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A
SERIOUS CALL
TO A
Devout *and* Holy Life

CHAPTER I

Concerning the Nature and Extent of Christian Devotion.

DEVOTION is neither *private* nor *publick* Prayer, but Prayers, whether private or publick, are particular parts or instances of Devotion. Devotion signifies a life given, or *devoted*, to God.

He therefore is the devout man, who lives no longer to his own *will*, or the *way* and *spirit* of the world, but to the sole will of God, who considers God in everything, who serves God in everything, who makes all the parts of his *common* life, parts of piety, by doing everything in the name of God, and under such rules as are conformable to his Glory.

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, that we are only to pray in *such a manner*, for *such things*, and *such ends* as are suitable to his Glory.

Now let anyone but find out the reason why he is to be thus strictly pious in his prayers, and he will find the same as strong a reason to be as strictly pious in all the other parts of his life. For there is not the least shadow of a reason, why we should make God the *rule* and *measure* of our prayers, why we should then look *wholly* unto him, and pray according to his will; but what equally proves it necessary for us to look *wholly* unto God, and make him the *rule* and *measure* of all the other actions of our life. For any ways of life, any employment of our talents, whether of our *parts*, our *time* or *money*, that is not *strictly* according to the will of God, that is not for such ends as are suitable to his Glory, are as great *absurdities* and *failings*, as prayers that are not according to the will of God. For 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 other reason for this, but that our lives may be of the same nature, full of the same *wisdom*, *holiness* and *heavenly* tempers, that we may *live* unto God in the *same spirit* that we pray unto him. Were it not our strict duty to live by *reason*, to devote *all* the actions of our lives to God, were it 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*. Nay, such prayers would be absurdities, they would be like Prayers for *wings*, when it was no part of our duty to *fly*.

As sure therefore as there is any wisdom in praying for the Spirit of God, so sure is it, that we are to make that Spirit the rule of *all* our actions; as sure as it is our duty to look *wholly* unto God in our Prayers, so sure is it, that it is our duty to live *wholly* unto God in our lives. But we can no more be said to live unto God, unless we live unto him in all the *ordinary* actions of our life, unless he be the rule and measure of all our ways, than we can be said to pray unto God, unless our Prayers look *wholly* unto him. So that unreasonable and absurd ways of life, whether in *labour* or *diversion*, whether they consume our *time*, or our *money*, are like unreasonable and absurd Prayers and are as truly an offence unto God.

'Tis for want of knowing, or at least considering this, that we see such a *mixture* of Ridicule in the lives of many People. You see them strict as to some *times* and *places* of Devotion, but when the Service of the *Church* is over, they are but like those that seldom or never come there. In their way of Life, their manner of spending their *time* and *money*, in their *cares* and *fears*, in their *pleasures* and *indulgences*, in their labour and diversions, they are like the rest of the world. This makes the loose part of the world generally make a jest of those that are *devout*, because they see their Devotion goes no farther than their *Prayers*, and that when they are over, they live no more unto God, till the time of Prayers returns again; but live by the same *humour* and *fancy*, and in as full an enjoyment of all the *follies* of life as other People. This is the reason why 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*.

Julius is very fearful of missing Prayers; all the Parish supposes *Julius* to be sick, if he is not at *Church*. But if you was to ask him why he spends the rest of his time by *humour* and

chance? why he is a companion of the silliest People in their most *silly pleasures*? why he is ready for every impertinent entertainment and diversion. If you was to ask him why there is no amusement too trifling to please him? why is he busy at all *balls* and *assemblies*? why he gives himself up to an *idle gossiping* conversation? why he lives in foolish friendships and fondness for particular persons, that neither want nor deserve any particular kindness? why he allows himself in foolish hatreds and resentments against particular persons, without considering that he is to love everybody as himself? if you ask him why he never puts his *conversation*, his *time*, and *fortune*, under the rules of Religion, *Julius* has no more to say for himself, than the most disorderly Person. For the whole tenor of Scripture lies as directly against such a life, as against *debauchery* and *intemperance*: He that lives in such a course of *idleness* and *folly*, lives no more according to the Religion of Jesus Christ, than he that lives in gluttony and intemperance.

If a man was to tell *Julius* that there was no occasion for so much constancy at Prayers, and that he might, without any harm to himself, neglect the service of the Church, as the generality of People do, *Julius* would think such a one to be no Christian, and that he ought to avoid his company. But if a person only tells him, that he may live as the generality of the world does, that he may enjoy himself as others do, that he may spend his *time* and *money* as People of fashion do, that he may conform to the follies and frailties of the generality, and gratify his tempers and passions as most People do, *Julius* never suspects that man to want a Christian spirit, or that he is doing the devil's work.

And yet if *Julius* was to read all the New Testament from the beginning to the end, he would find his course of life condemn'd in every page of it.

And indeed there cannot anything be imagined more absurd in itself, than *wise* and *sublime*, and *heavenly* Prayers added to a life of *vanity* and *folly*, where neither *labour* nor *diversions* neither *time* nor *money*, are under the direction of the wisdom and heavenly tempers of our Prayers. If we were to see a man pretending to act *wholly* with regard to God in everything that he did, that would neither spend time nor money, or take any labour or diversion, but so far as he could act according to strict principles of reason and piety, and yet at the same time neglect *all Prayer*, whether publick or private, should we not be amaz'd at such a man, and wonder how he could have so much folly along with so much religion?

Yet this is as reasonable as for any person to pretend to strictness in *Devotion*, to be careful of observing *times* and *places* of Prayer, and yet letting the rest of his life, his *time* and *labour*, his *talents* and *money* be disposed of without any regard to strict rules of Piety and Devotion. For it is as great an absurdity to suppose holy Prayers, and divine Petitions, without an holiness of life suitable to them, as to suppose an holy and divine life without Prayers.

Let anyone therefore think, how easily he could confute a man that pretended to great strictness of Life without Prayer, and the same Arguments will as plainly confute another, that pretends to *strictness* of *Prayer*, without carrying the same strictness into every other part of life. For to be weak and foolish in spending our *time* and *fortune*, is no greater a mistake, than to be weak and foolish in relation to our *Prayers*. And to allow ourselves in any ways of life that neither are, nor can be offer'd to God, is the same irreligion as to neglect our Prayers, or use them in such a manner, as makes them an offering unworthy of God.

The short of the matter is this, either Reason and Religion prescribe *rules* and *ends* to 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 necessary to worship God. For if Religion teaches us anything concerning *eating* and *drinking*, or spending our *time* and *money*, if it teaches us how we are to *use* and *contemn* the world, if it tells us what tempers we are to have in *common* life, how we are to be disposed towards all people, how we are to behave towards the *sick*, the *poor*, the *old* and *destitute*; if it tells us whom we are to treat with a *particular* love, whom we are to regard with a particular esteem; if it tells us how we are to treat our enemies, and how we are to mortify and deny ourselves, he must be very weak, that can think these parts of Religion are not to be observ'd with as much *exactness*, as any doctrines that relate to Prayers.

It is very observable, that there is not one command in all the Gospel for *Publick Worship*; and perhaps it is a duty that is least insisted upon in Scripture of any other. The frequent attendance at it is never so much as mention'd in all the New Testament. Whereas that *Religion* or *Devotion* which is to govern the *ordinary actions* of our life, is to be found in almost every verse of Scripture. Our blessed Saviour and his Apostles are wholly taken up in Doctrines that relate to *common life*. They call us to renounce the world, and differ in every *temper* and *way* of life, from the spirit and way of the world. To renounce all its goods, to fear none of its evils, to reject its joys, and have no value for its happiness. To be as new *born babes*, that are born into a new state of things, to live as *Pilgrims* in spiritual watching, in holy fear, and heavenly aspiring after another life. To take up our daily cross, to deny ourselves, to profess the blessedness of mourning, to seek the blessedness of poverty of spirit. To

forsake the pride and vanity of Riches, to take no thought for the morrow, to live in the profoundest State of Humility, to rejoice in worldly sufferings. To reject the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; to bear injuries, to forgive and bless our enemies, and to love mankind as God loveth them. To give up our whole hearts and affections to God, and strive to enter through the strait gate into a life of eternal Glory.

This is the *common Devotion* which our Blessed Saviour taught, in order to make it the *common life* of all Christians. Is it not therefore exceeding strange, that People should place so much piety in the attendance upon publick worship, concerning which there is not one precept of our Lord s to be found, and yet neglect these common duties of our *ordinary* life, which are commanded in every Page of the Gospel? I call these duties the devotion of our common life, because if they are to be practis'd, they must be made parts of our common life, they can have no place any where else.

If *contempt* of the world, and *heavenly* affection, is a necessary temper of Christians, it is necessary that this temper appear in the whole course of their lives, in their manner of using the world, because it can have no place any where else.

If *self-denial* be a condition of salvation, all that would be saved, must make it a part of their *ordinary* life. If *humility* be a Christian duty, then the common life of a Christian, is to be a constant course of humility in all its kinds. If *poverty of spirit* be necessary, it must be the spirit and temper 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 common life a visible exercise and demonstration of that love. If *content* and *thankfulness*, if the patient bearing of evil be duties to God, they

are the Duties of every Day, and in every circumstance of our life. If we are to be wise and holy as the new-born sons of God, we can no otherwise be so, but by renouncing everything that is foolish and vain in every part of our common life. If we are to be in Christ *new creatures*, we must show that we are so, by having new ways of living in the world. If we are to *follow* Christ, it must be in our common way of spending every day.

Thus it is in all the virtues and holy tempers of Christianity, they are not *ours* unless they be the virtues and tempers of our *ordinary life*. So that Christianity is so far from leaving us to live in the common ways of life, conforming to the folly of customs, and gratifying the passions and tempers which the spirit of the world delights in, it is so far from indulging us in any of these things, that 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 common actions of our life. If our common life is not a common course of *humility, self-denial, renunciation* of the world, *poverty* of spirit, and *heavenly affection*, we don't live the lives of Christians.

But yet though it is thus plain, that this and this alone is Christianity, an uniform open and visible practice of all these virtues, yet it is as plain, that there is little or nothing of this to be found, even amongst the better sort of People. You see them often at Church, and pleas'd with fine preachers, but look into their lives, and you see them just the same sort of People as others are, that make no pretences to devotion. The difference that you find betwixt them, is only the difference of their natural tempers. They have the same *taste* of the world, the same worldly *cares*, and *fears*, and *joys*, they have the same *turn* of mind, equally *vain* in their desires. You see the same fondness for *state* and *equipage*, 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* spirit, the same *fondness* for diversions, the same idle dispositions, and vain ways of spending their time in visiting and conversation, as the rest of the world, that make no pretences to devotion.

I don't mean this comparison betwixt People seemingly good and profest *rakes*, but betwixt People of sober lives. Let us take an instance in two modest Women: let it be supposed, that one of them is careful of times of Devotion, and observes them thro' a sense of duty, and that the other has no hearty concern about it, but is at Church seldom or often, just as it happens. Now it is a very easy thing to see this difference betwixt these persons. But when you have seen this, can you find any farther difference betwixt them? Can you find that their *common life* is of a different kind? Are not the *tempers*, and *customs*, and *manners* of the one, of the same kind as of the other? Do they live as if they be longed to different worlds, had different views in their heads, and different rules and measures of all their actions? Have they not the same *goods* and *evils*, are they not pleased and displeased in the *same manner*, and for 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? Does the one live in pleasure, delighting her self in *show* or *dress*, and the other live in *self-denial* and *mortification*, renouncing everything that looks like vanity either of *person*, *dress*, or *carriage*? Does the one follow *publick diversions*, and trifle away her time in *idle* visits, and *corrupt* conversation, and does the other study all the arts of improving her time, living in Prayer and Watching, and such good works, as may make all her time turn to her advantage, and be placed to

her account at the last day? Is the one careless of expence, and glad to be able to adorn her self with every costly ornament of dress, and does the other consider her fortune as a talent given her by God, which is to be improv'd religiously, and no more to be spent in vain and needless ornaments, than it is to be buried in the earth?

Where must you look, to find one Person of Religion differing in this manner, from another that has none? And yet if they do not differ in these things which are here related, can it with any sense be said, the one is a *good* Christian, and the other not?

Take another instance amongst the men. *Leo* has a great deal of good nature, has kept, what they call, *good* company, hates everything that is *false* and *base*, is very generous and brave to his friends, but has concern'd himself so little with Religion, that he hardly knows the difference betwixt a *Jew* and a *Christian*.

Eusebius, on the other hand, has had early impressions of Religion, and buys books of Devotion. He can talk of all the *feasts* and *fasts* of the Church, and knows the *names* of most men that have been eminent for Piety. You never hear him swear, or make a loose jest, and when he talks of Religion he talks of it, as of a matter of the last concern.

Here you see, that one person has Religion enough, according to the way of the world, to be reckon'd a *pious Christian*, and the other is so far from all appearance of Religion, that he may fairly be reckon'd a *Heathen*; and yet if you look into their *common life*, if you examine their *chief* and *ruling* tempers in the greatest articles of life, or the greatest doctrines of Christianity, you will find the least difference imaginable.

Consider them with regard to the use of the world, because that is what everybody can see.

Now to have right *notions* and *tempers* with relation to this world, is as essential to Religion, as to have right notions of God. And it is as possible for a man to worship a *Crocodile*, and yet be a *pious man*, as to have his affections set upon this world, and yet be a *good Christian*.

But now if you consider *Leo* and *Eusebius* in this respect, you will find them exactly alike, *seeking, using, and enjoying* all that can be got in this world in the same manner, and for the same ends. You will find that *riches, prosperity, pleasures, indulgences, state, equipage, and honour* are just as much the happiness of *Eusebius* as they are of *Leo*. And yet if Christianity has not changed a man's mind and temper with relation to these things, what can we say that it has done for him?

For if the doctrines of Christianity were practised, they would make a man as different from other People as to all *worldly tempers, sensual pleasures, and the pride of life*, as a *wise man* is different from a natural; it would be as easie a thing to know a Christian by his *outward course* of life, as it is now difficult to find any body that lives it. For it is notorious that Christians are now not only like other men in their *frailties* and *infirmities*, this might be in some degree excusable, but the complaint is, they are like *Heathens* in all the main and *chief articles* of their lives. They enjoy the world, and live every day in the same tempers, and the same designs, and the same indulgences as they did who knew not God, nor of any happiness in another life. Everybody that is capable of any reflexion, must have observed, that this is generally the state even of devout People, whether men or women. You may see them different from other People so far as to *times* and *places* of Prayer, but generally like the rest of the world in all the other parts of their lives. That is, adding *Christian Devotion* to an *Heathen* life: I have the authority of

our Blessed Saviour for this remark, where he says, *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.* But if to be thus affected even with the necessary things of this life, shows that we are not yet of a *Christian Spirit*, but are like the *Heathens*, surely to enjoy the vanity and folly of the world as they did, to be like them in the main chief tempers of our lives, in self-love and indulgence, in sensual pleasures and diversions, in the vanity of dress, the love of show and greatness, or any other gaudy distinctions of fortune, is a much greater sign of an *Heathen* temper. And consequently they who add Devotion to such a life, must be said to *pray* as Christians, but live as *Heathens*.

CHAPTER II

An Enquiry into the Reason, why the generality of Christians fall so far short of the Holiness and Devotion of Christianity.



T MAY now be reasonably enquired, how it comes to pass, that the lives even of the better sort of People are thus strangely contrary to the principles of Christianity.

But before I give a direct answer to this, I desire it may also be enquir'd, how it comes to pass that *swearing* is so common a vice amongst Christians? It is indeed not yet so common amongst *women*, as it is amongst men. But amongst men this sin is so common, that perhaps there are more than *two* in *three* that are guilty of it through the whole course of their lives, swearing *more* or *less*, just as it happens, some constantly, others only now and then, as it were by chance. Now I ask how comes it, that two in three of the