

Being Christians on Weekdays

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How to carry our religion into all parts of our life, is the question which perplexes many of us. It is not hard to be good on the quiet Sundays, when all the holy influences of the sanctuary and of the Christian home are about us. It is not hard, in such an atmosphere, to think of God, and to yield ourselves to the impact of the divine Spirit. It is easy then to accept the promises and allow them to entwine themselves about our weakness, like a mother's arms about feeble infancy. Most of us have little trouble with doubts and fears, or with temptations and trials, while sitting in the peaceful retreats into which the Sunday leads us.

Our trouble is in carrying this sweet, holy, restful life—out into the weekday world of toil, anxiety, strife and pain. Ofttimes with Monday morning—we lose all the Sunday calm, and resume again the old experience of restless distraction. The restraints of godliness lose their power, and the enthusiasm for holy living, so strong yesterday, dies out in the midst of the world's chilling influences, and we drop back into the old bad habits, and creep along again in the old dusty ways.

The Sunday has lifted us up for a day—but has no power to hold us up in sustained elevation of soul. The duties we saw so clearly, and so firmly determined to do, while sitting in the sanctuary, we do not feel pressing upon us today with half the urgency of yesterday. Our high resolves and our excellent intentions have proved only like the morning cloud and the early dew. So our religion becomes a sort of luxury to us—a bright unreal dream only which for one day in seven, breaks into the worldliness and the self-seeking of our humdrum lives, giving us a period of elevation—but no permanent uplifting.

It is only as when one climbs up out of a valley into the pure air of a mountaintop for one hour, and then creeps down again and toils on as before, amid the mists and in the deep shadows—but carrying none of the mountain's inspiration or of the mountain's splendor with him back into the valley.

Yet such a life has missed altogether, the meaning of the religion of Christ—which is not designed to furnish merely a system of Sunday oases across the desert of life, with nothing between but sand and glare. Both its precepts and its blessings—are for all the days. He who worships God only on Sundays, and then ignores him or disobeys him on weekdays—really has no true religion. We are perpetually in danger of bisecting our life, calling one portion of it religious and the other secular. Young people, when they enter the church, are earnestly urged to Christian duty, and the impression made upon them is that Christian duty means reading the Bible and praying every day, attending upon the public means of grace, taking active part in some of the associations, missionary or charitable, which belong to the Church, and in private and personal ways striving to bring others to Christ.

Now, as important as these things are, they are by no means all the religious duties of any young Christian, and it is most fallacious teaching that emphasizes them as though they were all.

Religion recognizes no bisecting into sacred and secular. "Whether therefore you eat, or drink—or whatever you do—do all to the glory of God." It is just as much a part of Christian duty—to do one's weekday work well—as it is to pray well. "I must be about my Father's business," said Jesus in the dawn of youth; and what do we find him doing after this recognition of his duty? Not preaching nor teaching—but taking up the common duties of common life and putting all his soul into them! He found the Father's business in his earthly home, in being a dutiful child subject to his parents, in being a diligent pupil in the village school, and later in being a conscientious carpenter. He did not find religion too spiritual, too transcendental, for weekdays. His devotion to God—did not take him out of his natural human relationships into any realm of mere sentiment; it only made him all the more loyal to the duties of his place in life.

We ought to learn the lesson. True religion is intensely practical. Only so far as it dominates one's life—is it real. We must get the commandments down from the Sinaitic glory amid which they were first engraved on stone by the finger of God—and give them a place in the hard, dusty paths of earthly toil and struggle. We must get them off the tables of stone—and have them written on the walls of our own hearts! We must bring the Golden Rule down from its bright setting in the teaching of our Lord—and get it wrought into our daily, actual life.

We say in creed, confession and prayer—that we love God; and he tells us, if we do—to show it by loving our fellow-men, since professed love to God which is not thus manifested, is not love at all. We talk about our consecration; if there is anything genuine in consecration, it bends our wills to God's, it leads us to loyalty that costs, it draws our lives to lowly ministry.

"One secret act of self-denial," says a thoughtful writer, "one sacrifice of selfish inclination to duty" is worth all the mere good thoughts, warm feelings, passionate prayers, in which idle people indulge themselves."

We are too apt to imagine, that holiness consists in mere good feeling toward God. It does not! It consists in obedience in heart and life to the divine requirements. To be holy is, first, to be set apart for God and devoted to God's service: "The Lord has set apart him who is godly for himself." But if we are set apart for God in this sense, it necessarily follows that we must live for God. We belong wholly to him, and any use of our life in any other service is sacrilege, as if one would rob the very altar of its smoking sacrifice to gratify one's common hunger. Our hands are God's and can fitly be used only in doing his work; our feet are God's and may be employed only in walking in his ways and running his errands; our lips are God's and should speak words only that honor him and bless others; our hearts are God's and must not be profaned by thoughts and affections that are not pure.

True holiness is no vague sentiment it is intensely practical. It is nothing less than the bringing of every thought and feeling and act into obedience to Christ! We are quite in danger of leaving out the element of obedience, in our conception of Christian living. If we do this, our religion loses its strength and grandeur and becomes weak, nerveless and forceless. As one has said, "Let us be careful how we cull from the gospel such portions as are congenial, forge God's signature to the excerpt, and apply the fiction as a delusive drug to our violated consciences. The beauties and graces of the gospel are all flung upon a background of requirements as inflexible as Sinai, and the granite. Christ built even his glory, out of obedience."

Now, it is the weekday life, under the stress and the strain of temptation; far more than the Sunday life, beneath the gentle warmth of its favoring conditions which really puts our religion to the test and shows what power there is in it. Not how well we sing and pray, nor how devoutly we worship on Sunday but how well we live, how loyally we obey the commandments, how faithfully we attend to all our duties, on the other days tell what manner of Christians we really are.

Nor can we be faithful toward God and ignore our human relationships. "It is impossible," says one, "for us to live in fellowship with God without holiness in all the duties of life. These things act and react on each other. Without a diligent and faithful obedience to the calls and claims of others upon us our religious profession is simply dead! We cannot go from strife, breaches and angry words to God. Selfishness, an imperious will, lack of sympathy with the sufferings and sorrows of other men, neglect of charitable offices, suspicions, hard censures of those with whom our lot is cast will miserably darken our own hearts, and hide the face of God from us."

The one word which defines and describes all relative duties is the word LOVE. Many people understand religion to include honesty, truthfulness, justice, purity but do not think of it as including just as peremptorily: unselfishness, thoughtfulness, kindness, patience, good temper and courtesy. We are commanded to put away lying but in the same paragraph, and with equal urgency, we are enjoined to let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and evil-speaking be put away, and to be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another. The law of love in all its most delicate shades of application to attitude, word, act and manner is the law of all true Christian living.

Thus the religion of the Sunday, like a precious perfume, must pervade all the days of the week. Its spirit of holiness and reverence, must flow down into all the paths of every-day life. Its voices of hope and joy, must become inspirations in all our cares and toils. Its exhortations, must be the guide of hand and foot and finger, in the midst of all trial and temptation. Its words of comfort, must be as lamps to burn and shine in sick-rooms and in the chambers of sorrow. Its visions of spiritual beauty, must be translated into reality in conduct and character.

So, in all our life, the Sunday's lessons must be lived out during the week! The patterns of heavenly things shown in the mount must be wrought into forms of reality and act and disposition and character. The love of God which so warms our hearts as we think of it must flow out in love to men. We must be Christians on Monday as well as on the Sunday. Our religion must touch every part of our life and transform it all into the beauty of holiness.