley of humiliation, where alone are to be found the still waters of comfort, and the rich pastures of your promised grace.

It is plainly revealed in Scripture, that "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God." Two things are required, which God alone, by his Holy Spirit, can bestow, and which, through the merits of

Christ, he is willing to impart to all who sincerely seek for them, through faith in his beloved Son.

The first is- The divine illumination of the understanding.

The second is- A relish for, and delight in, spiritual things.

Without the first, an awful darkness respecting the things of God, would envelope the mind. And, without the second, no pleasure could be found in them, even if the eyes of the understanding were enlightened to perceive their value. The visible Church contains within itself, many painful instances of those, to whom it may be said; "Well then, if you teach others, why don't you teach yourself?" Others there are who resemble the stationary guide-post. They only point out the road. How blessed are they who with Paul can say; "Be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." And with Moses, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you; come you with us, and we will do you good."

Through a spiritual discernment we perceive the excellencies of the gospel; and by a spiritual taste we enjoy them. Faith is the appropriating grace, that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; that faith which is ever looking unto Jesus; that faith which receives him as revealed in the gospel; that faith which lives upon him, and is continually tasting that the Lord is gracious. The baptized worldling, the orthodox formalist, knows nothing of this saving grace. It is wrought in the heart, solely through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord increase my faith. If I have it not, delay not in mercy to bestow it, before the night of death overtakes me. If I have in any measure received the precious gift, make it more evident to myself and others by its holy fruits. Pardon my importunity, for you have said; "Ask, and it shall be given to you." "Men ought always to pray and not to faint."

Two things I would daily seek- to love Christ above every other object; and, to obey his will above every other law. Love and obedience form the brightest evidence of discipleship. Without these fruits of righteousness, faith is dead; a mere notion of the head; the mere utterance of the tongue. Many who now shine in their circle of religious friends, will, at last, be found no better than potsherds of earth covered with silver dross.

Oh! that I may seek after the religion of the heart. Lord make me humble and sincere. Grant to me the faith of your elect. Give me that spiritual perception, and that spiritual relish of heavenly truths, which is the blessed portion of your children here, and the foretaste of their future glory.

How solemn are these words of the blessed Jesus "Some who are despised now will be greatly honored then; and some who are greatly honored now will be despised then." Our Lord also declares, that "that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God." How should professors of the gospel look well to themselves.

These declarations, O my soul, speak forcibly to you. I profess to be a Christian, attend the ordinances of the Gospel, associate with pious people, have family worship, abstain from places of worldly amusement; so far is well. But all this may be done, while the heart remains unchanged. The Pharisees went farther than this, in their austerities; but He, who knew the heart, said to them, "I know you, that you have not the love of God in you." And to his listening disciples; "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

A person, living in a round of outward duties, may be esteemed first by many who look only at the outward appearance, while he is viewed as last by the Searcher of hearts. A talking, forward professor, may attract attention, and gain admirers; but it is the humble, meek, self-denying believer, who studiously avoids all public notice, while he is laboring with all his might to advance the interests of the Gospel, that will be owned by Jesus in that great day, when true faith will be made manifest by its genuine fruits. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

HUMILITY is the peculiar characteristic of the people of God. The converted sinner is so deeply humbled on account of his former transgressions, that he is completely stripped of all self-righteousness and self-dependence; and so charmed with the love and grace of the Redeemer, that he is willing to spend and be spent in his service. He acknowledges himself, and feels himself to be the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints. Hence he gives God all the glory for his salvation; trusts in nothing but the finished and complete righteousness of Jehovah Jesus; and declares with the fullest conviction of his own insufficiency and vileness, and of that Savior's unspeakably glorious merits and power, "by the grace of God I am what I am."

He desires to be nothing in his own esteem, and the esteem of others, that Christ may be glorified. All his aims are directed to promote the exaltation of the Savior, and to debase the idol 'self', more and more. He daily mourns over those remainders of corruption in his heart, which are continually lusting against the Spirit; and rejoices in Christ Jesus, as his Atonement, Righteousness, and Hope of glory.

Hence, while this view of himself keeps him humble, the view of the Savior animates him to the conflict, and makes him finally more than conqueror over all his spiritual enemies. Feeling his own helplessness, he leans on the strength of Jesus; and knowing his own blindness, he prays without ceasing, for the illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit. He believes, and is not confounded. The Spirit of Christ dwells in his heart, witnessing with his Spirit that he is a child of God, and filling him with heavenly affections, holy desires, and spiritual joy. He thus bears the image of Christ, and evidences his election of God. His salvation being all of grace, he, with his whole soul, gives God the glory.

Such is the true believer, who is born from above; born of the Spirit. In this world he is often esteemed last; is branded by the formalist, as an enthusiast; and by the worldly, as a madman. But he shall be first in that day, when Christ shall make up his jewels, when he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all those who believe.

True religion will always influence the whole inner man. All the powers and faculties of the soul are brought under its sway. Forms and ceremonies are unavailing without this principle of grace, for "circumcision avails nothing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love." "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

In the present day much is being done, and still more devised, for the spiritual good of mankind. Christians are invited, on Gospel principles, to aid in these labors of love. But while the principles may be warmly enforced, yet the Gospel motive in the heart can only be imparted from above. The love of Christ to us should indeed constrain us to every act of self-denying obedience; yet, how few comparatively feel that love to the Savior which urges onward in the career of usefulness.

It is painful to think how much exertion may be made, and how much money expended, without one single motive which can render the service and sacrifice well-pleasing unto God. If called to labor in the field of benevolence, how needful it is to watch over the heart, to examine the principles, to scrutinize the motives of our actions. There is so much selfishness in our fallen nature, such a desire of pre-eminence, such a secret delight in human applause, such a high opinion of one's own powers, talents, however weak and inefficient, that there is daily need for that blessed grace which alone can make us humble, and keep us so.

Lord, root out of my heart that deadly weed of pride, which is so hateful to you, and so destructive to my soul. Give me, blessed Savior, that humble, lowly mind which dwelt in you. O let me tread in your steps. Clothe me with humility.

It is a serious truth, that a person may spend his whole life in feeding others, while he starves himself. The soul cannot thrive without spiritual meditation, retirement, secret prayer, and a devout study of the Holy Scriptures. The neglect of these things is the cause why so many cry out; "My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me." "They made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

God has closely connected the means with the end, as he has also the precept with the promise; but still a certain state of heart is needed, to attain the blessing. The understanding may be well furnished with Gospel truth, and yet the heart remain destitute of Gospel grace. We ought, and it is our privilege, and should be our desire, to lay out our time and talents, however small, for Christ and the good of souls; but in doing this, we must look well to the spring, the motive, the principle of action. This cannot be too deeply or too frequently impressed upon the mind. All must flow from faith in the Savior. All must be the genuine expression of ardent love to him. All must be directed simply to his glory. Self must be annihilated. Pride must be crucified. The praise of men must be disregarded; and Christ, and Christ alone must be seated on the throne of the affections. Then will a cup of cold water, given in his name be accepted. Then will the widow's mite be esteemed precious. Then will the smallest effort done in faith to glorify Christ among men, be well-pleasing unto God.

Lord! give me simplicity and sincerity, humility and love. Let all my doings be the fruit of faith. O let me think, and speak, and act, and live for you. Two things I would wish to attain- to say little, and do much. Lord, set a watch before the door of my mouth. Give me wisdom to know when to speak, and when to be silent. Let my speech be always with grace. Let me ever be willing to help forward the cause of truth in the earth, yet always desirous to take the lowest place among the laborers in your vineyard.

However blind the world may be to its own faults, it is quick sighted enough in discovering the failings of religious professors. The men of the world readily perceive their inconsistencies, and charge them upon the religion which they profess. Thus a vainglorious professor of godliness often spoils much good, and produces much evil. Christian prudence is therefore necessary, and, when springing from a knowledge of the human heart, from self-distrust, from genuine humility, from a real desire to advance the cause of God in simple dependence on divine aid, it is the means of effecting great things. In such a world as this, how greatly do we need the wisdom of the serpent combined with the harmlessness of the dove. When the blessed Gospel renews and governs the heart, through the Almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, then every excellence appears in its proper place and due proportion. The symmetry and beauty of the structure manifest a divine architect, whose prerogative alone it is to "make all things new."

The religion of the heart is simply Faith Working by Love. Jesus is the object of faith. Faith looks to him as the all-atoning sacrifice for sin. It comes to him as the helper and hope of the soul. It receives him as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his Church, the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Faith feeds upon him, as the bread of life; walks in his light, who is the light of the world; and, uniting the soul to him, as the branch is to the vine, it draws from him that grace and strength which causes the fruits righteousness to appear and abound.

Oh! what a precious gift is faith, wrought in the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. "Without faith it is impossible to please God; for he who comes unto God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." By faith, we stand in the liberty with which Christ has made us free. By faith, we walk steadily and perseveringly in the narrow way of holy obedience. By faith, we overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. By faith, we substantiate things hoped for, and realize things not seen.

Is faith thus precious? Then surely it must be the solicitude of all to obtain it. Alas! no. Thousands of Christians who profess to believe, have it not. Where true faith dwells, its effects become visible. "Faith without works is dead." Does faith work by love to Christ to his people, his word, his ministers, his cause, his Sabbaths? Then, where true faith is, there love will be in active operation. Do we perceive this energy of love in all who call themselves Christians? Ah! no! Few, comparatively few, show their faith by an ardent, self-denying, and constant love. Faith purifies the heart. Is sin hated by all Christian professors? Is holiness the element in which they live? Alas! the reverse is too often the case.

Faith overcomes the world. Do all who profess to follow the meek and lowly Savior, renounce those pomps and vanities from which he came to deliver them? How many thousands practically deny the doctrine of their baptismal regeneration, by living in direct opposition to the vows and promises made in their names at their baptism! Are all baptized people bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit? Facts prove that they do not. The world maintains an awful power in the visible Church. It forms the crying sin of the age. That love of money, that thirst for power, that fondness for vain show, that quest of pleasure which pervades all grades of society, evidences our fallen state as a professing Christian people. We forget the solemn warning; "Repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, unless you repent."

Lord, give me that deep conviction of sin which David felt, when he said unto Nathan; "I have sinned;" that heartfelt repentance which Job experienced, when he declared; "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes;" that brokenness of heart which Peter manifested, when "he went out and wept bitterly," that faith which upheld the blessed Paul, when he said; "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

O! Almighty Savior! fill me with faith, hope, and love; until faith is lost in vision, hope in enjoyment, and love is forever perfected in the region of peace and joy, through your own everlasting grace.

Father of Mercies, You alone I bless,

Oh Source divine of comfort and of peace;

When sorrow o'er my heart its mantle throws,

And all my days are marked by tears and woes;

Your gracious hand extends the kind relief,

Your smile paternal calms the poignant grief.
Yes! dearest Lord, I know your powerful word
In wildest storms can tranquil peace afford;
When death expands its cold and darksome shade,
And dire forebodings make the soul dismayed,
Your voice, blessed Savior, can dispel the gloom,
And light with joy my passage to the tomb.
How vain, how fleeting is the life of man!
How soon we traverse over its narrow span!
Without You, Lord, ah! what has life to boast,
A sinking vessel near a dangerous coast.
Death follows soon. Yet, through its darkened veil,
The dying saint can beams of glory hail!
As weary pilgrims wait their last remove,
My longing soul desires the joys above;
Eternal day will soon appear in view,
Then heaven possessed will prove the promise true.
A stranger here, I would abide a while,
Then hasten homeward to my Savior's smile.

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