

A Practical View of Christianity by William Wilberforce

2 Corinthians 5:17, “anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”

“View their plan of life and their ordinary conduct; and not to speak at present of their general inattention to things of a religious nature, let us ask wherein we can discern the points of discrimination between them and professed unbelievers. In an age wherein it is confessed and lamented that infidelity abounds, do we observe in them any remarkable care to instruct their children in the principles of faith which they profess, and to furnish them with arguments of the defense of it? They would blush, on their child’s coming out into the world, to think him defective in any branch of knowledge, or of those accomplishments which belong to his station in life, and according these are cultivated with becoming assiduity (diligence). But he is left to collect his religion as he may; the study of Christianity has formed no part of his education, and his attachment to it (where any attachment to it exists at all) is, too often, not the preference of sober reason, but merely the result of early prejudice and groundless prepossession. He was born in a Christian country, of course he is a Christian; his father was the member of the Church of England, so is he. When such is the hereditary religion handed down from generation to generation, it cannot surprise us to observe young men of sense and spirit beginning to doubt altogether of the truth of the system in which they have been brought up, and ready to abandon a station which they are unable to defend. Knowing Christianity chiefly in the difficulties which it contains, and in the impossibilities which are falsely imputed to it, they fall perhaps into the company of infidels; and, as might be expected, they are shaken by frivolous objections and profane cavils [petty objections], which had they been grounded and bottomed in reason and argument, would have passed them “as the idle wind,” and scarcely have seemed worthy of serious notice.” P.1-2

“the nature of this holiness to which the desires of the true Christian are directed, is no other than the restoration of the image of God: and as to the manner of acquiring it, disclaiming with indignation every idea of attaining it by his own strength, all his hopes of possessing it rest altogether on the divine assurances of the operation of the Holy Spirit, in those who cordially embrace the Gospel of Christ. He knows therefore that this holiness is not to PRECEDE his reconciliation to God, and be its CAUSE; but to FOLLOW it, and be its EFFECT. That, in short, it is by FAITH IN CHRIST only that he is to be justified in the sight of God; to be delivered from the condition of a child of wrath, and a slave of Satan; to be adopted into the family of God; to become an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, entitled to all the privileges which belong to this high relation; here, to the Spirit of Grace, and a partial renewal after the image of his Creator; hereafter, to the more perfect possession of the Divine likeness, and an inheritance of eternal glory.” P.166

“But the grand radical defect in the practical system of the nominal Christians, is their forgetfulness of all the peculiar doctrines of the Religion which they profess – the corruption of human nature – the atonement of the Savior – and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

Here again we come again to the grand distinction between the Religion of Christ and that of the bulk of nominal Christians in the present day. The point is of the utmost practical importance, and we would therefore trace it into its actual effects.” P.162-163

Ephesians 2:12, “In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.”

Isaiah 1:17, “Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.”

“In our own days, when it is but too clear that infidelity increases, it is not in consequence of the reasonings of the infidel writers having been much studied, but from the progress of luxury, and the decay of morals; and, so far as this increase may be traced at all to the works of skeptical writers, it has been produced, not by argument and discussion, but by sarcasms and points of wit, which have operated on weak minds, or on nominal Christians, by bringing gradually into contempt, opinions which, in their case, had only rested on the basis of blind respect and the prejudices of education.” P.245

“We depend on true Christians.... In that the church is strengthened in the foundations on which alone it can be much longer supported, the esteem and attachment of its members, and of the nation at large. Zeal is required in the cause of Religion: they only can feel it.

Let true Christians then, with becoming earnestness, strive in all things to recommend their profession, and to put to silence the vain scoffs of ignorant objectors. Let them boldly assert the cause of Christ in an age when so many who bear the name of Christians are ashamed of Him; and let them consider as passed down on Them the important duty of suspending for a while the fall of their country, and, perhaps, of performing a still more extensive service to society at large; not by busy interference in politics, in which it cannot but be confessed there is much uncertainty, but rather by that sure and radical benefit of restoring the influence of Religion, and of raising the standard of morality.

Let them be active, useful, generous towards other; manifestly moderate and self-denying in themselves. Let them be ashamed of idleness, as they would be of the most acknowledged sin. When Providence blessed them with affluence, let them withdraw from the competition of vanity...; that they consider it their duty to set an example of moderation and sobriety.

Let them pray continually for their country in this season of national difficulty. We bear upon us but too plainly the marks of a declining empire. Who can say but that the Governor of the universe, who declares himself to be a God who hears the prayers of his servants, may, in answer to their intercessions, for a while avert our ruin, and continue to us the fullness of those temporal blessings, which in such abundant measure we have hitherto enjoyed.”

“But it would be an instance in myself of that very false shame which I have condemned in others, if I were not boldly to avow my firm persuasion, that to the decline of Religion and morality our national difficulties must both be directly and indirectly be chiefly ascribed: and that the only solid hopes for the well-being of my country depend not so much on her fleets and armies, not so much on the wisdom of her rulers or the spirit of her people, as on the persuasion that she still contains many, who, in a degenerate age, love and obey the Gospel of Christ, on the humble trust that the intercession of these many be prevalent, that for the sake of these, Heaven may still look upon us with an eye of favor.” p.250-252