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How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that
publisheth peace.—ISA. LII. 7.

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SERMON CXXVI.

BY ALBERT BARNES.

REASONS WHY THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER SHOULD BE DEVELOPED.

MATT. v. 14, 15, 16.—*Ye are the light of the world, &c.*

In my former discourse I endeavored to prove that the Christian character will be developed in all cases where there is piety in the heart; that it is not merely a matter of obligation that the piety of Christians should be manifest, but it is a matter of sober truth that where it exists it will be manifest; and that the world is admirably adapted to bring out the character of man; to show what the sinner is, what the hypocrite is, and what the Christian is, and where he may be found. In the prosecution of the same subject I wish now to furnish an answer to one single question, *Why should the Christian character be made manifest, or be developed?*

Our Savior has given us the answer in the text. It is for two objects: two objects which blend themselves together, and result in the same thing,—*first*, that our good works may be seen; and *second*, that being seen, they may lead others to embrace the same religion, and glorify God by a holy life.

I. My first argument is, that *religion is of no value unless it is brought out, and made manifest to the world.* What is the use of light if it be hid under a bushel? What the value of parental affection unless it is brought out, so as to benefit your children? What the use of friendship, if your friend can never calculate on your aid in times of necessity? What would be the value of patriotism, if your country could not depend on you in times of danger? What is the value of the skill of a physician, unless the sick can calculate on his willingness to impart aid? What is the value of rich golden ore unless it be recovered from the earth, and turned to a circulating medium, and be made the means of comfort or of benevolence?

Just so it is with religion. What is the value of a *profession* of religion, where there is no living, humble, devoted piety? Of just as much value as would be the expression of parental tenderness while the parent would see his child languish with disease, and not seek relief; or sick or in prison, and not come to him: or as would be the piteous moanings of friendship, when your professed friend would see you pine in want, or incarcerated for a debt which he could easily discharge, and not lift a finger to aid you; or as would have been the professions of Washington about liberty and love of country if he had sought repose in the shades of Mount Vernon, or of Robert Morris had he hoarded his gold, and seen an army famished and naked, bleed and die without aid. What is the common value of a profession of religion where there is manifestly nothing more? What but to bring a reproach on the cause which can never be wiped away; to put an argument into the mouth of scoffers, which we can never meet; to parry all the appeals which we make to the consciences of sinners, and to hang heavy weights on the chariot-wheels of the great Redeemer?

That there will be *concealment* of principles in heaven—any diffident, and retiring piety where man can take refuge for want of decision, in the plea of unostentatiousness,—and where the assumption of modesty may be pleaded in

bar of the command to be seen and known as the friend of God, no man can pretend. Christ will cease, says Paul, to be admired *in all them that believe*; and they that be wise, says Daniel, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever; and then, says the Savior, shall the righteous *shine forth* as the sun in the kingdom of my Father.

II. The Christian should manifest his character, because *he lives for nothing else*. When a man is converted to God, he is prepared that moment for heaven;—that is, he has passed through the great revolution of moral feeling which will henceforward distinguish him from the wicked; and if he then dies, God will receive him to rest. It becomes then a most interesting question, *why* does God continue his stay on the earth? Why does he ordain that he shall still be doomed to live in a world of sin—to encounter contempt, and persecution, and poverty, and temptation, and lingering disease? Were an angel of bliss arrested in heaven, and commanded to descend to our scenes of calamity and want and wo—to be the tenant of a human body, and the object of the ribaldry and scorn of the world, it would be a case for which he would expect that some reason could be rendered. Now, whatever *might* be the conjectures of such a pure spirit in regard to the design for which he should live on the earth, they would *not* be the following. He would *not* conclude, 1st. That his business here was to become rich, and to lay his riches by in some useless deposit. God values gold too little to redeem a man, or to employ an angel, for the sole purpose of accumulating it. The shedding of the Savior's blood and the influences of the Holy Spirit had some other design than to brighten the faculties of man for successful purposes of gain. He who could make the mines of Potosi, or the gold of Ophir, or the diamonds of Goleonda as easily as he could the coarse granite, needs no such waste of means to bring accumulated property into the universe. Nor, 2d. would it be, that he might sit down in ease, and recline on a bed of down, for the sole purpose of enjoyment. This is manifestly *not* the world for such repose; nor was it a part of the promises, that this should be the allotment of the Christian.

Enough of our race are influenced solely by a regard to wealth, and pleasure, and fame. Enough under the influence of native feeling, tread the paths of ambition, and cross oceans and hills in pursuit of gold. Enough crowd the places of amusement; lie down in the lap of luxurious enjoyment, and walk in the ways of pride and vanity. To this number of melancholy magnitude, it is *not* well that there should be added the name of the Christian. In this whole revolted world, it is well to believe that there are *some* who are influenced by other motives, and live for other ends.

But if the Christian lives for none of these things, what is the object for which he is continued on earth? I answer, that it is, first, that his character may be developed—that the principles of the man may be brought out—that it may be seen and known what he is. It is to show the signal triumphs of the grace of God, in overcoming the deep-laid native propensities of the man; in subduing wild and evil passions amid objects fitted to excite; in breaking his hold on the world, when ten thousand allurements are around; and in unclenching the hand of avarice; smoothing the brow of care; stilling the whisperings of envy; opening the heart of selfishness; and chaining down a wayward imagination to a sober, humble view of the realities of this, and the world to come. This is manifestly the design of religion as presented in the New Testament. And where this does *not* exist, we say that there religion has no power—that it makes no distinction between its professed friends, and other men. The second design of our continuance here is, that the evidence of our religion may so shine

as that others may be benefited by our living. For no man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself. That this is the design of the Christian's living is clear from the example of Christ and the apostles. They believed that the Christian life *might* be turned to great practical account. They gave themselves to the great enterprise of saving a dying world; and the world felt that they *did live*, and Satan's empire through all its hosts gave signs of wo that all was lost. The Christian now lives for this. The salvation of men excites a deep interest in his bosom. It is an object for which he will pray, and toil, and deny himself. I say not that it is an object for which he *ought* to feel, but it is one which he *does* feel. It is a part of the man—the thing by which he is known—which constitutes his *individuality*—and by which he will be estimated at the judgment-seat of God.

III. The Christian character should be developed, because *there is no reason for its concealment*. The Christian, so far as he is a Christian, has nothing which he desires to hide from the notice of any being, created or uncreated. This is clear from the New Testament. He that is ashamed of me and of my words before men, said the Son of God, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed before his Father and the holy angels. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, cannot be my disciple. The life of Christ shows also that this was the grand principle on which *he* acted. He affected no disguise. He concealed no sentiments. His views of sinners he advanced with the utmost fearlessness. His judgment respecting hypocrites he proclaimed in their presence, at the hazard of his life. His doctrines he advanced alike amid the rich and the poor, at Jerusalem, and on the hills of Galilee. He felt deeply at the condition of dying sinners, and the impending calamities of Jerusalem; and the dignified and exalted Son of God was not ashamed to be seen weeping over the doom of the devoted city. How many Christians on the earth are there now who would feel themselves degraded to be seen weeping at the prospect of the impending damnation of sinners? How much persecution would *he* have saved by a prudent reserve, by concealing his tears, by a time-serving policy, by a studied *trimming* between the service of God and the world. How peaceful might have been his life in the hills of Galilee, if he had advanced no sentiments but such as fell in with the previous views of the people!—So judged also the apostle Paul. He felt for the condition of a dying world, and he was not ashamed to have his feelings known. He felt for the condition of men deceived in the church, and he was not ashamed to say, "I tell you *even weeping* that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction." Nor was he held back by any views of prudence and ease, from letting it be felt to the ends of the world that he believed men to be in danger, and was resolved that they should *know* his feelings at any expense of time, or toil, or pain, or blood.

Now religion affects no concealment. It has nothing to disguise. The sun, the moon, the stars, the heavens have nothing to conceal—nor has the Christian. There is not a sentiment in the Bible, nor a duty, which he wishes or is willing to conceal. There is not a doctrine, however repulsive, that he does not wish should be known, and which he is not willing by any feasible or proper way to make known. The whole operations of religion are above-board. We have no mysteries—and religion keeps back nothing from the Christian. It does not permit us to doubt that there is a hell, and that the wicked are descending there—and the Christian is willing that you should know that he thinks so. Christianity frowns on your foolish pleasures, your gayety, and fashions, and frivolity; your theatres, and places of revelry, and the Christian is not ashamed that you should know *he thinks so*. Christianity regards every

man as by nature the enemy of God, needing renovation, and in danger of eternal wo, and the Christian hides not this opinion. Christianity seeks the destruction of your schemes of wickedness; the humbling of the heart of pride; the annihilation of your plans of grandeur and ambition. It seeks an entire change in the feelings, thoughts, purposes, deeds, and destiny of the wicked, and is willing that you should know that this is its aim.

Now are these things which we are to conceal? Are we to shut the great truths of our redemption from the view? Or, what is the same thing, are we to live *as though* these were not true—are we to conceal in our bosoms that living and active principle which separates us from others, and leave the impression on them that we esteem them safe, and that we have no belief of their danger? Are we to make all the arrangements of our livings—order all the circumstances of our families—array our persons with as splendid attire, and be as gay, and giddy and thoughtless as though we were just like others—living for the same ends, and putting forth no effort for their salvation? Who is it that practises concealment? The wretch who has some plan of evil. The man who wishes to insinuate himself into your favor to obtain by fraud your gold. The infidel, the drunkard, the gambler, who is aiming at your money or your principles. The seducer, who would undermine your virtue. He who would betray your confidence—who uses oily and smooth, and cunning flattery to ruin you—who overlooks your faults; commends your foibles; praises your beauty, your skill, or your learning; professes profound admiration of your accomplishments, to make you a prey to his selfish designs.—And shall the Christian be ranked with such men? Is *he* a man who believes a thing in his heart, and attempts to *pass off* a different opinion in his life? Is he a man whose characteristic it is that he wishes to convince you that he still loves the world—that he feels no interest in the salvation of man—who strives to imitate the gay, to associate with the great rather than the pious, to cultivate the society of the rich, rather than those who fear God? You have the hope of heaven. Is that a hope which it is your aim to conceal? You feel that you are a sinner. Are you ashamed that this feeling should be known? Are you unwilling that it should be known that you pray, or fear God; or can deny yourself for the cause of benevolence? Are you undistinguished from your fellow-men, except at the communion table? Then there centres all your religion. And under the plea that religion is modest and unobtrusive, that it seeks retirement, how many *appear* just like the men of the world—lay plans just like the men of the world—aspire to office just like the men of the world—live, feel, act, just like the men of the world—deny themselves as little, lay plans of gain as greedily, are as much moved at losses, and as little known in places of prayer, and in their closets, turn as coolly away from plans of benevolence, grasp their gold as tightly, and use their influence as reluctantly, as the men who profess to be influenced only by a regard to this world. When religion retires thus, the world may well ask, what is its value?—Nor can we find a ready answer.

IV. The Christian should manifest his religion for the sake of *the power of his example over other men.*

There is nothing in this world that has so much power over a man as the gospel; and there is nothing that will so affect the mind of a sinner—so try *him*, and bring *him out*, as a life of active and decided piety on the part of a Christian. But in order that this may be seen, it is proper to advert to a singular abuse of one of the loveliest traits of the Savior's life among his professed friends. The Savior was modest, was retiring, was unostentatious. He sought the shades of private life, and rebuked noise and display. He frowned on open and public proclamation of our piety, our prayers, and our alms. All this is

very true. But it is perfectly easy to see how a man who *does nothing*, and who *intends* to do nothing, may make a cloak of this for his indolence. The Savior's life was retiring—so is indolence. His maxims were unostentatious—so is inactivity. His prayers were unseen—so is the neglect of prayer. He gave his life in an unostentatious way to the service of mankind. So the man who does nothing, who lives like other men, who is undecided and unknown as a Christian—so does he sink out of view, and repose in obscurity. The Savior frowned on pride, and parade, and noise. So it is easy for any one to denounce ostentation—to regard deep feelings as parade, and expanded benevolence as ostentation and display. And yet it is not a strange thing if the whole character of the Savior should be mistaken. On pride he did frown, but not on *manifested* humility. On ostentation he did frown, but it was the ostentation of the Pharisee. On improper zeal in error and delusion he did frown, and so he did on those who were neither cold nor hot. On proclamation of our doings he did frown—and so he did on those who had nothing to proclaim, and who lived like other men. Now what is the thing that the Son of God meant to reach in all this? It was a false and hypocritical exhibition of what we do not possess. It was show of what was not deep-felt in the soul. It was that which the *hypocrite* always manifests—display of what he feels not—profession of that which is not believed: and this is the same as a profession of religion at the communion table, when there is none elsewhere; and public deference to its outward forms, when the whole life is like that of other men. But never—no, never, in his whole ministry, did he lisp a syllable against its being seen, and felt, and known, where we are to be found, and against the proper and public manifestation of a life of decided piety. His whole life was just such an exhibition. The zeal of thine house, saith he, hath eaten me up; and his professions at the bar of Pilate; his unshrinking fidelity even in view of death; and his last pangs on the cross, showed where he was to be found.

Here we may make another remark. It is that religion supposes something in *advance* of other men. The world has come up to a certain elevation, and says it will honor religion if it will remain stationary at this level. If it will improve few of its vices, and those of grosser form; if it will leave undisturbed its more refined pleasures; if it will not rebuke its gayety, and fashion, and pride; if it will be found at the same festive board, and suppress its peculiarities: if it will covenant that the peace of the sinner shall not be disturbed; and the great designs of God's benevolence be not pressed on the attention of men, it will speak smoothly of religion and its friends. Thus a covenant is easily made with death, and a league with hell. There is a truce in the warfare, and the world yields just as much as the church yields, and any decided movement in behalf of perishing sinners is regarded as a breach of compact, or an invasion of right. Religion, thus peaceful and still—thus undecided and unobtrusive, is the praise of every sinner's lips. It is eminently, in his view, the religion of peace, and it has reconciled the world unto itself. There is no emotion, no opposition, no conflict; there is no irritation, no movement, no feeling. The world is willing that the church should secure all the triumphs it can, for it disturbs no man's peace, disquiets no man's conscience, breaks in upon no man's vices or pleasures. It is willing even that men should become united to the church of God; for it implies no self-denial, no abandonment of pleasure, no *obligation* to do any thing to save man or to benefit the world. *There is peace.* But there is peace like this also elsewhere. There was peace, and unity, and concord, in the lonely valley which Ezekiel tread, which was full of bones, very many and very dry. There is peace like this in the hollow tombs, in the charnel-house of the dead—where no lip moves to reprove the living, no eye is fired with indignation at the sins of man, no one

of the still and solemn people there lifts a finger to warn the gay and the foolish that they are going to hell. There is a union there which nothing disturbs, and which is never broken, except when one and another is laid, solemn and still, and noiseless, in the vaults of the dead—as hypocrites still dead in sin become attached to a slumbering church.

Now it is not a religion or a peace like this of which I speak when I say, that Christianity has power over men, and that the Christian should let his light shine that he may do good. I speak of that only which is *in advance* of other men—which is open and decided. There is no development of Christianity when you go just as far as the *world will speak well of you, and then stop*. Wo, said the Savior to his disciples, “wo unto you when all men shall speak well of you, for so did they to the false prophets.” An ancient Grecian orator was accustomed to say, “what foolish thing have I uttered that the people applaud me?” A Christian may well begin to fear when all are loud in his praise. The Christian minister should seek his closet when his praise is on the lips of the gay, and foolish, and wicked, and when he has said nothing to disturb their peace. Our account is laid *in exciting feeling*, and better is *any* emotion than the still, prolonged slumbers of the dead; better any note than the everlasting and dreary silence of the tombs. So thought the Savior. He came for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against, that thereby the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed. And he finished *his* work. He was *in advance* of his age. He had new views, new plans, new projects, new endeavors. Never had Scribe, or Pharisee, or Priest, dreamed that the peace of Judea was to be disturbed by a religion so pure, so humble, so bold, so spiritual. Never had the great and lordly ruler supposed that one who was rich, yet for the sake of others could become poor, that he might make many rich. Never had it occurred to a Jewish teacher that any one could be bold enough to declare, or to risk his reputation on the declaration, that they who have riches should with difficulty enter into the kingdom of God; or to represent a rich man as calling in vain in hell for a drop of water from a poor beggar to cool his tongue. Never had they dreamed that there was to be a religion that was to move all the people—break in upon the dull monotony of the synagogue, or overthrow the tables of the money-changers in the temple—that was to produce *excitement*, and inquiry, and alarm—that was to lead thousands in a day to cry with deep solicitude, Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved? Yet he showed *what and where he was*. No one mistook him; nor was the proudest man or the richest man ever at a loss to see that Jesus Christ was actuated by some principle prodigiously *in advance* of other men. And his power was felt. His name was known. His words *stung* in the hearts of his hearers, and his preaching vibrated long in the ears of the goaded and irritated Pharisee.

So religion, if it be any thing, is always in advance of the world. It has a train of measures that are to be *felt*. It holds up a set of doctrines that are to tell on the soul. It has no concealment. It aims at the renovation of the entire world; and it seeks to apprise you that it is on this embassy, and that it has nothing *but this* to do in the world. But for its designs on your pride and plans, your hearts and lives, your follies and your wealth, it might to-day take its flight to its native heavens, and leave the world to perish *as it is*. But it seeks that its principles may be known. And it *supposes* that its most humbling doctrines, its most repulsive measures, its most stern features, should be held up by Christians themselves *in advance* of their fellow men. So Jesus stood before the Sanhedrim; so Paul stood before Felix; so Peter sought the imperial city; and so John, and James, and Matthew went among the nations of the earth, not modestly to *conceal*, but to *make known* the unsearchable riches of Christ. And so there is

no Christian—there *can be none*; it is one of the axioms, the elementary truths, the first principles of Christianity, that there can be none who will conceal his sentiments—that he that is ashamed of Christ and his words before men, of him will the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in the clouds, with the glory of his Father and the holy angels.

Now, when we ask what is the proper effect of a life of decided piety, or *why* the Savior supposed that letting our light shine would have such an effect on men, the answer is at hand. For, 1. It shows what men are. It shows to sinners that they *differ* from others—that they are neglecting their salvation and going down to wo. An object may be totally deformed, or odious, and in the darkness of midnight it will strike no one. Pour on it a flood of day, and it will be seen. A sinner will be calm and thoughtless so long as he supposes he is as good as others. Live so that he may be reproved by your life. Let your conduct be a rebuke of his; your benevolence, a reproof of his avarice; your prayers, of his thoughtlessness; your seriousness, of his gayety; and your heavenly-mindedness, of his sensuality; and he will feel it. 2. The life of a Christian is an argument of the truth of Christianity, which he will see and know. We may preach in this matter, and no man will feel it. The world is full of books proving that religion is true, but who reads them? We can pile demonstration on demonstration, but they are cold abstractions, and all our demonstrations will be overturned in their practical effects by one cold and cutting remark of an infidel world: "See how your Christians live. See them just as gay as I wish to be. See them as thoughtless as I desire to be. See them just as inactive as I have any inclination to be. See them as fond of the world, as greedy of gain, as ambitious, as sumptuous in their style of dress and living, as I desire to be. See them do as little for the conversion of sinners and the spread of the gospel as I do. Such a religion, with all your demonstrations, is worth little; and it cannot be of much moment whether I follow the inclinations of my heart *within* or *without* the pale of the Christian church." But there is another side to this picture. The remarks of the infidel have not reached the *Christian* yet. There *is* an argument which infidelity must feel, and before which guilt will tremble. It is when Christianity reforms the sinner; silences the profane; reclaims the drunkard, the gay, and the worldly. The argument of such a life will be felt when our tomes of cold demonstration shall lie forgotten on our shelves. But what is this argument? It is this. That Christianity changes the man. That the change is seen in all his life. It is not that he is simply a *professor* of religion. That is *no* change. It is not that he is *periodically* religious, like the return of a quartan ague; or *prudentially* religious, at distant intervals; or a pious man, like the visits of angels, few and far between. It is that you know where to find him—that he is uniform, steady, like the light of a morning unbroken by mists, or the beams of a noonday unobscured by clouds and tempests. You know the power which a man has, who, in perils of field and flood—on the cold ground and in the cannon's mouth—serves his country. You know how different this from that frothy periodical patriotism which declaims on its beauty, and then sinks on a bed of down; which is eloquent with the praise of valor, and then is seen no more. So much difference is there between the example of him *in the church* who serves God, and him *in the church* who serves him not. 3. The world understands what religion is. They *know* that it is more than a name, a bugbear, or a shadow. And hence they scoff at professors, and deride our pretences of piety. Now the only way to silence the world, is to do it by your life. Argument will not do it. But a life of religion *will*. It will do more. It will not only *silence*, it will *subdue*. It will not merely close the mouth, it will find its way to the heart. The world knows that the conduct of Christ was different from that of other men. And they under-

stand that when professed Christians do not live like him, they are not Christians, and they are not slow in expressing their convictions—**NOR SHOULD THEY BE.** They are in the right of it *there*, and once at least sinners shall find me defending the correctness of their conclusions, and endeavoring to carry forward their demonstrations. 4. There is nothing so well fitted to convert men as a Christian life. God blesses such a life. He follows it with the influences of his grace. See a Christian self-denied. See him abandon every thing which is not *Christian*. See him lay aside the emblems of pride, of gayety, of luxury. See him unambitious of honors. See him the friend of the poor, of the widow. See him live in an atmosphere of prayer; breathe forth the aspirations of devotion; turn aside from the allurements of the world. See him lay himself and all he has on the altars of God. See him the patron of those great designs that look to the conversion of all mankind. See the iron bands which fetter other men fall around him; the ice of selfishness and avarice dissolve. See his great wealth freely given, and that which calls forth all the energies of the men of this world—that for which *they* live, see it all yield in his heart and life to the influence of some mightier principle. See the gospel in his soul have such an ascendancy that it humbles his pride, subdues his feelings, unclenches his hands from gold and office, and makes him a large and liberal benefactor of mankind. Who doubts that Howard was under the influence of some such principle? Who doubts it of Wilberforce? of Martin? of Edwards? No man doubts it any more than I doubt that he who has never done one of these things is *not a Christian*. See the gospel shed its peace in affliction, silence murmurs, restrain passion, sustain the sinking soul, and bear it up in the agonies of death. Who doubts that there is something in religion then? No man doubts it: and no man doubts that where none of these things exist, there is nothing in his religion. It is name, emptiness, vanity, imposition that deceives no one; profession that no one mistakes; pretension that never beguiles; a cloak that conceals nothing; an assumption which every man understands, and which every man, and which God, despises and abhors. The Saviour understood all this, and felt more deeply than I do, or than I can express, that no good would be done unless the light of his people shine so that others should see their good works and glorify their heavenly Father.

V. A fifth reason for this is, that God will in this way be honored. A mere profession does *not* honor him. A life of inactivity does not honor him. The most staid and formal regularity, where there is no *Christian life*, does not honor him, any more than the solemn corpse of the dead laid in state is an honor to living men. The Christian honors God; the sun does that by *his light*, the moon and the stars of heaven by *theirs*; so does he by *his light*. The hills, the trees, the streams, the flowers, the ocean honor God. The Christian does it more than all. One word spoke *them all* into being. But your piety cost the labors, the long agonies, the groans of God's only Son. One word may turn *them all* to nothing, but your piety shall show forth his praise for ever and for ever.