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LIVING TO GOD:

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED JUNE 16, 1816,

AT

THE BRICK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN THE

CITY OF NEW-YORK.

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SERMON.



ROM. xiv. 7, 8.

FOR NONE OF US LIVETH TO HIMSELF, AND NO MAN DIETH TO HIMSELF. FOR WHETHER WE LIVE WE LIVE UNTO THE LORD, AND WHETHER WE DIE WE DIE UNTO THE LORD. WHETHER WE LIVE THEREFORE OR DIE WE ARE THE LORD'S.

THIS is a comprehensive description of the Christian character. It is of real Christians that the apostle is speaking. He supposes them capable of differing on smaller matters;—one is weak and another strong; “one believeth that he may eat all things, another eateth herbs;” the baptized Jew regarded as sacred the days which had been set apart for the feasts of the Old Testament, the believing Gentile considered that distinction done away. In all these secondary matters the apostle exhorted Christians to bear with each other, and not to assume the office of their Master by judging their brethren. And this exhortation he enforced by the consideration that with all their minor differences they were essentially alike in their devotedness to the Lord Jesus Christ. “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth

to himself. "For whether we live we live unto the Lord, and whether we die we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die we are the Lord's." There is as real selfishness in the contentions and distance of different sects of Christians, not divided by essential points, as in the collisions of the men of the world. I hail with all my heart the dawn of a brighter day. These low contracted jealousies and rivalries are at length yielding to the more expanded and generous emotion of Christian love. The different names into which Christ was split are at last uniting on the common ground of Christianity, and combining their influence to extend the light of life to a benighted world*. This is a union which gives delight to every heart in heaven, and spreads dismay and terror through the regions of hell. It is a glorious triumph of Christian magnanimity and kindness over the littleness and meanness of a selfish heart,—a selfish heart entrenched behind the Christian name. Let us cherish this noble and heavenly temper with the utmost exertion of our talents and influence, and never return back to the sordid and carnal spirit of sectarian bigotry.

Among all the sects who have not essentially subverted the Gospel, there are probably real

* But one month before this sermon was preached, the cheering spectacle had been exhibited in the city of New-York, of almost all denominations uniting with harmony and zeal in forming *The American Bible Society*.

Christians. And wherever Christians are found, they agree in the grand feature drawn in the text. “ For *none* of us liveth to himself, and *no* man dieth to himself.” By whatever denomination or errors good men may be distinguished, by whatever imperfections they may be marred, not a Christian on earth lives to himself or dies to himself; but whether he lives he lives unto the Lord, and whether he dies he dies unto the Lord. In his opinions he may be erroneous, in his character he may be imperfect, but in this essential distinction he cannot fail. It becomes then a matter of infinite importance to understand precisely what is implied in the character here drawn, and to rouse ourselves to the cultivation of a temper so magnanimous and divine. I will therefore,

I. Endeavour to explain what is meant by living to ourselves and dying to ourselves, and what by living to God and dying to God.

II. Show that there is no religion without the character here drawn, and that there is just as much religion as there is of this, because this and nothing else is religion.

III. Exhibit some motives which ought to awaken us to such a spirit and character.

1. What is meant by living to ourselves and dying to ourselves, and what by living to God and dying to God?

To live to ourselves is to make the support

of our lives, and the gratification of our personal and social tastes, the governing aim of our conduct. It is to consult our own ease, or honour, or pleasure, or advantage, as the leading object of our wishes. It is to make ourselves and our families the centre of our chief cares and affections. There are two classes of men who do this; first, the man of the world, and secondly, the false professor, who, however correct his creed, however regular his life, however addicted to devotion, makes himself and his family the centre of almost all his cares from morning to night, from day to day, from year to year,—who has scarcely any other calculation than to spend each day in his own affairs, and to bestow all he can earn upon himself and his friends,—and if he has any care about the other world, it is that he and his may be happy, with little concern for the salvation of others, for the redemption of a world going down to death, and none for the glory of God. It is the easiest thing in the world for a man to have certain religious commotions, to profess his faith, and taking his shape from the habits and opinions of cultivated society, to lead a regular life, without any more self-denial than an infidel. With his views of his own interest for both worlds, it would really be a self-denial for him to be less devout or less moral. He is still living to himself.

To die to one's self, according to the meaning of the text, is to make one's self the end in all one's exposures to death, and in all one's calculations about dying. The duellist does this, when, as a mere offering to pride, he sends his soul to the bar of God under the double guilt of suicide and murder. The soldier does this, when he sacrifices his life to vain glory, and dies that he may be celebrated in the records of fame, or lauded in the private circle. The whole system of war, I fear, has little other support. The grand inspiring motive is personal glory, than which nothing more selfish is to be found in your houses of infamy or your state-prisons. Armies after armies *die to themselves*. Remove that motive, with the unhallowed principle of retaliation, and wars would cease. Is it not a wonder that a murderous system, which has no other support than the worst passions of the human heart, should so long have passed current even with the Church of God? that it should have been reserved to the 19th century of that religion which was sent to proclaim peace on earth and good will to men, to discover that this cruel practice is opposed to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel? But blessed be God *that light also has begun to dawn**. As

* The author is not unmindful of the attachment of the primitive Christians, and in later times, of the Waldenses, Moravians, Friends, and many others, to the doctrine of non-resistance. His meaning is, that it was reserved to the 19th century to give currency to this sentiment, (or to one nearly like it),

we approach the happy period when the nations are to beat their swords into plow-shares and their spears into pruning-hooks, an enlightened spirit of holy and benevolent opposition to this system of butchery is going forth; and in a few years, I doubt not, the Christian world will look back on war, as they now do on the slave-trade, with one gaze of astonishment that it should have been tolerated so long. Associations are forming to extend these enlightened views; and is there nothing, my brethren, for us to do in this matter? Have we not a hand and a voice to aid the general effort to chase this monster from the world? I would that a *Peace Society* were established in every town and village of the civilized world*.

among other denominations, and to revive among Christians indiscriminately a habit of thinking on this subject which promises to become universal.

* The author has no intention to agitate the question whether resistance is admissible in the most extreme case that can be supposed, much less to deny the applicability of force to human beings in every instance, as to children, maniacs, criminals, and the like. The great principles of practical morality are not to be settled by extreme cases. There is scarcely one in the whole circle of casuistry whose applicability in certain conceivable circumstances may not admit of a doubt. It is enough if it can be shown that the opinions of the Christian world about *defensive* war, (for none but Nimrods justify any other,) are altogether too loose, and that a general diffusion of correct sentiments on this point would avail, so far as the Gospel has influence, to banish wars from the world. Until the disarming power of a just and pacific disposition, and the safety of an unlimited trust in divine providence, have been fully tried, let not the alarming consequences of our principles be too confidently trumpeted. If the wars of the Old Testament are brought against us, it ought to be shown that they are not to be placed on a level with divorce, proligamy, concubinage and slavery, all of which were tolerated in that *infant age* of the Church, and for a reason assigned by our Saviour himself. Matt. xix. 7, 8. Because of the hardness of their hearts Moses even *commanded* what from the beginning was not so, and what is not so under the Gospel. You permit, and even direct, your little children to do what would ill become them at mature age.

To live to God is to regard his will as the rule and ground of our conduct, and his glory as our supreme object ; not merely one day in a week, or two seasons in a day, but in our general course, to act from a reference to his authority ; to choose our calling, to pursue our business, to frame our habits, to regulate our actions from hour to hour, from a regard to his will and honour ; to feel and act as those who are not at liberty to live to themselves, but have their work daily assigned them by a heavenly Master ; to move about under a sense that we are not our own,—not our own masters, not our own proprietors, not at our own disposal,—that our time, talents, influence, property, and all that we are and have are God's ; to hold every thing in readiness to use for him or resign to him as he shall direct ; to be submissive under afflictions, and willing to be at his disposal in all our trials ; to be ready to deny ourselves for him in every way which his word or providence may point out ; to desire life chiefly that we may serve him ; to make him the centre in which all the lines of our life shall meet ; to make it the business of our lives to please him and not ourselves, labouring “ that whether present or absent we may be accepted of him,” “ and whatsoever” we “ do in word or deed,” to “ do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

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The service of God, let it be distinctly remarked, does not consist *in fastening our cares on ourselves, and referring to his will only so far as to prevent our selfishness from openly trespassing on the rights of others.* This is probably the sad mistake of thousands, who, *finding that they have some respect to the divine will,* flatter themselves that they are Christians. No, the service of God consists in the exercise and fruits of that charity which “seeketh not her own,”—of that benevolence which extends its most earnest cares to a perishing world; not that good will which spends itself in frames and feelings which cost us nothing,—in saying, “Be ye warmed and filled,”—but that which can put forth a hand to relieve, which can deny ourselves, and part with our substance, our ease, our comfort, for the benefit and salvation of others; not that parsimonious charity which reluctates, and hangs back, and gives just enough to obtain, as is thought, a passport to heaven; but that warm, tender, sincere benevolence which loves our neighbour in some good measure as ourselves, and is ready to give, or labour, or suffer, according to the wants of others and our own ability. This is the service of God,—of that God who himself is infinite and active benevolence, and who has set such an example of self-denial for the happiness of others in the sacrifice of his own Son.

To die to God is to expose ourselves to sufferings, hazards, and death for his sake, as the primitive Christians were delivered to death and died daily through their exposures and sufferings for the Gospel. It is also to feel ourselves the property and servant of God for both worlds, to consent to be at his disposal in death as well as in life, to be willing that he should appoint the time and manner of our decease, to wish for death not so much that we may be "unclothed," not so much that we may be delivered from the trials of life, as to honour and enjoy God, and finally to be ready to die as martyrs to his cause. Thus Paul felt: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Thus Epaphroditus felt, when "for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life." It was the "earnest expectation and hope" of Paul, that Christ might "be magnified" in his body, "whether by life or by death;" and martyrdom was the death by which Peter was to "glorify God."

II. There is no religion without the character which has been described, and there is just as much religion as there is of this, because this and nothing else is religion.

The depravity of man consists in the dominion of his selfish passions. It is murder in one case, and devotion in another, but it is depravity still. One man is impelled by interest to out-breaking crimes, another to tremble under the divine threatenings, and in a certain view of his character and state to profess religion, and to lead an orderly life ; but one equally with the other lives to himself and makes himself the centre. His own advantage for one or both worlds is his supreme care, and his temper of course, into whatever frames it may be cast, with whatever hopes, and joys, and gratitude it may be attended, is prepared to defend his own interest against all other beings, and when he ~~sees~~ *sees that* finally prostrated, to gnash upon God with his teeth. Such a temper can be rendered placid and even grateful by gifts and hopes, but it still encloses a principle of hostility to the universe, and wants nothing but provocation to rise upon God with the spirit of a devil. Nothing can change its nature but the introduction of another ruling passion, another supreme object. But in the universe there is not another object which can rival self but God and his kingdom. Nothing therefore can cure a depraved heart but

that heavenly charity, which, while it acts supremely towards God, goes forth under the impulse of his authority to all other beings. This is that love which is "the fulfilling of the law," and than which of course the law can require no more. This is that love to God and our neighbour on which "hang all the law and the prophets,"—which in its active nature and fruits comprehends all obedience, and constitutes the vital principle by which faith operates. This is that charity without which "the tongues of men and of angels" are "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal,"—without which "all knowledge," and "all faith," and the gift of all our goods "to feed the poor," and of our "body to be burned" for Christ, are "nothing."

There are many forms which selfishness assumes, some of them very sacred and capable of deceiving, if it were possible, the very elect; but there is no true religion that does not break the dominion of this principle by introducing another ruling passion. Whatever be our frames, hopes, and transports, there is no sanctification further than the heart is raised above the domination of self-interest. An escape from this tyranny by transferring the heart to God and his kingdom, is the very sanctification itself. An ingenious writer remarks, that there is just as much religion as there is self-denial. And certain it is that there is just as much religion

as there is a subjection of self-interest to the glory of God and the good of his kingdom. Our religion is exactly in proportion as we are borne away by the love of God and his creatures from self, and stand ready, from that heavenly principle, to sacrifice personal ease, comfort, and property, to advance the kingdom of righteousness and truth;—exactly in proportion as we cease to live to ourselves, and live to God alone. The only evidence of attachment to him on which we can rely, is that we make it our main design and care to promote his glory and the accomplishment of his benevolent purposes, not now and then, but in the general tenour of our lives. Nothing less than this will establish the *general character* of his servants; and by general character we are to be approved or condemned. In all its promises and threatenings the Bible speaks only of general characters. As the particular end determines the quality of an action, so the general scope decides the nature of our state. The goal at which we steadily aim designates the way in which we run. Self-seekers, no more than murderers, have any part in the kingdom of Christ. The very core of all religion is not to live to ourselves but to God; not to consider ourselves our own, but the property and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ; not to feel as though we are set up in the world to work for ourselves, to spend the most of our

time in promoting what is termed our *innocent* gratifications, but to hold our time, powers, influence, and property as talents intrusted to us to be used for Christ, keeping our eye on his lips to learn his will, and aiming habitually to please and honour him. This and nothing but this is true Christianity. Whatever be our creed and frames, if we possess this spirit we are Christians. Whatever be our creed and frames, if this be not our character all our religion is vain.

The world has long enough been cumbered with professors, who, with the Gospel of Christ on their lips, have never extended their cares beyond their own circle; who, claiming to be the children of the God of universal love, have looked on composedly and seen a miserable world sink by thousands a day into hell, without putting forth their hand to arrest the mighty ruin. The world has long enough been lumbered with griping professors, who spend their lives in scraping together all they can, and never have a cent to give to Christ; who dream that they can go to heaven without paying tribute to their divine King, though the page is often spread before them on which they read, "Sell that ye have and give alms;" "for this ye know, that no covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." I have read of Christians

who had many slips and some falls, but in all the word of God I never read of a *covetous* Christian.

III. Let us contemplate some of the motives which should awaken us to the spirit and character which have been described.

(1.) "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's;" "forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation,—but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." "We thus judge, that if One died for all then were all dead, and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again;" "who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." The Lord Jesus Christ, who created you and redeemed you from death, is your Proprietor, Master, and King. He was raised from the dead and invested with dominion on purpose that he might rule over you. Whom else then should you serve? To whom else should you devote your lives? Whose interest should you rather seek? That interest he received as a reward for redeeming you; and does it not be-

come you to aid in bringing to him that reward, since you have nothing of your own to give? All that you are and have are his. You owe him your whole selves. Will you linger in your own affairs and leave his inheritance to take care of itself? Thus he did not leave you when you were in need.

(2.) The only way to improve your heart is to carry it from home. While it is lingering there, and brooding over your own interest even of a spiritual nature, it is settling into all the habits which it derived from its low and polluted birth. Send it abroad to travel if you would refine it. The best means of sanctification is to accustom yourselves to care and do for others, not from mere humanity, but from the love of Christ. While your hearts are moved for the miseries of your brethren, they burst their own chains, and before you are aware they are free. While striving to dispel the darkness from other minds or other lands, your own darkness scatters. While you water you are watered also yourselves. The Missionaries who have left all for Christ, and those benevolent men at home who yearly cast one tenth of their income into the treasury of the Lord, of all men are likely to find the way to heaven the least obstructed, and to enjoy the greatest light and peace.

(3.) The heart-breaking necessities of a

world ought to rouse us from our selfish stupor. To say nothing of the multitudes who are swarming the way to death in the most favoured regions; to say nothing of whole nations in the Romish and Greek Churches, who, though they bear the Christian name, are apparently living without God in the world; to say nothing of hundreds of thousands of nominal Christians scattered through Asia and Africa, who scarcely retain any thing of Christianity but the name; to say nothing of three millions of Jews; it is a distressing truth that more than *two thirds* of the population of the globe are still buried under Pagan or Mahometan darkness, and are as abominably wicked as sin can make them. Of that wretched portion of our race, (omitting the account of infants and small children,) it cannot be computed that less than twenty thousand die daily, and seven millions and a half a year*. To

* According to the latest calculation there are in the world,

475	millions of Pagans,
73	do Mahometans,
5	do Jews,
214	do Christians.

765 millions in all.

Of the 548 millions of pagans and Mahometans, say that one half die before the years of discretion, and that the average age of the other half is thirty-six and a half years, (and considering the low latitudes and unhealthy countries in which the bulk of them live, this must be enough,) then, without any account of small children, there die of those vicious and deluded creatures 274 millions in thirty-six and a half years; that is,

Seven millions and a half, (a population equal to that of the United States,) a year;

Twenty thousand a day;

Eight hundred and fifty, (accurately, 856,) an hour;

Fourteen a minute.

think of twenty thousand moral agents dropping into perdition daily, and a population as great as that of the United States every year, only from Pagan and Mahometan countries, and that because Christians will not send the Bible to them! O this is a thing almost to make heaven weep. To think of eight or nine hundred from those countries dropping into the pit every hour*! Thus it has been from generation to generation, while the Christian world have been sleeping away their lives at home. Ought another moment to be lost to stop that current of souls which is constantly discharging itself into the burning lake? If we wait till to-morrow, twenty thousand more will be gone. If we linger an hour, eight or nine hundred are beyond our reach. While I am speaking they are bursting forth to meet their doom. It certainly has become the duty of every person in a Gospel land to rack his invention to devise means, and to strain the last nerve of his strength, to rescue those perishing nations, as he would to deliver his family from a burning house. O if we loved those heathen as we do our children! but we ought to love them as we

* The author does not take upon himself to say that *no adults* are saved from the pagan and Mahometan world, in a way not revealed to us: but this he says, that from the polluted character of those nations, as attested by *history*, by modern travellers and missionaries, and as drawn in the word of God, we have no reason to conclude that the instances of such a merciful interposition are numerous enough essentially to vary the result.

love ourselves. Heretofore we knew not how it was possible to reach them; but now a way is opened by which we may operate upon them with as much ease as though they lived at our door. If we drop a dollar into the treasury of the American Bible Society, it will turn to a Bible, and find its way to India, and will travel while we sleep. If we deposit another, it will become a Bible and make its way to South America, without postage or risk. Thus God has opened a door by which we may pour upon the heathen the blessings of the Gospel as fast as we please, and need not be bounded by any other limit than our ability and inclination. One Bible will shed upon a benighted family a light which will radiate through a neighbourhood, and descend from generation to generation. And who is too poor to give a Bible? It has been computed by those who have passed through our country to search out its wants, that no less than five hundred thousand Bibles are wanted in the United States, to furnish each family with one, that each man may have a Bible to lie upon his dying pillow. Do we hear this, and shall we sleep? There ought to be two Bible Societies, one of males and the other of females, formed in every town, and village, and hamlet in America. And into one of these every person but actual paupers ought to come. Every hand in Christendom, but those which are stretched out

for alms, ought to give one Bible a year, till the wants of a world are supplied. It is a tax which the God of heaven has laid upon the whole population of Christian countries. Let the labouring poor work an hour longer each day, and retrench some unnecessary expenses, and they need not be excluded from this glorious work of regenerating a world*. But the coffers of the rich —— it is only when such a view passes before my mind that I covet wealth, and now I could grasp the treasures of Cræsus. What has sealed the coffers of the rich? That they should roll in luxury and pave the way to their theatres with gold, when six or seven hundred millions of sinners are without a Bible! There is superfluous wealth enough in a few of our cities and larger towns to convey the Gospel

* An ingenious friend has made the following calculation of the possible savings in a single article. The use of sugar, (at the lowest calculation of quantity and price,) costs a cent a day for each person. If people would suspend the use of this article only two days in a week, they might each save 1 dollar 4 cts. a year. Reckoning only three consumers in a family, eight families might by this means feed, clothe, and religiously educate one Hindoo child, at an expense of 25 dols. a year; forty eight families might support a school of fifty Hindoo children, at an expense of 150 dols. a year; a hundred families might maintain and educate an indigent youth for the Gospel ministry, at an expense of 312 dols. a year; two hundred families might support a missionary among the heathen, at an expense of 624 dols. a year; a town of seven thousand inhabitants, (reckoning only one half to be consumers,) might support five missionaries, at a salary of 728 dols. each; the people of the United States might furnish the same salary to *five thousand* missionaries;—and all without the smallest addition to their expenses. The same might be done by any other means by which one half of the community should save each two cents a week. Let it be solemnly remembered that if one half of the people of the United States would give only two cents a week, they might support *five thousand* missionaries!

in a short time to every family on earth. God Almighty open their hearts that they may pour out their treasures by hundreds and by thousands, till the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

My brethren, let us no longer live to ourselves. Let us arise and put our hands to the great work in which the nations are now moving. Wondrous things are taking place in the four quarters of the globe. The world is waking up after a long sleep, and is teeming with projects and efforts to extend the empire of truth and happiness. This is the day of which the prophets sung. Let us not sleep while all others are rousing themselves to action. Let every soul come up to the help of the Lord. Let not one be left behind. He that has *absolutely nothing to give*, let him *pray*. Let no one be idle. This is a great day and the Lord requires every hand in the work.

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