

EVERY-DAY RELIGION

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Colossians 3:23.

In one of his essays Emerson said, "Hitch your wagon to a star." On first thought, there does not seem to be any connection between a star shining in unfading splendor in the sky above and the homely wagon of the farmer which has to carry many loads. How can they be linked together? What did Emerson mean by his strange words? To him the star was the emblem of a lofty purpose or a splendid motive. The wagon was the emblem of commonplace duties, the humble toils and tasks with which the lives of most people are taken up. He meant that, even if it is a wagon you are driving, even if it is a lowly duty that you have to do, you should link it with a splendid aim, and do it heartily with an uplifting motive.

Centuries earlier, while writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul had expressed that idea much more effectively. He said, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." It was Paul's habit to solve the problems related to conduct by the largest principles. He did not keep his theology and his ethics in separate water tight compartments, and refuse to allow them to communicate with each other. He used the greatest truths to regulate the smallest duties. For that reason, he admonished the performance of the lowliest duties with an uplifting motive. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord."

This is an actual possibility for every one who knows the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever we do, we can and we should do it for Him. Rich or poor, wise or otherwise, the vision of Christ is open to all of us. To every soul that has an experimental knowledge of Jesus as Saviour and Lord there is the possibility of doing everything for Him.

In our text Paul was speaking to slaves, who must have felt their condition to be irksome and degrading, but he applied a principle which transformed it altogether. They were to feel and act as servants of Christ, which they were. This principle is of far-reaching application. All of us are to serve Christ by faithfully discharging all the duties of life so as to please Him.

It is well for us to remember that the interests of Christ are not limited, as we often suppose, to church affairs or to spiritual matters. Lord Melbourne, the first Prime Minister of Queen Victoria, is said to have been very angry on hearing what is called "a practical sermon," and on leaving the church spoke out indignantly, "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade private life." What offended him is really the glory of Christianity. It does invade the private and every-day life, claims as the sphere of its rule whatever men may think or say or do, sets itself to honor the humble, to lift the degraded, to sanctify the secular, and to glorify all the tasks of men. The so-called Christianity which can be kept out of the private life is certainly not the Christianity of Christ. His Word teaches us to do whatever we do as unto the Lord.

Paul repeatedly proclaimed the importance of Christianity in the ordinary affairs of our lives. We should bring our Christianity into our every-day conversation. If there is anything good, glad, beautiful, and important about it, we should discuss it. We ought to bring it into our every-day employments. A religion that is not good in one place is not worth anything in another place. We also need to bring it into our every-day trials. For severe losses, for bereavement, and for trouble that shocks like an earthquake and blasts like a storm, we prescribe religious consolation; but for the small annoyances, how much of the grace of God do you apply?

Furthermore, we must bring Christianity into our every-day blessings. Every day ought to be a thanksgiving day for each of us. But, so often, we fail to recognize

the common mercies of life. We have to see a blind man being led by his dog before we begin to think of what a grand thing it is to have good eyesight. We have to see someone hobbling on a crutch, or someone with an empty sleeve pinned up before we think of what a grand thing God did for us when He gave us full use of healthy limbs. We are so stupid that nothing but the misfortunes of others can really make us truly conscious of our numerous blessings. How many of us thank God for water, food, and air.? We take these things for granted. But, suppose God should withhold these blessings from us! Can it be that you have enjoyed these and numerous other blessings all through the years, and as yet have never accepted Christ as your Saviour and given your heart and life to Him?

We are impressed with the necessity of commending our faith by our daily conduct. Christianity is not only something to be believed, but it is something that must be practiced. In fact, belief itself is in order to practice. "Faith without works is dead." It is useless to know all about the art of walking unless we actually walk.

We are all affected by the way in which the world looks at the various tasks and stations of men. Humble occupations are thought to be without honor. There is a strong temptation to fall into the habit of doing them without any uplifting motive. It does not seem to matter whether we do them well or not. No one, we complain, takes any interest in them. When we say that we have forgotten the Lord Jesus.

It is said that the wife of President Garfield was at one time heavily burdened with the thought of the uselessness of her life. It was entirely occupied with the commonplace duties of the home. She could see the dignity of the public duties which fell to the lot of her husband, but she did not see any dignity or honor in the trivial round and common tasks with which she was occupied. At last the thought struck her: "This is really my work. Somebody must attend to the cleaning and the cooking, and if God has imposed these duties upon me, can I not present them as an offering to Him?" That thought brought peace and joy into her life, and ended all her feelings of uselessness. We should remember always that the ordinary tasks of ordinary people are of interest and importance to Christ, and therefore they should be of interest and importance to us. If we can do them for Him, we can please Him as well as a king, who rules an empire with the same motive. It is the motive that matters.

Christ is interested in the most common acts of our daily lives. This fact is not stated definitely in our text, but it underlies the verse and gives its words their force. A simple illustration will make this plain. A boy at school has certain unwelcome tasks to perform. Their uncongeniality makes it hard for him to give to them the necessary concentration of mind. His teacher perceives this, and in order to simulate him says: "Work at them heartily, my boy, for it will please your father to see them well done." Provided that the lad has a sympathetic father, the motive is a powerful one; but if the opposite is true, the appeal fails altogether. In the same way, the words "work heartily, as to the Lord," would not have exerted any beneficial influence on the Colossian slaves unless they had been convinced that Christ was interested in their affairs, and would be well pleased with their hearty performance.

Another idea which hinders many from seeing the possibility which is open to them is the false distinction which has been made between work that is secular and work that is sacred. They do not think that the Lord Jesus is interested in what they are called upon to do. Everything should be lifted up as something which can be done for Christ, as something which is not rightly done unless it is done for Christ. We miss a great possibility of life when we forget that there is nothing which we may not do for Christ.

Some seem to have the idea that only a call to be a minister, an evangelist, or a missionary, constitutes a divine call. But why confine such a meaning only to such vocations? Why may not one be called to be an architect, a contractor, a carpenter, a grocer, a weaver, a lawyer, a baker, a salesman, or a teacher? Surely God never calls anyone to any kind of work that contravenes Christian principle or introduces questionable and nefarious practices. Wherever the calling is upright in every respect, it may rightly be deemed a Christian calling, and as worthy of the appellation, "Christian," as that of being a preacher, a pastor, an evangelist, or a missionary.

What an incentive such a consideration can be to a real service for Christ! And what an influence it will have upon all such services! How it will inspire to our very best work, and to the expression of the highest ideals in the daily enterprise! "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col.3:17). If this principle is adopted and acted upon, it will impart a golden value to all we say and do. The modern idea of some acts being religious and some secular is not for us to entertain. The quality of each act depends on the motive from which it springs, and on the spirit which guides it. The commonplace thing may be done in a noble Christian spirit.

In the multitude and complexity of human activities nature compels all to have a chief aim. Most people have self in view in their aims. They are interested in their pleasure, ease, luxury, wealth, position, or power, but "the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." And living to the glory of God gives dignity to our living. It lifts us from the commonplace and monotonous. To do everything for God's glory is life's deepest inspiration and highest power. It enables us to do our best. To you who are just beginning life, say to yourself, "What is really the best thing I can do with my life? I can go in for money, and perhaps make it; but I shall have to leave it behind, and I must die a pauper, however much I make. I can go in for pleasure, and get it for a while perhaps, but that can't last forever; or I might give myself right up to God, and live with all my heart to serve and to please Him. That will last longest and be best both now and ever."

Our Christianity should be carried into every department of our lives. All things should be done to the glory of God. Christianity has to do with work during the week as well as with worship on Sundays. Whether we buy or sell, whether we work with the brain or with the hands, in public life or in private life--whatsoever we do we are to do it to the glory of God. We should even bear our burdens for His glory. When Frances Ridley Havergal was enduring excruciating pains, which had resulted from a complication of diseases, she cried repeatedly, "Lord Jesus, help me in this to glorify Thee." That is a prayer we seldom think of uttering in our troubles. Being selfish, we think only of ourselves, and the means whereby our sufferings can be relieved. All of us, the righteous and the unrighteous, have to bear our crosses; but the real difference should be seen in the spirit with which we bear them.

There is much of what we call drudgery in this world--many tasks that are unattractive, commonplace, and monotonous. Every task is drudgery when we do it without a motive to uplift us and to inspire us. It is not another occupation or a change of circumstances that we need, but it is a change of spirit that is needed. The right motive is to be found in the realization that we are fulfilling the purposes of God and serving the will of Christ.

If we do our daily work with unwillingness and slackness, these qualities work themselves into the very fiber of our being. On the other hand, if we do our work heartily, as unto the Lord, not only is the work well done, done with satisfaction

and joy, but we have added some qualities to our characters which make our lives more like the life of the Lord Whom we serve. The noble or ignoble motive with which we have wrought works in us and fashions us after His likeness. Here are two lines that are strangely significant:

"Two men looked through prison bars,
One saw mud; the other stars."

How do you think the prison affected these men? They were alike in everything except their outlook. Nay, their very outlook was the same. Both could have looked downwards and seen the mud, as both could have looked upwards and seen the stars. But the one looked up and the other looked down. The one brought into his prison life the thought of the stars, with their suggestiveness of the majesty and glory of God and the width and grandeur of the universe;; and the other brought into his prison life the suggestiveness of mud, of the toil, the sin, the filth, and the narrowness of the world. What we see with the eyes of the soul is the ideal for which we live, the end for which we toil, and the motive by which we work. The humblest lot and the homeliest task offer the same possibility for the exercise of spiritual motive and the reaching of a spiritual aim as the loftiest position or the grandest task. But we must look up to find the uplifting motive. And this motive, doing everything heartily, as unto Christ, is one which can uplift every heart and benefit every life.

As we examine our lives--our thoughts, our desires, our motives, our words, and our conduct--under the searching light of the Holy Spirit, can we truthfully say we are living unto the Lord; that we are doing everything as service rendered unto Him? Is doing His will our chief aim? Is His glory our chief concern? The better we know our own hearts, the more we realize that we have much of the spirit of the Pharisees. They lived to be seen of men, and preferred the praise of men to the approval of God. All of us must strive to overcome the strong temptation to render "eyeservice"; to be on our best behavior when other eyes are upon us, forgetting that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place." When we are released from all desire for self-glory and live only for His glory, our Lord will be able to use us more fully and far more effectively.

When we do anything for the glory of our Lord, we bring out His glory and make it appear to the eyes of men. We do not give Him what He does not have, but we do cause what He has to be seen of men. There is nothing more certain than this, namely, that Christianity is designed to leaven our whole lives.

There are various ways of doing a thing--mechanically, like a machine; unlovingly, as a matter of duty; and heartily, where you put your whole soul into it. The service where one puts his whole heart into it is far more acceptable. The best work is that which is done from love. "Ye serve the Lord Christ," therefore, seek to please Him in all that you do. The glory of God is to be our first concern, and everything in our lives should contribute to that and be inspired by it. If we seek our own glory, we shall miss it. But, if we seek God's glory in all that we do, then we shall be "changed from glory into glory." And when we live entirely unto Him, He will do His very best for us.