

A
DEVOUT
& HOLY LIFE

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A Devout and Holy Life

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Chapter 1

The Nature of Christian Devotion

Devotion is not prayer, but prayer is part of devotion. Devotion signifies a life given, or devoted, to God. The devout man, therefore, is one who lives no longer to his own will or to the way and spirit of the world, but solely to the will of God. He considers God in everything, and he serves God in everything; he makes every aspect of his common life into an aspect of piety, by doing everything in the name of God and to His glory.

Prayer, whether public or private, is simply an instance of devotion. We readily acknowledge that God alone is to be the rule and measure of our prayers, that in them we are to look wholly unto Him and act wholly for Him. We know that we are to pray only in such a manner, for such things, and to such ends, as are suitable to His glory.

Now, if a man were simply to find out the reason why he is to be so strictly pious in his prayers, he will also find out why he must be as strictly pious in all the other areas of his life. For the very reasons why we should make God the rule and measure of our prayers, why we should look wholly unto Him and pray according to His will, are the same reasons why we should also make Him the rule and measure of all the other actions of our lives. Any way of life, any employment of our talents—whether of our time or our money—that is not strictly according to the will of God, that is not carried out for His glory, is as great an absurdity as prayers that are not according to the will of God.

There is no other reason why our prayers should be according to the will of God, why they should have nothing in them but what is wise and holy and heavenly; there is no

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other reason for this, but that our lives may be of the same nature, full of the same wisdom, holiness, and heavenly qualities—that we may live unto God in the same spirit that we pray unto Him. If it were not our strict duty to live by reason, to devote all the actions of our lives to God; if it were not absolutely necessary to walk before Him in wisdom and holiness and all heavenly conversation, doing everything in His name and for His glory; there would be no excellency or wisdom in the most heavenly prayers. No, such prayers would be absurdities; they would be like prayers for wings, when it was never our privilege to fly.

Therefore, as surely as there is wisdom in praying for the Spirit of God, so are we to make that Spirit the rule of all our actions; as surely as our duty is to look wholly unto God in our prayers, so is it our duty to live wholly unto God. Just as we cannot be said to pray unto God unless our prayers look wholly to Him, so we cannot be said to live unto God unless we live unto Him in all the ordinary actions of our lives, and unless He is the rule and measure of all our ways. Unreasonable and absurd ways of life, whether in labor or recreation, whether they consume our time or our money, are like unreasonable and absurd prayers, and they are as truly an offense to God.

It is because we fail to even consider this, that we see such a mixture of ridicule in the lives of many people. They are very strict about having certain times and places of devotion, but when the service of the church is over, they are like those who seldom or never come there. In their way of life, in their manner of spending their time and money, in their cares and fears, in their pleasures and indulgences, in their work and recreation, they are like the rest of the world.

This causes the wanton and reckless part of the world to make a general mockery of those who are devout, because they see their devotion goes no farther than their prayers. When their prayers are over, they live no more unto God, but they live by the same whims and fancies, and in as full an enjoyment of all the follies of life, as other people, until the time of prayer returns again. They are the jest and scorn of careless and worldly people, not because they are really devoted to God, but because they appear to have no other devotion but that of occasional prayers.

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Julius¹ is a man very fearful of missing prayers; the entire congregation supposes him to be ill if he is not at church. However, he spends the remainder of his time following his every whim. He is a companion of people who engage in silly pleasures; he gives himself up to idle, gossiping conversation; he allows himself foolish hatred and resentment against certain people without considering that he is to love everybody as himself (see Leviticus 19:18); and he never puts his conversation, his time, and his money under the rules of religion. The whole body of Scripture stands directly against such a life: one who lives such a course of idleness and folly does not live according to the religion of Jesus Christ. If Julius were to read the New Testament from the beginning to the end, he would find his course of life condemned in every page of it.

Indeed, I cannot imagine anything more absurd than to add wise, sublime, and heavenly prayers to a life of vanity and folly, where neither labor nor entertainment, neither time nor money, are under the wise and heavenly direction of our prayers. Suppose we were to see a man pretending to act wholly with regard to God in everything that he did—a man who would neither spend time nor money, nor engage in any work or leisure, unless he could act according to strict principles of reason and piety. Suppose that the same man neglected all prayer, whether public or private. Would we not be amazed at such a man, and wonder how he could have so much folly along with so much religion?

This man's actions are as unreasonable as pretending to be strict in devotion, being careful to observe certain times and places of prayer, and yet letting the rest of your life—your time and labor, your talents, and your money—be disposed of without any regard to piety and devotion. You cannot have holy prayers and divine petitions without a holiness of life suitable to them; and you cannot have a holy and divine life without prayers. For to be weak and foolish in spending our time and money, is no greater a mistake than to be weak and foolish in relation to our prayers. And to allow ourselves to live in such ways that neither are, nor can be, offered to God,

1 Julius: the suggestion is that Caesar is the worldly power, as opposed to God. The notes in this edition simply aim at explaining the names of the allegorical characters and at giving the sense of words whose connotations have altered in the course of time.

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is the same irreligion as to neglect our prayers or use them in a manner unworthy of God.

The point of the matter is this: either reason and religion prescribe rules for all the ordinary actions of our life, or they do not. If they do, then it is as necessary to govern all our actions by those rules, as it is to worship God. For if religion teaches us anything concerning eating and drinking (1 Cor. 10:31), or spending our time (Eph. 5:16) and money (1 Tim. 6:8–10); if it teaches us how we are to use and despise the world (1 John 2:15); if it tells us what attitude we are to have in common life, or how we are to be disposed toward all people (Eph. 4:31–32); if it tells us how we are to behave toward the sick, the poor, the old, the destitute; if it tells us whom we are to treat with a particular love and whom we are to regard with a particular esteem; if it tells us how we are to treat our enemies (Matt. 5:44) and how we are to mortify (Col. 3:5) and deny ourselves (Matt. 16:24)—a person must be very weak to think these aspects of religion are not to be observed with as much exactness as any doctrines that relate to prayer.

There is not one command in the whole Gospel for public worship, and perhaps it is a duty that is insisted on in Scripture less than any other. The entire New Testament never so much as mentions that we should make it a matter of daily heedfulness, whereas the religion or devotion that is to govern the ordinary actions of our lives is found in almost every verse of Scripture.

Those Scriptures that deal with Christ or His apostles, are filled with doctrines that relate to daily living. They call us to renounce the world; to differ in every attitude and way of life from the spirit and the way of the world; to renounce all its goods, fear none of its evils, reject its joys, and have no value for its happiness; to be as newborn babes (1 Pet. 2:2), born into a new state of things; to live as pilgrims (1 Pet. 2:11) in spiritual watching, in holy fear, and in heavenly aspirations for another life; to take up our daily cross and deny ourselves (Matt. 16:24); to profess the blessedness of mourning (Matt. 5:4) and to seek the blessedness of poverty of spirit (Matt. 5:3); to forsake the pride and vanity of riches (1 Tim. 6:17); to take no thought for the morrow (Matt. 6:34); to live in the profoundest state of humility (James 4:10); to

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rejoice in worldly sufferings (1 Pet. 4:12–13); to reject the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16); to bear injuries (Matt. 5:44); to forgive and bless our enemies (Matt. 5:43–44); to love mankind as God loves them (Eph. 5:2); to give up our hearts and affections entirely to God (James 4:7); and to strive to enter through the strait² gate (Matt. 7:13) into a life of eternal glory.

This is the common devotion that our blessed Savior taught, in order to make it the common life of all Christians. Is it not therefore very strange that people give so much weight to public worship, concerning which there is not one precept of our Lord's to be found, and yet they neglect these common duties of ordinary life, which are commanded in every page of the Gospel? I call these duties the devotion of everyday life, because if they are to be practiced, they must be made part of our lives every day; they can have no place anywhere else.

If heavenly affection and contempt of the world are necessary to the character of Christians, it is necessary that this mind-set appear in the whole course of their lives and in their manner of using the world, because it can have no place anywhere else. If self-denial is a condition of salvation, everyone who would be saved must make it a part of his daily life. If humility is a Christian duty, then the everyday life of a Christian is to be a constant course of humility in all its kinds. If poverty of spirit is necessary, it must be the spirit and attitude of every day of our lives.

If we are to relieve the naked, the sick, and the prisoner, it must be the common charity of our lives, as far as we can render ourselves able to perform it. If we are to love our enemies, we must make our lives a visible exercise and demonstration of that love every day. If contentment and thankfulness and the patient bearing of evil are duties to God, then they are the duties of every day and in every circumstance of our lives. If we are to be wise and holy as the newborn sons of God, we cannot be so unless we renounce everything that is foolish and vain in every part of our lives. If we are to be new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), we must show that we are so, by having new ways of living in the world. (See Romans 12:2.) If we are to follow Christ, it must be in our way of spending every day.

2 The spelling here is actually correct, meaning *narrow* or *closely fitting*.

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It is the same for all the virtues and holy qualities of Christianity; they are not ours unless they are the virtues and qualities of our daily lives. Christianity does not leave us to live in the common ways of life, conforming to the folly of customs and gratifying the passions and desires in which the spirit of the world delights. Christianity does not indulge us in any of these things. All its virtues, which it makes necessary to salvation, are only so many ways of living above and contrary to the world in all the actions of our lives. If our lives are not every day a course of humility, self-denial, renunciation of the world, poverty of spirit, and heavenly affection, then we do not live the lives of Christians.

However, although a uniform, open, and visible practice of all these virtues is clearly what Christianity is, yet there is little or nothing of this to be found even among the better sort of people. You often see them at church, pleased with the fine preachers; but look into their lives, and you will see that they are the same sort of people as those who make no pretenses to devotion. The difference that you find between them is only the difference of their natural temperaments.

They have the same taste of the world, the same worldly cares, fears, and joys as the rest of the world; they have the same frame of mind, equally vain in their desires. They have the same fondness for luxurious living and material goods, the same pride and vanity of dress, the same self-love and indulgence, the same foolish friendships and groundless hatreds, the same levity of mind and trifling of spirit, the same fondness for entertainment, the same idle dispositions and vain ways of spending their time in visiting and conversation, as those who never intended to be devout.

This comparison is not between people who seem to be good and those who are known to be indulgent; but it is among people of moderate lives. Let us take an instance in two modest women. Suppose that one of them is careful about her times of devotion, and observes them through a sense of duty. And suppose that the other has no concern about it, but attends church seldom or often, just as it happens.

Now, it is easy to see the difference between these two women, but apart from this, can you find any further difference between them? Are not the customs, manners, and

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attitudes of the one, the same as the customs, manners, and attitudes of the other? Do they live as if they belonged to different worlds, had different ideas in their heads, and had different rules by which they governed all their actions? Do they not have the same goods and evils? Are they not pleased and displeased in the same manner, about the same things? Do they not live in the same course of life? Does one seem to be of this world, looking at the things that are temporal, and the other to be of another world, looking wholly at the things that are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18)?

If you examine their predominant attitudes in the greatest areas of life or in the greatest doctrines of Christianity, you will not find the least difference imaginable. In that case, you must look into their everyday lives and consider them with regard to the use of the world, because that is what everybody can see.

Now, you know that having the right ideas about God is necessary to religion, yet it is also necessary to have right ideas about this world. It is entirely possible for a man to have his affections set upon this world, and yet be considered a good Christian. And yet, if Christianity has not changed a man's mind and spirit with relation to these things, what can we say that it has done for him? For if the doctrines of Christianity were practiced, they would make a man as different from other people—as to all worldly temperaments, sensual pleasures, and the pride of life—as a wise man is different from an idiot. It would be as easy a thing to know a Christian by his outward way of life, as it is now difficult to find anybody who lives the Christian life.

Indeed, it is well known that Christians are now not only like other men in their frailties and infirmities (this might be in some degree excusable), but they are also like the world in all the most important aspects of their lives. They live every day in the same attitudes, the same designs, and the same indulgences as those who neither know God nor the happiness to be found in another life.

Everyone who is capable of any reflection must have observed that this is generally the state of devout people, whether men or women. You may see them as different from other people, inasmuch as they have specific times and places of prayer, but they are generally like the rest of the world in

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all the other parts of their lives: that is, they add Christian devotion to a heathen life.

I have the authority of our blessed Savior to say, “*Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek)*” (Matt. 6:31–32). If being this concerned even with the necessities of this life shows that we are not yet of a Christian spirit, but are like the heathen, then surely to enjoy the vanity and folly of the world as they do—to be like them in the chief qualities and attitudes of our lives, in self-centeredness and indulgence; in sensual pleasures and diversions; in the vanity of dress and the love of show and greatness—is a much greater sign of a heathen spirit. Consequently, one who adds devotion to such a life, may be said to pray as a Christian, but he lives as a heathen.