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**THE DUTY OF
THE CHRISTIAN
BUSINESS MAN**

Phillips Brooks



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OF A

CHRISTIAN BUSINESS MAN

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By
PHILLIPS BROOKS



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THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN BUSINESS MAN.



I WILL read to you once again the words which I have read before, the words of Jesus in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of St. John:

“As He spake these words, many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered Him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

I do not know how any man can stand and plead with his brethren for the higher life, that

they will enter into and make their own the life of Christ and God, unless he is perpetually conscious that around them with whom he pleads there is the perpetual pleading and the voice of God Himself. Unless a man believes that, everything that he has to say must seem, in the first place, impertinent, and, in the second place, almost absolutely hopeless. Who is man that he shall plead with his fellow-man for the change of a life, for the entrance into a whole new career, for the alteration of a spirit, for the surrounding of himself with a new region in which he has not lived before? But if it be so, that God is pleading with every one of His children to enter into the highest life; if it be so, that God is making His application and His appeal to every soul to know Him, and in Him to know himself, then one may plead with earnestness and plead with great hopefulness before his brethren. And so it is. The great truth of Jesus Christ is that, that God is pleading with every soul, not merely in the words which we hear from one another, not merely in the words which we read from His book, but in every influence of life; and, in those unknown influences which are too subtle for us to understand or perceive, God is forever seeking after the souls of His children.

I cannot stand before you for the last time that I shall stand in these meetings, my friends, without reminding myself and without reminding you of that; without reminding myself also and without trying to remind you of how absolutely conformable it is to everything that man does in this world. The great richness of nature, the great richness of life, comes when we understand that behind every specific action of man there is some one of the more elemental and primary forces of the universe that are always trying to express themselves. There is nothing that man does that finds its beginning within itself, but everything, every work of every trade, of every occupation, is simply the utterance of some one of those great forces which lie behind all life, and in the various ways of the different generations and of the different men are always trying to make their mark upon the world. Behind the power that the man exercises there always lies the great power of life, the continual struggle of nature to write herself in the life and work of man, the power of beauty struggling to manifest itself, the harmony that is always desiring to make itself known. To the merchant there are the great laws of trade, of which his works are but the immediate expression. To the mechanic there are the continual forces of

nature, gravitation uttering itself in all its majesty, made no less majestic because it simply takes its expression for the moment in some particular exercise of his art. To the ship that sails upon the sea there are the everlasting winds that come out of the treasuries of God and fulfil his purpose in carrying his children to their destination. There is no perfection of the universe and of the special life of man in the universe until it comes to this. The greatest of all forces are ready without condescension, are ready as the true expression of their life, to manifest themselves in the particular activities which we find everywhere, and which are going on everywhere. The little child digs his well in the seashore sand, and the great Atlantic, miles deep, miles wide, is stirred all through and through to fill it for him. Shall it not be so then here to-day, and shall it not be the truth, upon which we let our minds especially dwell, and which we keep in our souls all the time that I am speaking and you are listening, that however He may be hidden from our sight God is the ultimate fact and the final purpose and power of the universe. and that everything that man tries to do for his fellow-man is but the expression of that love of God which is everywhere struggling to utter itself in blessing, to give itself away to the soul of every one for whom He cares?

It is in this truth that I find the real secret, the deepest meaning, of the everlasting dissatisfaction of man that is always ready to be stirred. We moralize, we philosophize about the discontent of man. We give little reasons for it; but the real reason of it all is this, that which everything lying behind it really signifies: that man is greater than his circumstances, and that God is always calling to him to come up to the fullness of his life. Dreadful will be the day when the world becomes contented, when one great universal satisfaction spreads itself over the world. Sad will be the day for every man when he becomes absolutely contented with the life that he is living, with the thoughts that he is thinking, with the deeds that he is doing, when there is not forever beating at the doors of his soul some great desire to do something larger, which he knows that he was meant and made to do because he is the child of God. And there is the real secret of the man's struggle with his sins. It is not simply the hatefulness of the sin, as we have said again and again, but it is the dim perception, the deep suspicion, the real knowledge at the heart of the man, that there is a richer and a sinless region in which it is really meant for him to dwell. Man stands separated from that life of God, as it were, by a great,

thick wall, and every effort to put away his sin, to make himself a nobler and a purer man, is simply his beating at the inside of that door which stands between him and the life of God, which he knows that he ought to be living. It is like the prisoner hidden in his cave, who feels through all the thick wall that shuts him out from it the sunlight and the joyous life that is outside, who knows that his imprisonment is not his true condition, and so with every tool that his hands can grasp and with his bleeding hands themselves beats on the stone, that he may find his way out. And the glory and the beauty of it is that while he is beating upon the inside of the wall there is also a noble power praying upon the outside of that wall. The life to which he ought to come is striving in its turn, upon its side, to break away the hindrance that is keeping him from the thing he ought to be, that is keeping him from the life he ought to live. God, with His sunshine and lightning, with the great majestic manifestations of Himself, and with all the peaceful exhibitions of His life, is forever trying, upon His side of the wall, to break away the great barrier that separates the sinner's life from Him. Great is the power, great is the courage of the sinner, when through the thickness of the walls he feels that beating

life of God, when he knows that he is not working alone, when he is sure that God is wanting him just as truly, far more truly, than he wants God. He bears himself to a nobler struggle with his enemy and a more determined effort to break down the resistance that stands between him and the higher life. Our figure is all imperfect, as all our figures are so imperfect, because it seems to be the man all by himself, working by himself, until he shall come forth into the life of God, as if God waited there to receive him when he came forth the freed man, and as if the working of the freedom upon the sinner's side had not something also of the purpose of God within him. God is not merely in the sunshine; God is in the cavern of the man's sin. God is with the sinner wherever he can be. There is no soul so black in its sinfulness, so determined in its defiant obstinacy, that God has abandoned his throne room at the centre of the sinner's life, and every movement is the God movement and every effort is the God force, with which man tries to break forth from his sin and come forth into the full sunlight of a life with God. Do you not think how full of hope it is? Do you not see that when this great conception of the universe, which is Christ's conception, which beamed in every look that He shed upon the

world, which was told in every word that He spoke and which was in every movement of His hand — do you not see how, when this great conception of the universe takes possession of a man, then all his struggle with his sin is changed, it becomes a strong struggle, a glorious struggle. He hears perpetually the voice of Christ, “Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. You shall overcome it by the same strength which overcame with Me.”

And then another thing. When a man comes forth into the fulness of that life with God, when at last he has entered God’s service and the obedience to God’s will, and the communion with God’s life, then there comes this wonderful thing, there comes the revelation of the man’s past. We dare to tell the man that if he enters into the divine life, if he makes himself a servant of God and does God’s will out of obedient love, he shall then be strong and wise. One great element of his strength is going to be this: A marvellous revelation that is to come to him of how all his past has been filled with the power of that spirit with which he has at last entered into communion, to which he has at last submitted himself. Man becomes the child of God, becomes the servant of Jesus Christ, and this marvellous revelation amazes him. He sees that

back through all the years of his most obstinate and careless life, through all his wilfulness and resistance, through all his profligacy and black sin, God has been with him all the time, beating himself upon his life, showing him how He desired to call him to Himself, and that the final submission does not win God. It simply submits to the God who has been with the soul all the time. Can there be anything more winning to the soul than that, anything that brings a deeper shame to you, than to have it revealed to you, suddenly or slowly, that from the first day that you came into this world, nay, before your life was an uttered fact in this world, God has been loving you, and seeking you, and planning for you, and making every effort that He could make in consistency with the free will with which He endowed you from the centre of His own life, that you might become His and therefore might become truly yourself? Through all the years in which you were obstinate and rebellious, through all the years in which you defied Him, nay, through the years in which you denied Him and said that He did not exist, He was with you all the time. What shall I say to my friend who is an atheist? Shall I believe that until he comes to a change of his opinions and recognizes that there is indeed a ruling love,

a great and fatherly God for all the world, that he has nothing to do with that God? Shall I believe that God has nothing to do with him until he acknowledges God? God would be no God to me if He were that, if He left the man absolutely unhelped until the man beat at the doors of His divine helpfulness and said, "I believe in Thee at last. Now help me." And to the atheist there appears the light of the God whom he denies. Into every soul, just so far and just so fast as it is possible for that soul to receive it, God beats His life and gives His help. That is what makes a man hopeful of all his fellow-men as he looks around upon them and sees them in all the conditions of their life.

And this could only be if that were true, if that is true, which we are dwelling upon constantly, the absolute naturalness of the Christian life, that it is man's true life, that it is no foreign region into which some man may be transported and where he lives an alien to all his own essential nature and to all the natural habitudes in which he is intending to exist. There are two ideas of religion which always have abounded, and our great hope is, our great assurance for the future of the world is, that the true and pure idea of religion some day shall grow and take possession of the **life of man**. One idea held

by very earnest people, embodied in very faithful and devoted lives, is the strangeness of religion to the life of man, as if some morning something dropped out of the sky that had had no place upon our earth before, as if there came the summons to man to be something entirely different from what the conditions of his nature prophesied and intended that he should be. The other idea is that religion comes by the utterance of God from the heavens, but comes up out of the human life of man; that man is essentially and intrinsically religious; that he does not become something else than man when he becomes the servant of Jesus Christ, but then for the first time he becomes man; that religion is not something that is fastened upon the outside of his life, but is the awakening of the truth inside of his life; the Church is but the true fulfilment of human life and society; heaven is but the New Jerusalem that completes all the old Jerusalems and Londons and Bostons that have been here upon our earth. Man, in the fulfilment of his nature by Jesus Christ, is man — not to be something else, our whole humanity is too dear to us. I will cling to this humanity of man, for I do love it, and I will know nothing else. But when man is bidden to look back into his humanity and see what it means to be a man,

that humanity means purity, truthfulness, earnestness, and faithfulness to that God of which humanity is a part, that God which manifested that humanity was a part of it, when the incarnation showed how close the divine and human belonged together — when man hears that voice, I do not know how he can resist, why he shall not lift himself up and say, “Now I can be a man, and I can be man only as I share in and give my obedience to and enter into communion with the life of God,” and say to Christ, to Christ the revealer of all this, “Here I am, fulfil my manhood.”

And do not you see how immediately this sweeps aside, as one gush of the sunlight sweeps aside the darkness, do not you see how it sweeps aside all the foolish and little things that people are saying? I say to my friend, “Be a Christian.” That means to be a full man. And he says to me, “I have not time to be a Christian. I have not room. If my life was not so full. You don't know how hard I work from morning to night. What time is there for me to be a Christian? What time is there, what room is there for Christianity in such a life as mine?” But does not it come to seem to us so strange, so absurd, if it was not so melancholy, that man should say such a thing as that? It is as if the

engine had said it had no room for the steam. It is as if the tree had said it had no room for the sap. It is as if the ocean had said it had no room for the tide. It is as if the man said that he had no room for his soul. It is as if life said that it had no time to live, when it is life. It is not something that is added to life. It is life. A man is not living without it. And for a man to say that "I am so full in life that I have no room for life," you see immediately to what absurdity it reduces itself. And how a man knows what he is called upon by God's voice, speaking to him every hour, speaking to him every moment, speaking to him out of everything, that which the man is called upon to do because it is the man's only life! Therefore time, room, that is what time, that is what room is for — life. Life is the thing we seek, and man finds it in the fulfilment of his life by Jesus Christ.

Now, until we understand this and take it in its richness, all religion seems, becomes to us such a little thing that it is not religion at all. You have got to know that religion, the service of Christ, is not something to be taken in in addition to your life; it is your life. It is not a ribbon that you shall tie in your hat, and go down the street declaring yourself that you have accepted something in addition to the life which

your fellow-men are living. It is something which, taken into your heart, shall glow in every action so that your fellow-men shall say, "Lo, how he lives! What new life has come into him?" It is that insistence upon the great essentialness of the religious life, it is the insistence that religion is not a lot of things that a man does, but is a new life that a man lives, uttering itself in new actions because it is the new life. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." So Jesus said to Nicodemus the ruler, Nicodemus the amateur in religions, who came and said, "Perhaps this teacher has something else that I can bind into my catalogue of truths and hold it." Jesus looked him in the face and said: "It is not that, my friend, it is not that; it is to be a new man, it is to be born again. It is to have the new life, which is the old life, which is the eternal life. So alone does man enter into the kingdom of God." I cannot help believing all the time that if our young men knew this, religion would lift itself up and have a dignity and greatness — not a thing for weak souls, but a thing for the manliest soul. Just because of its manliness it is easy. "Is it easy or is it hard, this religion of yours?" people say to us. I am sure I do not know the easy and the hard things. I

cannot tell the difference. What is easier than for a man to breathe? And yet, have you never seen a breathless man, a man in whom the breathing was almost stopped, a drowning man, an exhausted man? have you never seen, when the breath was put once more to his nostrils and brought down once more into his empty lungs, the struggle with which he came back to it? It was the hardest thing for him to do, so much harder for him to live than it was for him to die. But by and by see him on his feet, going about his work, helping his fellow-men, living his life, rejoicing in his days, guarding against his dangers, full of life. Is life a hard thing for him? You don't talk about its being hard or easy any more than you talk about life itself. The man who lives in God knows no life except the life of God. Let men know that it is not mere trifling, it is not a thing to be dallied with for an instant, it is not a thing for a man to convince himself by an argument, and then keep as it were locked in a shelf: it is something that is so deep and serious, so deep and serious that when a man has once tested it there is no more chance of his going out of it than there is of his going out of the friendship and the love which holds him with its perpetual expression, with the continued deeper and deeper manifestation

of the way in which the living being belongs to him who has a right to his life.

Now in the few moments that remain I want to take it for granted most seriously, most earnestly, that the men who are listening to me are in earnest, and I want to try to tell them as a brother might tell a brother, as I might tell to you or try to tell to you if sitting before my fire-side, I want to try to answer the question which I know is upon your hearts. "What shall I do about this?" I know you say. "Is this all in the clouds? Is there anything I can do in the right way?" If you are in earnest, I shall try to tell you what I should do, if I were in your place, that I might enter into that life and be the free man that we have tried to describe, of whom we believe certain special and definite things. What are they? In the first place I would put away my sin. There is not a man listening to me now who has not some trick of life, some habit that has possession of him, which he knows is a wrong thing. The very first thing for a man to do is absolutely to set himself against them. If you are foul, stop being licentious, at least stop doing licentious things. If you, in any part of your business, are tricky, and unsound, and unjust, cut that off, no matter what it costs you. There is something clear and

definite enough for every man. It is as clear for every man as the sunlight that smites him in his eyes. Stop doing the bad thing which you are doing. It is drawing the bolt away to let whatever mercy may come in come in. Stop doing your sin. You can do that if you will. Stop doing your sin, no matter how mechanical it seems, and then take up your duty, whatever you can do to make the world more bright and good. Do whatever you can to help every struggling soul, to add new strength to any staggering cause, the poor sick man that is by you, the poor wronged man whom you with your influence might vindicate, the poor boy in your shop that you may set with new hope upon the road of life that is beginning already to look dark to him. I cannot tell you what it is. But you know your duty. No man ever looked for it and did not find it.

And then the third thing—pray. Yes, go to the God whom you but dimly see and pray to Him in the darkness, where He seems to sit. Ask Him, as if He were, that He will give you that which, if He is, must come from Him, can come from Him alone. Pray anxiously. Pray passionately, in the simplest of all words, with the simplest of all thoughts. Pray, the manliest thing that a man can do, the fastening of his

life to the eternal, the drinking of his thirsty soul out of the great fountain of life. And pray distinctly. Pray upon your knees. One grows tired sometimes of the free thought, which is yet perfectly true, that a man can pray anywhere and anyhow. But men have found it good to make the whole system pray. Kneel down, and the very bending of these obstinate and unused knees of yours will make the soul kneel down in the humility in which it can be exalted in the sight of God.

And then read your Bible. How cold that sounds! What, read a book to save my soul? Read an old story that my life in these new days shall be regenerated and saved? Yes, do just that, for out of that book, if you read it truly, shall come the divine and human person. If you can read it with your soul as well as with your eyes, there shall come the Christ there walking in Palestine. You shall see Him so much greater than the Palestine in which he walks, that at one word of prayer, as you bend over the illuminated page, there shall lift up that body-being of the Christ, and come down through the centuries and be your helper at your side. So read your Bible.

And then seek the Church — oh, yes, the Church. Do you think, my friends, you who

stand outside the Church, and blame her for her inconsistencies, and tell of her shortcomings, and point out the corruptions that are in her history, all that are in her present life to-day — do you really believe that there is an earnest man in the Church that does not know the Church's weaknesses and faults just as well as you do? Do you believe that there is one of us living in the life and heart of the Church who don't think with all his conscience, who don't in every day in deep distress and sorrow know how the Church fails of the great life of the Master, how far she is from being what God meant she should be, what she shall be some day? But all the more I will put my life into that Church, all the more I will drink the strength that she can give to me and make what humble contribution to her I can bring of the earnestness and faithfulness of my life. Come into the Church of Jesus Christ. There is no other body on the face of the earth that represents what she represents — the noble destiny of the human soul, the great capacity of human faith, the inexhaustible and unutterable love of God, the Christ, who stands to manifest them all.

Now those are the things for a man to do who really cares about all this. Those are the things for an earnest man to do. They have no power

in themselves, but they are the opening of the windows. And if that which I believe is true, God is everywhere giving himself to us, the opening of the windows is a signal that we want Him and an invitation that He will be glad enough to answer, to come. Into every window that is open to Him and turned His way, Christ comes, God comes. That is the only story. There is put aside everything else. Election, predestination, they can go where they please. I am sure that God gives Himself to every soul that wants Him and declares its want by the open readiness of the signal which He knows. How did the sun rise on our city this morning? Starting up in the east, the sun came in its majesty into the sky. It smote on the eastward windows, and wherever the window was all closed, even if it were turned eastward, on the sacred side of the city's life, it could not come in; but wherever any eastward window had its curtains drawn, wherever he who slept had left the blinds shut, so that the sun when it came might find its way into his sleepiness, there the sun came, and with a shout awoke its faithful servant who had believed in him even before he had seen him, and said, "Arise, arise from the dead, and I will give thee life." This is the simplicity of it all, my friends. A multitude of

other things you need not trouble yourselves about. I amaze myself when I think how men go asking about the questions of eternal punishment and the duration of man's torment in another life, of what will happen to any man who does not obey Jesus Christ. Oh, my friends, the soul is all wrong when it asks that. Not until the soul says, "What will come if I do obey Jesus Christ?" and opens its glorified vision to see all the great things that are given to the soul that enters into the service of the perfect one, the perfect love, not until then the perfect love, the perfect life, come in. A man may be — I believe it with all my heart — so absolutely wrapped up in the glory of obedience, and the higher life, and the service of Christ, that he never once asks himself, "What will come to me if I do not obey?" any more than your child asks you what you will do to him if he is not obedient. Every impulse and desire of his life sets toward obedience. And so the soul may have no theory of everlasting or of limited punishment, or of the other life.

Simply now, here, he must have that without which he cannot live, that without which there is no life. Jesus the soul must have, the one yesterday, to-day, and forever; He that is and was and is to be. Men dwell upon what He was,

upon what He is; I rather think to-day of what He is to be. And when I see these young men here before me looking to the future and not to the past,—nay, looking to the future and not to the present, valuing the present only as it is the seed ground of the future, the foundation upon which the structure is to rise whose pinnacle shall some day pierce the sky,—I want to tell them of the Jesus that shall be. In fuller comprehension of Him, with deeper understanding of His life, with a more entire impression of what He is and of what He may be to the soul, so men shall understand Him in the days to be, and yet He shall be the same Christ still. The future belongs to Jesus Christ, yes, the same Christ that I believe in and that I call upon you to believe in to-day, but a larger, fuller, more completely comprehended Christ, the Christ that is to be, the same Christ that was and suffered, the same Christ that is and helps, but the same Christ also who, being forever deeper and deeper and more deeply received into the souls of men, regenerates their institutions, changes their life, opens their capacities, surprises them with themselves, makes the world glorious and joyous every day, because it has become the new incarnation, the new presence of the divine life in the life of man.

Men are talking about the institutions in which you are engaged, my friends, about the business from which you have come here to worship for this little hour. Men are questioning about what they care to do, what they can have to do with Christianity. They are asking everywhere this question. "Is it possible for a man to be engaged in the activities of our modern life and yet to be a Christian? Is it possible for a man to be a broker, a shopkeeper, a lawyer, a mechanic, is it possible for a man to be engaged in a business of to-day, and yet love his God and his fellow-man as himself?" I do not know, I do not know what transformations these dear businesses of yours have got to undergo before they shall be true and ideal homes for the child of God; but I do know that upon Christian merchants and Christian brokers and Christian lawyers and Christian men in business to-day there rests an awful and a beautiful responsibility: to prove, if you can prove it, that these things are capable of being made divine, to prove that a man can do the work that you have been doing this morning and will do this afternoon, and yet shall love his God and his fellow-man as himself. If he cannot, if he cannot, what business have you to be doing them? If he can, what business have you to be doing them so poorly, so carnally,

so unspiritually, that men look on them and shake their heads with doubt? It belongs to Christ in men first to prove that man may be a Christian and yet do business; and, in the second place, to show how a man, as he becomes a greater Christian, shall purify and lift the business that he does and make it the worthy occupation of the Son of God.

What shall be our universal law of life? Can we give it as we draw toward our last moment? I think we can. I want to live, I want to live, if God will give me help, such a life that, if all men in the world were living it, this world would be regenerated and saved. I want to live such a life that, if that life changed into new personal peculiarities as it went to different men, but the same life still, if every man were living it, the millennium would be here; nay, heaven would be here, the universal presence of God. Are you living that life now? Do you want your life multiplied by the thousand million so that all men shall be like you, or don't you shudder at the thought, don't you give hope that other men are better than you are? Keep that fear, but only that it may be the food of a diviner hope, that all the world may see in you the thing that man was meant to be, that is, the Christ. Ah, you say, that great world, it is too

big; how can I stretch my thought and imagination and conscience to the poor creatures in Africa and everywhere? Then bring it home. Ah, this dear city of ours, this city that we love, this city in which many of us were born, in which all of us are finding the rich and sweet associations of our life, this city whose very streets we love because they come so close to everything we do and are, cannot we do something for it? Cannot we make its life diviner? Cannot we contribute something that it has not to-day? Cannot you put in it, some little corner of it, a life which others shall see and say, "Ah, that our lives may be like that!" And then the good Boston in which we so rejoice, which we so love, which we would so fain make a part of the kingdom of God, a true city of Jesus Christ, we shall not die without having done something for it.

I linger, and yet I must not linger. Oh, my friends, oh, my fellow-men, it is not very long that we shall be here. It is not very long. This life for which we are so careful — it is not very long; and yet it is so long, because, long, long after we have passed away out of men's sight and out of men's memory, the world, with something that we have left upon it, that we have left within it, will be going on still. It is so long because,

long after the city and the world have passed away, we shall go on somewhere, somehow, the same beings still, carrying into the depths of eternity something that this world has done for us that no other world could do, something of goodness to get now that will be of value to us a million years hence, that we never could get unless we got it in the short years of this earthly life. Will you know it? Will you let Christ teach it to you? Will you let Christ tell you what is the perfect man? Will you let Him set His simplicity and graciousness close to your life, and will you feel their power? Oh! be brave, be true, be pure, be men, be men in the power of Jesus Christ. May God bless you! May God bless you! Let us pray.

TRUE LIBERTY.



AN earnest appeal to all that enter that Liberty. May I read to you a few words from the eighth chapter of St. John? "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Let us not think, my friends, that there is anything strange about the spectacle which we witnessed this morning. The only strange thing that there could be about it is that anybody should think that it is strange that men should turn aside for half an hour from their ordinary business pursuits, that they should come from the details of life to inquire in regard to the principles, the everlasting principles and purposes of life; that they should turn aside from those things which are occupying them from day to day and make one single hour in the week consecrated to the service of those great things

which underlie all life — surely there is nothing very strange. There is nothing more absolutely natural. Every man does it in his own sort of way, in his own choice of time. We have chosen to do it together, on one day of the week during these few weeks which the Christian Church has so largely set apart for special thought and prayer and earnest attempt to approach the God to whom we belong. It is simply as if the stream turned back again to its fountain, that it might refresh itself and make itself strong for the great work that it had to do in watering the fields and turning the wheels of industry. It is simply as if men plodding along over the flat routine of their life chose once in a while to go up into the mountain top, whence they might once in a while look abroad over their life, and understand more fully the way in which they ought to work. These are the principles, these are the pictures which represent that which we have in mind as we come together for a little while each Monday in these few weeks, in order that we may think about things of God and try to realize the depth of our own human life. The first thing that we ought to understand about it is that when we turn aside from life it is only that we go deeper into life. This hour does not stand apart from the rest of the hours of the week, in that we are

dealing with things in which the rest of the week has no concern. He who understands life deeply and fully, understands life truly; he has forever renewed his life; and if there comes into our hearts, in the life which we are living, a perpetual sense that life needs renewal, a richening and refreshing, then it is in order that we may go down into the depths and see what lies at the root of things — things that we are perpetually doing and thinking. It is this that brought us together here: it is that we may open to ourselves some newer, higher life. It is that we may understand the life that we may live, along side of and as a richer development of that life which we are living from day to day, which we have been living during the years of our life. How that idea has haunted men in every period of their existence, how is it haunting you, that there is some higher life which it is possible to live! There has never been a religion that has not started there, lifted up its eyes and seen, afar off, what it was possible for man to do from day to day, in contrast with the things which men immediately and presently are. There is not any moment of the human soul which has not rested upon some great conception that man was a nobler being than he was ordinarily conceiving himself to be; that he was not destined to the

things which were ordinarily occupying his life; that he might be living a greater and nobler life. It is because the Christian Scriptures have laid most earnestly hold of this idea, it is because it was represented not simply in the words which Christ said, but in the very being which Christ was, that we go to them to get the inspiration and the indication, the revelation and the enlightenment which we need. I have read to you these few words in which Christ declares the whole subject, the whole character of which His life is and what His work is about to do, because it seems to me that they strike at once the key-note of that which we want to understand. They let us enter into the full conception of that which the new life which is offered to man really is. There are two conceptions which come to every man when he is entering upon a new life, changing his present life to something that is different from the present life, and being a different sort of creature and living in a different sort of a way. The first way in which it presents itself to him — almost always at the beginning of every religion, perhaps — is in the way of restraint and imprisonment. Man thinks of every change that is to come to him as in the nature of denial of something that he is at the present doing and being, as the laying hold upon himself of some

sort of restraint, bringing to him something which says: "I must not do the thing which I am doing. I must lay upon myself restraints, restrictions, commandments, and prohibitions. I must not let myself be the man that I am." You see how the Old Testament comes before the New Testament, the law ringing from the mountain top with the great denials, the great prohibitions, that come from the mouth of God. "Thou shalt not do this, that, or the other — Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods." That is the first conception which comes to a man of the way in which he is to enter upon a new life, of the way in which the denial in his experience is to take effect. It is as if the hands were stretched out in order that fetters might be placed upon them. The man says, "Let some power come that is to hinder me from being this thing that I am." And the whole notion is the notion of imprisonment, restraint. So it is with all civilization. It is perfectly possible for us to represent civilization as compared with barbarism, as accepted by mankind, as a great mass of restrictions and prohibitions that have been laid upon human life, so that the freedom of life has been cast aside, and man has entered into restricted, re-

strained, and imprisoned condition. So it is with every fulfilment of life. It is possible for a man always to represent it to himself as if it were the restriction, restraint, and prohibition of his life. The man passes onward into the fuller life which belongs to a man. He merges his selfishness into that richer life which is offered to human kind. He makes himself, instead of a single, selfish man, a man of family; and it is easy enough to consider that marriage and the family life bring immediately restraints and prohibitions. The man may may not have the freedom which he used to have. So all development of education, in the first place, offers itself to man, or seems to offer itself to man, as prohibition and imprisonment and restraint. There is no doubt truth in such an idea. We never lose sight of it. No other richer and fuller idea which we come to by and by ever does away with the thought that man's advance means prohibition and self-denial, that in order that man shall become the greater thing he must cease to be the poorer and smaller thing he has been. But yet there is immediately a greater and fuller. When we hear those words of Jesus, we see immediately that not the idea of imprisonment but the idea of liberty, not the idea of restraint but that of **setting free**, is the idea which is really in His

mind when he offers the fullest life to human kind. Have you often thought of how the whole Bible is a Book of Liberty, of how it rings with liberty from beginning to end, of how the great men are the men of liberty, of how the Old Testament, the great picture which forever shines, is the emancipator, leading forth out of imprisonment the people of God, who were to do the great work of God in the very much larger and freer life in which they were to live? The prophet, the psalmist, are ever preaching and singing about liberty, the enfranchisement of the life of man, that man was not imprisoned in order to fulfil himself, but shall open his life, and every new progress shall be into a new region of existence which he has not touched as yet. When we turn from the Old Testament to the New Testament, how absolutely clear that idea is! Christ is the very embodiment of human liberty. In His own personal life and in everything that He did and said, He was forever uttering the great gospel that man, in order to become his completest, must become his freest, that what a man did when he entered into a new life was to open a new region in which new powers were to find their exercise, in which he was to be able to be and do things which he could not be and do in more restricted life. It is the

acceptance of that idea, it seems to me, that makes us true disciples of Christ and of that great gospel, and that transfigures everything. When my friend turns over some new leaf, as we say, and begins to live a new life, what shall we think of him? I learn that he has become a Christian man, that he is doing something, that he is working in a way and living a life which I have not known before. What is my impression in regard to him? Is not your impression, as you look upon that man, that somehow or other he has entered into a slavery or bondage, that he has taken upon his life restrictions and imprisonments which he did not have before? And you think of him, perhaps, as a man who has done a wise and prudent thing, who has done something that is going to be for his benefit some day in some distant and half-realized world, but as a man who, for the present, has laid a burden and bondage upon his life. That is never the tone of Christ; it is never the tone of the Christian gospel. When a man turns away from his sins and enters into energetic holiness, when a man sacrifices his own self-indulgence and goes forth a pure servant of his God and his fellow-men, there is only one cry in the whole gospel of that man, and that is the cry of freedom. As soon as he can catch that, as soon as I can

feel about my friend, who has become a better man, that he has become a larger and not a smaller, a freer and not a more imprisoned man, as soon as I lift up my voice and say that the man is free, then I understand him more fully, and he becomes a revelation to me in the higher and richer life which is possible for me to live. But think of it for yourselves, for a moment, and ask what freer life really is. Try to give a definition of liberty, and I know not what it can be said to be except something of this kind: Liberty is the fullest opportunity for man to be and do the very best that is possible for him. I know of no definition of liberty, that oldest and dearest phrase of men, and sometimes the vaguest also, except that. It has been perverted, it has been distorted and mystified, but that is what it really means: the fullest opportunity for a man to do and be the very best that is in his personal nature to do and to be. It immediately follows that everything which is necessary for the full realization of a man's life, even though it seems to have the character of restraint for a moment, is really a part of the process of his enfranchisement, is the bringing forth of him to a fuller liberty. You see a man coming forward and offering himself as one of the defenders of his country in his country's need. You see him

standing at the door where men are being received as recruits into the army of the country. He wants liberty. He wants to be able to do that which he cannot do in his poor, personal isolation here at home. He wants the badge which will give him the right to go forth and meet the enemies of his country, and he enrolls himself among these men. He makes himself subject to obligations, duties, and drill. They are a part of his enfranchisement. They are really the breaking of the fetters upon his slavery, the sending him forth into freedom. He is like a bit of iron or steel that lies upon the ground. It lies neglected and perfectly free. You see it is made by the adjustment of the end of it so that it can be set into a great machine and become part of a great working system. But there it lies. Will you call it free? It is bound to be nothing there. It is absolutely separate, and with its own personality distinct and individual and all alone. What is to make that bit of iron a free bit of iron, to let it go forth and do the thing which it was meant to do, but the taking of it and the binding of it at both ends into the structure of which it was made to be a part? It seems to me the binding of a man,—it seems to me that the binding of the iron is not the yielding of its freedom. It is not merely after finding

its place within the system that it first achieves its freedom and so joins in the music and partakes of the courses with which the whole enginery is filled. Is not it, then, for the first time a free bit of iron, having accomplished all that it was made to do when it came forth from the forge of the master, who had this purpose in his mind? This, then, is freedom; everything is part of the enfranchisement of a man which helps to put him in the place where he can live his best. Therefore every duty, every will of God, every commandment of Christ; every self-surrender that a man is called upon to obey or to make — do not think of it as if it were simply a restraint to liberty, but think of it as the very means of freedom, by which we realize the very purpose of God and the fulfilment of our life. It is interesting to see how all that is true in regard to the matter of belief, doctrine, and opinions which we are to accept. How strange it very often seems that men go to the Church, or to one another, and say: “Must I believe this doctrine in order that I can enter into the Church?” “Must I believe this doctrine in order that I may be saved?” men say, with a strange sort of notion about what salvation is. How strange it seems, when we really have got our intelligence about us and know what it is to believe! To believe

a new truth, if it be really truth and we really believe it, is to have entered into a new region, in which our life shall find a new expansion and a new youth. Therefore, not "Must we believe?" but "May I believe?" is the true cry of the human creature who is seeking for the richest fulfilment of his life, who is working that his whole nature may find its complete expansion and so its completest exercise. We talk a great deal in these days and in this place about a liberal faith. What is a liberal faith, my friends? It seems to me that by every true meaning of the word, by every true thought of the idea, a liberal faith is a faith that believes much, and not a faith that believes little. The more a man believes, the more liberally he exercises his capacity of faith, the more he sends forth his intelligence into the mysteries of God, the more he understands those things which God chooses to reveal to his creatures, the more liberally he believes. Let yourselves never think that you grow liberal in faith by believing less; always be sure that the true liberality of faith can only come by believing more. It is true, indeed, that as soon as a man becomes eager for belief, for the truth of God and for the mysteries with which God's universe is filled, he becomes all the more critical and careful. He will not any longer, if

he were before, be simply greedy of things to believe, so that if any superstition comes offering itself to him he will not gather it in indiscriminately and believe it without evidence, without examination. He becomes all the more critical and careful, the more he becomes assured that belief, and not unbelief, is the true condition of his life. The truth that God has entered into this world in wondrous ways and filled its life with Jesus Christ, the truth that man has a soul and not simply a body, that he has a spiritual need, that God cares for him and he is to care for himself, that there is an immortal life, and that that which we call faith is but the opening of a gate, the pushing back of a veil, — shall a man believe those things as imprisonments of his nature, and shall it not make him larger? Shall it not be the indulgence of his life when he enters into the great certainties which so are offered to his belief, believing them in his own way? Let us always feel that to accept a new belief is not to build a wall beyond which we cannot pass, but is to open the door to a great fresh, free region, in which our souls are to live. And just so it is when we come to the moral things of life. The man puts aside some sinfulness. He breaks down the wall that has been shutting his soul out of its highest life. He has been a drunkard, and he becomes a

sober man. He has been a cheat and becomes a faithful man. He has been a liar and becomes a truthful man. He has been a profligate, and he becomes a pure man. What has happened to that man? Shall he simply think of himself as one who has crushed this passion, shut down this part of his life? Shall he simply think of himself as one who has taken a course of self-denial? Nay. It is self-indulgence that a man has really entered upon. It is an indulgence of the deepest part of his own nature, not of his unreal nature. He has risen and shaken himself like a lion, so that the dust has fallen from his mane, and all the great range of that life which God gave him to live lies before him. This is the everlasting inspiration. This is the illumination. I don't wonder that men refuse to give up evil if it simply seems to them to be giving up the evil way, and no vision opens before them of the thing that they may be and do. I don't wonder that, if the negative, restricting, imprisoning conception of the new life is all that a man gets hold of, he lingers again and again in the old life. But just as soon as the great world opens before him then it is like a prisoner going out of the prison door, is there no lingering? Does not the baser part of him cling to the old prison, to the ease and the provision for him,

to the absence of anxiety and of energy? I think there can hardly be a prisoner who, with any leap of heart, goes out of the prison door, when his term is finished, and does not even look into that black horror where he has been living, cast some lingering, longing look behind. He comes to the exigencies, to the demands of life, to the necessity of making himself once more a true man among his fellow-men. But does he stop? He comes forth, and if there be the soul of a man in him still, he enters into the new life with enthusiasm, and finds the new powers springing in him to their work. And if it be so with every special duty, then with that great thing which you and I are called upon to do — the total acceptance by our nature of the will of God, the total acceptance by our nature of the mastery of Jesus Christ. Oh! how this world has perverted words and meanings, that the mastery of Jesus Christ should seem to be the imprisonment and not the enfranchisement of the soul! When I bring a flower out of the darkness and set it in the sun, and let the sunlight come streaming down upon it, and the flower knows the sunlight for which it was made and opens its fragrance and beauty; when I take a dark pebble and put it into the stream and let the silver water go coursing down over it and

bringing forth the hidden color that was in the bit of stone, opening the nature that is in them, the flower and stone rejoice. I can almost hear them sing in the field and in the stream. What then? Shall not man bring his nature out into the fullest illumination, and surprise himself by the things that he might do? Oh! the littleness of the lives that we are living! Oh! the way in which we fail to comprehend, or when we do comprehend, deny to ourselves the bigness of that thing which it is to be a man, to be a child of God! Sometimes it dawns upon us that we can see it opening into the vision of these men and women in the New Testament. Sometimes there opens to us the picture of this thing that we might be, and then there are truly the trial moments of our life. Then we lift up ourselves and claim our liberty or, dastardly or cowardly, slink back into the sluggish imprisonment in which we have been living. How does all this affect that which we are continually conscious of, urging upon ourselves and upon one another? How does it affect the whole question of a man's sins? Oh! these sins, the things we know so well! As we sit here and stand here one entire hour, as we talk in this sort of way, everybody knows the weaknesses of his own nature, the sins of his own soul. Don't you know it? What

shall we think about those sins? It seems to me, my friends, that all this great picture of the liberty into which Christ sets man, in the first place does one thing which we are longing to see done in the world. It takes away the glamour and the splendor from sin. It breaks that spell by which men think that the evil thing is the glorious thing. If the evil thing be that which Christ has told us that the evil thing is — which I have no time to tell you now — if every sin that you do is not simply a stain upon your soul, but is keeping you out from some great and splendid thing which you might do, then is there any sort of splendor and glory about sin? How about the sins that you did when you were young men? How can you look back upon those sins and think what your life might have been if it had been pure from the beginning, think what you might have been if from the very beginning you had caught sight of what it was to be a man? And then your boy comes along. What are the men in this town doing largely in many and many a house, but letting their boys believe that the sins of their early life are glorious things, except that those things which they did, the base and wretched things that they were doing when they were fifteen and twenty and twenty-five and thirty years old, are the true

career of a human nature, are the true entrance into human life? The miserable talk about sowing wild oats, about getting through the necessary conditions of life before a man comes to solemnity! Shame upon any man who, having passed through the sinful conditions and habits and dispositions of his earlier life, has not carried out of them an absolute shame for them, that shall let him say to his boy, by word and by every utterance of his life within the house where he and the boy live together, "Refrain, for they are abominable things!" To get rid of the glamour of sin, to get rid of the idea that it is a glorious thing to be dissipated instead of being concentrated to duty, to get rid of the idea that to be drunken and to be lustful are true and noble expressions of our abounding human life, to get rid of any idea that sin is aught but imprisonment, is to make those who come after us, and to make ourselves in what of life is left for us, gloriously ambitious for the freedom of purity, for a full entrance into that life over which sin has no dominion. And yet, at the same time, don't you see that while sin thus becomes contemptible when we think about the great illustration of the will of God and Jesus Christ, don't you see how also it puts on a new horror? That which I thought I was doing in

the halls of my imprisonment I have really been doing within the possible world of God in which I might have been free. The moment I see what life might have been to me, then any sin becomes dreadful to me. Have you ever thought of how the world has stood in glory and honor before the sinless humanity of Jesus Christ? If any life could prove, if any argument could show on investigation to-day that Jesus did one sin in all his life, that the perfect liberty which was his perfect purity was not absolutely perfect, do you realize what a horror would seem to fall down from the heavens, what a constraint and burden would be laid upon the lives of men, how the gates of men's possibilities would seem to close in upon them? It is because there has been that one life which, because absolutely pure from sin, was absolutely free; it is because man may look up and see in that life the revelation and possibility of his own; it is because that life, echoing the great cry throughout the world that man everywhere is the son of God, offers the same purity — and so the same freedom — to all mankind; it is for that reason that a man rejoices to cling to, to believe in, however impure his life is, the perfect purity, the sinlessness of the life of Jesus. When you sin, my friends, it is a man that sins, and a man is a child of God; and for a child of

God to sin is an awful thing, not simply for the stain that he brings into the divine nature that is in him, but for the life from which it shuts him out, for the liberty which he abandons, for the enthrallment which it lays upon the soul. There is one thing that people say very carelessly that always seems to me to be a dreadful thing for a man to say. They say it when they talk about their lives to one another, and think about their lives to themselves, and by and by very often say it upon their death-bed with the last gasp, as though their entrance into the eternal world had brought them no deeper enlightenment. One wonders what is the revelation that comes to them when they stand upon the borders of the other side and are in the full life and eternity of God. The thing men say is, "I have done the very best I can." It is an awful thing for a man to say. The man never lived, save he who perfected our humanity, who ever did the very best he could. You dishonor your life, you not simply shut your eyes to certain facts, you not simply say an infinitely absurd and foolish thing, but you dishonor your human life if you say that you have done in any day of your life or in all the days of your life put together, the very best that you could, or been the very best man that you could be. You! what are you?

Again I say, The child of God, and this which you have been, what is it? Look over it, see how selfish it has been, see how material it has been, how it has lived in the depths when it might have lived on the heights, see how it has lived in the little narrow range of selfishness when it might have been as broad as all humanity, nay, when it might have been as the God of humanity. Don't dare to say that in any day of your life, or in all your life together, you have done the best that you could. The Pharisee said it when he went up into the temple, and all the world has looked on with mingled pity and scorn at the blindness of the man who stood there and paraded his faithfulness; while all the world has bent with a pity that was near to love, a pity that was full of sympathy because man recognized his condition and experience, for the poor creature grovelling upon the pavement, unwilling and unable even to look upon the altar, but who, standing afar off, said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Whatever else you say, don't say, "I have been the very best I could." That means that you have not merely lived in the rooms of your imprisonment, but that you have been satisfied to count them the only possible rooms of your life, and that the great halls of your liberty have never opened themselves before you. Shall not

they open themselves somehow to us to-day, my friends? Shall we not turn away from this hour and go back into our business, into our offices, into the shops, into the crowded streets, bearing new thoughts of the lives that we might live, feeling the fetters on our hands and feet, feeling many things as fetters which we have thought of as the ornament and glory of our life, determined to be unsatisfied forever until these fetters shall be stricken off and we have entered into the full liberty which comes to those alone who are dedicated to the service of God, to the completion of their own nature, to the acceptance of the grace of Christ, and to the attainment of the eternal glory of the spiritual life, first here and then hereafter, never hereafter, it may be, except here and now, certainly here and now, as the immediate, pressing privilege and duty of our lives? So let us stand up on our feet and know ourselves in all the richness and in all the awfulness of our human life. Let us know ourselves children of God, and claim the liberty which God has given to every one of his children who will take it. God bless you and give some of you, help some of us, to claim, as we have never claimed before, that freedom with which the Son makes free!





