

Christian Retirement

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART

The word of truth declares, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jer. xvii. 9. The deceitfulness of the heart is so great, that no human penetration can discover its extent, or detect its various windings. Fully to know this hidden evil is the prerogative of Jehovah; for when the question is asked, "Who can know it?" the important answer is given, "I the Lord, search the heart and try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings."

The holy, ever blessed Trinity, three persons in one Jehovah, can alone raise man from the ruins of the fall, and restore him to holiness, happiness, and heaven. How vain then are all attempts to renovate the old Adam. The ancient philosopher and the modern rationalist have each found their boasted efforts ineffectual, in restoring the disfigured mind of man to moral beauty.

The arts of civilization may indeed render the savage peaceable, domestic, and industrious; just as a refined education gives to the more cultivated parts of society, that vigor of mind and suavity of manner which greatly add to the enjoyment of social life. But without the sanctifying grace of God, communicated through the faithful preaching of the Gospel, the rude barbarian, though civilized, still retains his blindness respecting the true God, and all his native propensities to evil.

If we turn our eyes from the civilized heathen, to his superior in the scale of intelligence, the polished and well-educated inhabitant of a Christian country, we behold in this latter character, science, taste, politeness; all that can charm the mind and imagination in the brilliancy of wit, strength of intellect, and sportive flights of fancy; yet even this polished stone, cut out of the quarry of nature, and rendered so beautiful by art, is still destitute of real worth, while devoid of those qualities which alone can render it precious in the sight of God. Such a character, the world's idol and the Gospel's bane, is held up as the pinnacle of excellence, while utterly abhorrent in the eye of Him who sees not as man sees; and who has declared, that while man looks at the outward appearance, he looks at the heart.

Hence we see the necessity of converting grace, whether in the crude, or more polished parts of the human race. In all, the heart is deceitful above all things and

desperately wicked. In all, sin reigns, until divine love dethrones the tyrant, and brings the humbled sinner to the feet of Jesus.

We cannot have a more convincing proof of the corruption of our nature, than that proneness which we continually feel to seek rest in the creature, and to find our satisfaction in earthly things.

This alienation of the heart from God, may and often does exist to a most awful extent, under the fair garb of amiability of temper, and the creditable profession of orthodox Christianity. It is therefore possible to be highly esteemed among men, and yet be an abomination in the sight of God.

The holy Scriptures declare, that God will not accept of a divided heart. We must love God supremely, or we do not love him at all. We must rest altogether upon his grace as manifested in the gift of his beloved Son, or our partial dependence will be found a delusion. The language of the Almighty Father is, "my son give me your heart." Oh, happy hour! when the heart is cheerfully and without reserve given to a gracious God.

As all sin lies in the departure of the heart from God. So all holiness is concentrated in this unreserved surrender of the heart to him. Herein lies the secret of holiness and of happiness. When the heart is once truly given to God; when the affections flow delightfully towards him; when the will is swallowed up in the Divine will; when the whole soul is devoted to the service of its Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer; then the fruits of righteousness will appear and abound; then joy and peace will gladden the heart; and hope and love will unite to prepare the believer for his eternal rest. But it is most awful to think how little the blessed God is regarded and obeyed by creatures whom he has endued with reason and reflection.

Man, although formed to show forth the praises of Jehovah, is of all his lower works, the only creature who rebels against his sovereign will. "The ox knows' his owner, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not consider." "The stork in the heaven knows her appointed times; and the turtle-dove, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." "Listen, you foolish and senseless people—who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear. Do you have no respect for me? Why do you not tremble in my presence? I, the Lord, am the one who defines the ocean's sandy shoreline, an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross. The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the bounds I set. 'But my people have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned against me and have chosen to practice idolatry.'" Jeremiah 5:21-23

When we read the sacred pages of revealed truth, what an awful catalogue of crime meets our eye. What unbelief, what pride, what sensual lust, what covetousness, what supreme attachment to the world, what daring independence

and contempt of the Almighty, what entire forgetfulness of God, and abominable idolatries, what gross impurities, what envy, malice, cruelties and love of murder, what deceit and fraud, what superstition, hypocrisy and formality, what crimes of every name and character stain the history of our fallen race, and prove by an incontrovertible evidence, that we are born in sin, and are by nature the children of wrath.

For such a world of hateful sinners, Jesus died! Oh! stupendous miracle of mercy! Well may angels desire to look into this mystery of love. But Oh! amazing infatuation, man, for whom this mercy was provided, man to whom this mercy is offered, man, who so greatly needs it, and who without it must perish forever, is careless and indifferent, yes, most awfully opposed to it!

We do not dislike mercy, but we dislike the channel through which it flows. We do not dislike forgiveness, but we dislike the purity of heart connected with it. We do not dislike heaven as a place of rest from toil and sorrow, but we dislike those dispositions and affections which alone can qualify us for the enjoyment of it.

While we would gladly be saved from future misery, we cannot part with present sinful attachments: therefore we willfully renounce the infinite joys of heavenly glory, and choose the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, with all their tremendous consequences, in a future world. Awful delusion! Lord save us from such a miserable choice and condition.

In the midst of this general aversion to the humbling, purifying, elevating doctrines and precepts of the Gospel, there is, in every age, a "remnant according to the election of grace," who most gladly and thankfully embrace the rich offers of mercy made to a lost world through the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. These happy souls receive Christ into their hearts by faith, obtain pardon and peace through his blood, and are renewed in the spirit of their minds through the power of the Holy Spirit. They walk in humble fear and holy obedience; are admitted as heirs of glory into God's everlasting kingdom; and reign with Christ their Lord and Savior forever and ever.

Blessed Jesus! you who are the kind Physician of souls, heal this fatal distemper of my fallen nature—an earthly mind. Spiritualize my affections—elevate my views—enlarge my heart. Fill my soul with your own self. Let me not grovel here below, fond of the perishing vanities of time. Wean my heart from the transitory enjoyments of sense, and fix my affections upon yourself, the eternal unchanging source of good. Oh! satisfy me with your mercy, and that soon. Hasten to help me, for you are my God.

Short-sighted man can only see
The outward form of piety;
But God can in a moment dart
Within The caverns of the heart

To his all-searching, piercing eye,
Our secret evils naked lie;
Pride cannot work by him unseen,
Nor angry passion; lust, or spleen.

Wash me in Jesus' blood divine;
May I be his, and he be mine;
From all deceitful workings, free
My heart that pants to live for thee.

A monument of grace I stand,
Redeemed, supported by your hand;
Whatever I am, whatever possess,
It is all the gift of richest grace.

Then let my soul forever raise
The incense of adoring praise;
And join the heavenly choirs above,
In sweetest songs of grateful love.

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