

Christian Retirement

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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THE ALMOST CHRISTIAN

In this day of outward profession, it is most needful frequently to reflect how far a person may go in the way of religion, and yet prove nothing at the last but an 'almost Christian'. This will prove to us the importance of self-examination, since nothing is genuine that will not stand the test of Scripture— that only touchstone of real godliness. A person may have a clear knowledge of the Gospel way of salvation; be able to declare the truths of Christianity with interest and edification; have much fluency in prayer; be punctual in his attendance on the means of grace; engage actively in religious and benevolent institutions; maintain family worship; join the society of pious characters; abstain from worldly amusements, and all outward immoralities: and yet, with all these shining appendages, be only an almost Christian.

This, to many, may appear uncharitable, and lead them to exclaim with the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" The fact is, all these important gifts and talents may be possessed, and these active exertions may be made, upon the principles of our 'fallen nature'. A man may have a taste for scriptural studies, and a fondness for biblical criticism; he may have a natural fluency of discourse; his connections may be such as imperceptibly lead him to join the friends of religion in their activities, and, by degrees, influence him to establish family worship, to separate himself from worldly amusements and worldly associates; and yet there may be a total destitution of evangelical principles. 'Faith working by love' may be a stranger to his heart.

The Gospel declares, that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature;" that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The work of grace being altogether 'spiritual and internal', its operations must be felt and experienced in the heart. This work consists in a deep humiliation on account of sin, both original and actual, whether of omission or commission; in a deep sense and feeling of spiritual helplessness and wretchedness; in a hearty reception of Jesus Christ, as revealed and offered in the Gospel to perishing sinners; in a supreme love of Him who died to save the vilest who come unto him in a childlike obedience to his will and commands, however self-denying.

If these things be lacking, all else is nothing but dross in the sight of God. All short of this divine work in the soul is only 'almost Christianity'. It is painful to the friends of Jesus to behold many droop and wither, who have given promising hopes of future excellence, and almost confirmed the expectations of pious friends concerning their religious sincerity.

These hopeful professors walk well for a season, but at length they begin to draw back, by slow degrees, it may be, at the first; but, increasing in their speed as they advance in the path of declension, they finally plunge into the world, and thus verify the true proverb, "the dog is turned to his vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." With uneasy consciences, they endeavor to justify their return, by slandering the lives of professors, and speaking evil of those things with which they were never savingly acquainted. Such people, if they die in their apostasy, give every reason to believe that they never knew the grace of God in truth; that they never received the truth in the love of it. Hence the apostle John, speaking of such characters, plainly says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be manifest that they were not all of us."

We may equally presume that they never tasted the inward blessedness of true religion— peace with God and joy in the Holy Spirit, arising from a believing, self-appropriating view of the atonement of Jesus.

When, therefore, their new mode of thinking and acting subsided; when prosperity gilded their path, or persecution covered it with thorns; not having root in themselves, and being destitute of saving faith, they became weary of a service, in which their whole soul was never engaged. They cast off a yoke, to them galling and grievous, and ran back again with delight into the secretly beloved pastures of the world. "Demas has forsaken me," said the sorrowing apostle, "having loved this present evil world."

Where is the congregation of professing Christians, which does not from time to time afford melancholy proofs of this hollowness of character, this emptiness of profession, this influence of the world, to the grief of its faithful pastor, and the pious part of his flock? Such awful characters may be considered as spies, "pretending themselves to be just men," whom Satan sends into the camp of the true Israel of God, in order to discover the failings and infirmities of real Christians. These they traitorously expose to the derision of an ungodly world, hoping thereby to bring discredit upon the Gospel of Christ, and keep men more quietly in their sins. God can indeed overrule all for good, but woe unto them by whom these offenses come.

It is, then, both awakening and alarming to reflect how far a person may go in outward profession, and yet be a hypocrite with God; an almost Christian; "a

castaway." If the new creature in Christ Jesus can be so counterfeited, as to deceive for a time the children of God, whose judgment is always guided by that charity which hopes all things; how ought I to examine into the principles, motives, and springs of my own actions, lest, after having made a profession before men, I should be rejected as "reprobate silver" in that day, when "the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is!" Oh what need there is for sifting ourselves!

"Blessed Lord, make me an humble, sincere disciple. Let me not covet after gifts, so much as graces; and after divine gifts, only that I may be useful to others, and glorify you. I may live in the bustle of religious institutions, while devoid of religious affections. I may be able to advocate the cause of Christ, while destitute of a saving interest in his blood. I may mingle in the companies of the pious, and yet be an utter stranger to their spirit and experience."

Nothing will stand the test of the great day, but faith which works by love. My soul must be united to Christ by a living faith, before my works can be acceptable to a holy God. Out of Christ, I am a dead branch. In Christ, I become fruitful, through the skill of the heavenly husbandman, who prunes the living branches, that they may bring forth more fruit to the glory of his grace. This blessed receiving of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will be accompanied by a gradual renewal of the soul into his image; and this divine transformation will be productive of works of faith, labors of love, and patience of hope. My heart will become the abode of peace and purity. High and holy principles will be implanted in richer abundance. I shall live for Christ. His glory will be my chief aim, his law my soul's delight. Holy love will guide my movements, and become the unceasing spring of holy actions. All my desires will be to him who loved me, and gave himself for me. This is true Christianity. "Oh that I may feel the power of this sacred truth Lord, save me from insincerity and hypocrisy, from declension and apostasy. Let me not be satisfied with barren knowledge and outward profession; but let your love rule in my heart, and shine forth in my daily words and actions, until I am translated, through grace, to those pure regions of unsullied happiness, where all your redeemed people shall shine forth, as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, forever and ever.

Dear Jesus, fill my soul
With holiness and peace;
Arise with healing in your wings,
You Sun of righteousness.

May all beneath the sky
Usurp my heart no more;
May you be my first, my chief delight,
My soul's unbounded store.

In you all treasures lie,

From you all blessings flow;
You are the bliss of saints above,
The joy of saints below.

Oh come and make me yours,
A sinner saved by grace;
Then shall I sing with loudest strains
In heaven, your dwelling-place.

When standing round the throne,
Amid the ransomed throng,
Your praise shall be my sweet employ,
While love inspires my song.

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