

Christian Retirement

Part 40

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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AGREEMENT NECESSARY TO COMMUNION

The question of Amos is of practical importance: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" There can be no real communion or pleasing communion, without a similarity of views and disposition.

What can be more opposite than the carnal and the spiritual mind? A spiritually-minded man delights in heavenly things. He views the world through the sacred medium of divine revelation; and beholds it as the abode of sin, as a place of trial, as the valley of the shadow of death. While, therefore, he blesses his heavenly Father for every undeserved mercy, and receives with gratitude the bounties of his providence, he longs for that glorious rest from sin and sorrow, which remains to the people of God. His treasure and heart are in heaven, where joy and happiness fill every ransomed soul in the beatific presence of God and the Lamb. Being born from above, he loves his heavenly Father; being united to Christ by faith, he derives all his strength from him; being under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, he is led into all truth, and made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

As he loves God, so he loves all the children of God. He delights in the company, and sedulously cultivates the friendship of genuine Christians. He can say with David, "I am a companion of those who fear you." "My delight is in the excellent of the earth, and in such as excel in virtue." With expanded views and enlarged heart, he can love all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, though all may not agree with him on minor points of difference. All who follow Christ in simplicity of spirit, and adorn the doctrine of God their Savior, by the purity of their hearts and the holiness of their lives, are hailed by him as brethren, traveling to the heavenly Zion.

The unconverted man is the opposite of all this. He cannot endure to bear religion discoursed upon in his presence. By a frown, a sarcasm, or a significant silence, he soon manifests his displeasure. The people of God are offensive to him. Should some unhappy characters, by their inconsistency or misconduct, dishonor the holy religion of Jesus, he ceases not to hold them up as patterns of the whole fraternity of professing Christians; thus putting the stamp of hypocrisy

upon all, without exception. His manner evidences the exquisitely malignant pleasure which he finds in having so plausible an opportunity of traducing the Gospel, whose pure and self-denying principles his soul abhors.

To him, the world is everything. All his thoughts are exercised either upon the best mode of acquiring wealth, or the most delightful way of spending it. Is he a man of fortune? Much of his time is occupied in ornamenting his grounds, or in the chase. The pleasures of the field, the intricate mazes of political events, the passing news of the day, or the still more uncertain nature of the weather, form his most edifying topics of discourse, except he have a taste for literature; and then, men and books are occasionally canvassed and reviewed.

Is he a man of business? His conversation is filled with subjects connected with his calling, mixed up with all those little incidents of life which compose each passing day. And well would it be, if language awfully pernicious never stained his lips! But, in these worldly circles of business and of pleasure, the value of the soul, the dying love of Jesus, the work of grace upon the heart, all the rich and varied subjects of redemption, are never heard, unless it be to bear the lash of ridicule or the laugh of scorn. How, then, can two such opposite characters walk cordially together? It is impossible. Hence arises the danger of real Christians associating with the people of the world.

Courtesy and kindness are Christian duties to be exercised towards all; but friendship with the world is decidedly repugnant to the spirit of the Gospel. In order to walk amicably together, that is, to enjoy each other's company in any tolerable degree, one party must give way to the other, at least to a certain extent.

The religious man, whose soul is supremely occupied with heavenly things, cannot help making occasional reflections on those topics which so deeply interest his heart. The carnal man, who cannot bear such conversation, must either hear him patiently, and even with seeming complacency; or a disagreement must ensue, which would in a moment destroy all pleasing communion.

But as the men of the world are, in general, the most true to their master, they seldom fail to insinuate that such reflections are unpleasant, and little better than preaching. They think it bearable, because customary, to hear them once a week from the pulpit; but quite intolerable to have such sermons forced upon them in common conversation. Consequently, they endeavor to turn the discourse to subjects more congenial with their taste and inclination.

Here the Christian must either give way, or go away as soon as decorum will permit; since he finds that either he must be in continual dispute, or else be continually making compliances to the injury of his soul.

If, then, it be evident that two cannot walk comfortably and profitably together, except they be agreed on the most important of all subjects—the salvation of the soul, through faith in a crucified Redeemer; what must we think of those professors of the Gospel, who are constantly mixing with the world, not so much from duty as from choice; not so much through necessity, as for pleasure? Are they never tempted to make sinful compliances, that they and their party may be agreed?

Do they never sit for hours to listen to the vainest and most trifling discourse, while the dread of putting the salutary check to such idle words seals up their lips in silence? Have they never encouraged by a smile some witty jest upon religious characters; or felt the blush of sinful shame glowing on their cheeks, when sarcastically called a Methodist or a saint? Let conscience give the right answer.

The end of too many such unguarded professors lamentably proves, that they have fallen into these snares of the devil. Rushing into temptation, without a call of duty arising from filial or conjugal relationship, they grieve the Holy Spirit, wound their own consciences, imbibe by degrees the spirit of the world, get more and more assimilated to its taste and manners, until at last they lose all relish for spiritual enjoyments, and, like the apostate Julian, sit down in the seat of the scornful. "Remember Lot's wife," is the warning voice of Jesus. "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present evil world," is the lamentation of Paul.

Some may condemn these cautionary remarks as uncharitable; but those who take Scripture for their guide, and experience for their teacher, well know the truth of these assertions. Surely, then, we may say with David, "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he does meditate day and night." There are many fearful passages in the word of God to guard Christians against the love, the deceits, and the allurements of the world.

We are, alas! too apt, even after we know better things, to be carried away by material objects. Any little trifle can divert the attention, even when the mind is engaged about heavenly things, without great watchfulness and self government; and these holy habits are only to be attained by frequent and fervent prayer. The world, and the things of the world, press upon us at all points. Our daily avocations, yes, our most lawful enjoyments, have need to be narrowly watched, lest they insensibly steal upon our affections, and draw away our hearts from God.

A true Christian living in the world is like a ship sailing on the ocean. It is not the ship being in the water which will sink it, but the water getting into the ship. So, in like manner, the Christian is not ruined by living in the world, which he must necessarily do while he remains in the body; but by the world living in him. The world in the heart has ruined millions of immortal souls. How careful are mariners

in guarding against leakage, lest the water, entering into the vessel, should by imperceptible degrees cause it to sink. And ought not the Christian to watch and pray, lest Satan and the world should find some unguarded inlet to his heart; and thus, by entering in, bring him to destruction both of body and soul?

Let no one dare to be negligent, because salvation is all of grace; since this very salvation consists in no small degree in a deliverance from pride, carelessness, and presumption; and in the implantation of holy fear, circumspection, and humility.

The voice of wisdom says, "He that despises small things, shall fall by little and little." "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." But why give such exhortations, if no danger is to be dreaded? Every caution, every warning of Scripture, inculcates the necessity of godly fear. Thus I learn from the word of truth and from daily experience, that "no man can serve God and money;" that there can be no fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness; no agreement between the temple of God and idols; that a believer has no part with an infidel; and, consequently, that the children of God must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers: how, then, can two walk together except they be agreed? The blessed Savior gave himself for us to deliver us from this present evil world. He declared to his disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Hence it follows, that "they who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution;" for, said our Lord, "if they have hated me, they will also hate you." And so we find it; for, as he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. There must, therefore, of necessity, be drawn a broad line of separation between the true church of Christ and the world; this distinction must be plain and visible; not by needless singularity of dress or manner; not by sanctimonious looks or drawling tones; but by humility of mind; by kindness of spirit; by purity of conversation; by unwearied efforts to do good, even to the evil and unthankful; in a word, by a faithful exhibition of the Spirit of Christ in all the holy fruits of righteousness, goodness, and truth.

Thus true Christians must come out and are separate from the world in its principles, spirit, and practice; for the word of God unequivocally declares, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

"Oh blessed Savior! preserve my heart from the pollutions of the world; from the influence and example of worldly men. Defend and shield me by your grace from sinful compliances; stop all the avenues to evil. May holy affections and heavenly desires fill my soul, that worldly desires may have no room to enter in. While I am in the world, Oh! grant that I may not be of the world. While my hands are employed about the necessary affairs of this life, may my heart be fully fixed on the next. While I use the world, preserve me from abusing it; and through the

riches of your grace enable me to live in such a weanedness from it, and nonconformity to it, that when death shall bear me hence, I may walk with you in white in your kingdom of light and glory."

Sing, Oh you saints, in sweet accord,
The wonders of your dying Lord;
While journeying homeward, sweetly sing
The praises of your heavenly King.

To you the scepter he extends;
To you a willing audience tends;
For you he died—for you he bled,
And dwelt in lodgings of the dead.

With joy his work of love survey,
As you approach the eternal day;
Behold the beauties of his face;
Admiring, own his matchless grace.

Though angry storms should seem to lower,
And over your head the deluge pour;
Yet Jesus, by one gracious smile,
Can even the darkest hour beguile.

Soon shall your painful conflicts cease,
Soon shall you reach the realms of peace,
Where Jesus will his people own;
Where storms and tempests are unknown.

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