

## Christian Retirement

### Part 42

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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#### **On the Importance of Self-knowledge**

And did Jesus say to his disciples, "you know not what manner of spirit you are of," when, in their zeal for the honor of their Master, they wanted fire to descend upon the unbelieving Samaritans? Then, Oh my soul, look well to yourself! Search deep into your principles of action, the ground of your obedience. Weigh well your motives in the balance of your sanctuary. Examine your intentions. Behold and see what manner of spirit you are of. Among the twelve disciples, I find a traitor. Among the early Christians, an Ananias and Sapphira. In the judgment day, many will produce their wonderful works, to whom Jesus will say, "I never knew you." How important, then, is self-knowledge, the result of divine teaching and self-examination!

In the common business of life, those thrive best who examine most into their concerns. When a tradesman neglects his accounts, he will soon have a painful account to give. Negligence and bankruptcy are like substance and shadow; the latter follows closely upon the former. These remarks are still more important when transferred to our eternal concerns.

Oh! then, before it be too late, give me grace, blessed Redeemer, to examine well what manner of spirit I am of, lest I should remain in error until that awful period, when, standing before your dread tribunal, every spirit shall be made manifest of what sort it is.

With all sincerity of heart, I would inquire:

1. When I attend the ordinances of the Gospel, in what spirit do I attend them? Do I come into the house of God as a poor beggar would go to the dwelling of the rich, for bread to eat and clothing to put on? Is it the bread of life and the garment of salvation, which I earnestly crave at the throne of grace? Do I go as a poor debtor who has nothing to pay—as a guilty criminal, on whom the sentence of death has been passed, that my debts may be canceled through the blood of Jesus, and my soul delivered from the curse of the law? Do I go, as one who is full of a sore disease, to the great Physician for health and cure, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, to renovate my corrupted nature?

Do I go to the house of God, as my exceeding joy, to hear the glad tidings of salvation, to learn the way of righteousness, and to sing the praises of the Lord? Or do I go in a spirit of formality, for the sake of being thought religious; from mere custom and habit, and in a spirit devoid of devotion and love?

2. When I give to the poor, in what spirit do I give? Have I considered all my property as a trust committed to my care by the Almighty Proprietor of the universe, to whom I must one day give a strict account of my stewardship? Do I view the poor as the Lord's bankers; remembering who has said, he that has pity on the poor; lends unto the Lord, and that which he has given, will he pay again? Do I esteem the pious poor, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him, as brethren, whose necessities it is not only my duty, but my pleasure to relieve, consistently with the claims and necessities of my own family?

Do I relieve them for the sake of Christ, because they belong to him, with a single eye to his glory; and as unobserved by others as circumstances will admit? Or do I relieve the poor through public institutions only that my name may be enrolled, and my beneficence made known to the world; thus loving the praise of men, more than the praise of God?

Are my charities confined to the body; or do I seek the spiritual good, as well as the temporal benefit of my fellow-creatures?

3. When I discourse among religious friends upon the truths of the Gospel, in what spirit do I discourse upon them? Is it from a heart-felt conviction of the sweetness, richness, and vastness of these mysteries? Is it with a view to mutual edification, to provoke one another to love and to good works, to stimulate to exertion in the cause of Christ, and to excite others to greater usefulness? Is it from a pure desire that Christ may be glorified; that his name may be honored, and his righteousness exalted?

Is it from a principle of love, that I converse with others on the preciousness of Jesus, the work of the Spirit, and the joys of heaven? Or do I speak of these things in a spirit of spiritual pride, to make a display of my religious knowledge, to be thought wise, and to be esteemed a saint?

4. When I perform the daily duties of my worldly calling, in what spirit do I perform them? Is it with a view to glorify God in them, and to obtain an honest livelihood, through the divine blessing on my labors, that I may thereby provide for my family, and have enough to give to him that is in need?

Or is it from a covetous desire of wealth for its own sake, that I may vie in splendor with my richer neighbors; have a greater opportunity of gratifying my pride; of gaining the appellation of opulent; and raising my family in the world?

5. When the religion of Jesus is traduced, and the Gospel dispensation derided by carnal men, in what spirit do I hear these things? Do I pray that the Lord would convince them of their errors, and convert them by his grace? Do I labor to do them good, if opportunity will permit, by speaking a word for Christ, and exhorting them in a spirit of meekness and love?

Or, with the disciples of old, do I secretly pray for vengeance to overtake them, like the enemies of Elisha; forgetting that I am a partaker of the same evil nature with themselves; and if made to differ in any measure, most humbly, yet gracefully acknowledge with the apostle, "By the grace of God, I am what I am?"

6. When reviled for righteousness sake, in what spirit do I treat my persecutors? Do I return good for evil—blessing for cursing—kindness for abuse? Do I bear them on my heart before God in prayer; and earnestly implore, like my passionate Savior when nailed to the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?" Or do I resent their injuries by sourness of temper, irritation of spirit, retaliation of wrongs; returning, when possible, evil for evil?

"Almighty Savior! you who are the author and finisher of faith, give me a right spirit; a purity of intention; a principle of love; that all my thoughts, words, and actions may be regulated according to your will. With true humility of heart, may I ever study to advance the spiritual welfare of my fellow-creatures, by exhortations, prayers, influence, and example. Do not allow the enemy of souls to fill me with high notions of my own excellence; but ever keep me low in my own eyes. Preserve me from spiritual pride, the bane of all true godliness. In the lowly attitude of deep contrition, may I daily come to your bleeding cross for renewed forgiveness and renewed strength. There may love and gratitude fill my heart, until, passing through the gates of death into the celestial city, my soul shall be forever dedicated to your service and glory."

Ah! Who can tell the joy,  
Which reigns within the breast,  
Where heavenly dews of grace descend,  
And Jesus is the guest.

Like some sweet summer rose,  
It sheds a fragrance round  
Though still, alas! the noxious thorn  
Of nature may be found.

A bright celestial day  
Pours light and warmth within  
Yet still a cloud too often obscures  
Its beams, through inbred sin.

Here is the seat of war,  
Where sin and Satan rage;  
The conqueror is the dying saint,  
Who, fighting, quits the stage.

Blest Jesus, to my soul  
Your grace and strength impart;  
Til, clothed in perfect righteousness,  
I see you as you art.

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