

Christian Retirement

Part 37

By [Thomas Reade](#)

1837

ON CHRISTIAN MOTIVES

Christianity has justly been called a religion of motives; and yet, alas! how little are those sublime motives to action, which the Gospel inspires, considered by the great mass of professing Christians!

Men carry out their worldly concerns under the powerful influence of some constraining motive, which impels them forward with unabating ardor. But in the affairs of eternity, they commonly act at random, without any fixed purpose whatever. Education, or custom, gives the coloring to their religion; and if they are asked to give a reason of the hope that is in them, a total absence of motive or purpose will soon be discovered.

They think as the world thinks—and they act as the world acts. Treading in the steps of their forefathers, they retain the impression of early habits. And finding little leisure amid the accumulating engagements of life, to investigate the claims of eternity, they are satisfied with the observance of outward ordinances, and a few crude notions of the Christian religion.

They pity those who are so weak as to prefer future to present enjoyments; and can scarcely conceive any rational motive sufficiently powerful to induce men to pass by the flattering prospects of the world, for the unseen possessions of futurity. Hence they condemn such people as visionary and enthusiastic; while they applaud the wisdom of those who endeavor to make sure of present profit and advantage. To secure the main prospect, is their standard of wisdom; their highest object of pursuit.

This, we may fear, is but too faithful a picture of thousands who call themselves Christians; but who possess nothing beyond the name. Esteeming themselves wise, they become fools; and will, except they repent, eternally bewail their folly.

It is of immense importance to examine well into the motives of our actions, for "whatever is not of faith, is sin."

Saul of Tarsus in his blind zeal conceived that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth: but when his understanding was enlightened, he saw himself to have been a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious.

When Abraham went to offer up his beloved Isaac, it was an eminent instance of faith. He acted on this trying occasion from a good motive; in simple compliance with a divine command, though an apparent frustration of a divine promise. Yet he believed God, and cheerfully obeyed his will.

This childlike reliance on the truth and faithfulness of Jehovah, was honored by a rich promise of abundant blessings. But when the Israelites, on the contrary, caused their children to pass through the fire to Moloch, it was an awful instance of human depravity. Their conduct sprang from a bad motive, being in direct violation of a divine prohibition, and was therefore quickly followed by heavy judgments upon the nation.

The command to Abraham was designed by the Almighty to be a trial of his faith; a test of his obedience; a proof of his love. But more especially to be a signal representation of his own unspeakable love, in not withholding his own—his well-beloved Son from us, when he gave him to be a sacrifice for sin, on one of those very mountains of Moriah.

Now, can anyone for a moment suppose that these two actions shall receive the same recompense of reward? We shudder while we contemplate the unnatural infatuation of the idolatrous Israelites. We feel humbled while we meditate on the astonishing exercise of faith, obedience, and self-denial which was exhibited in the case of Abraham.

Their motives were as widely distant as the east is from the west; as distant as holy faith is from rebellions unbelief.

Some actions are criminal in their very nature, while others may be good or bad according to the motive from where they spring. The hypocrites, whom Jesus condemns in his sermon on the mount, gave alms, and prayed, and fasted. But when they distributed their charities, they sounded a trumpet before them; when they prayed, they stood in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets; when they fasted, they disfigured their faces; thus making their religious performance as public as possible. And why did they take such pains to be seen? Our Lord tells us: "that they might have glory from men." They obtained that which was the governing motive of their actions, and consequently they had their reward.

Our blessed Savior exhorts his people to the performance of the same duties, but from a far different motive. Secrecy in giving—retirement in devotion—and unostentatiousness in fasting, are opposed to 'pharisaical display'. Duties, thus

performed from a principle of faith and love, and directed simply to the glory of God, will be approved of by Him who sees in secret, and who will graciously reward them openly.

We hear of a man extolled for his charity and benevolence to the poor. His name appears in the list of benefactors to almost every laudable institution; but if to be extolled is the secret motive of his actions, this man has his reward.

Another is very regular in his attendance on public ordinances. His seat is never vacant. He talks much about doctrines, and seeks the society of religious people. Hence he obtains the appellation of pious. If to be so esteemed is the moving spring of his conduct, truly he has his reward.

All this is equitable. Those who act from no higher motive than human approbation, on receiving such commendation, have their coveted reward.

They may speak with the tongues of men and of angels; they may understand all mysteries and all knowledge; they may bestow all their goods to feed the poor;— yes, in a season of fiery persecution they may even give their bodies to be burned: and yet, if faith working by love is not their principle of action, all these splendid gifts and costly sacrifices will profit them nothing. In the day of judgment, they will be found no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; while the widow's mite, and the cup of cold water given to the least of the brethren of Jesus, out of love to his name, shall in no way lose its reward.

How important then is self-examination! How necessary to ascertain the motives of our actions, lest self-seeking, vain glory, and the desire of human applause, should render them odious in the sight of God.

Oh! that I may never forget this Gospel truth, that no work is accounted good in the judgment of heaven, but what springs from faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, until I am united to Christ by faith, and justified through his righteousness, all my boasted moral virtues, are nothing but "splendid sins." Brought to this touchstone, how many actions, highly esteemed and far-famed among men, will be rejected as "reprobate silver" by that holy Being who searches the heart and tries the reins. For lack of due consideration in time, many thousands, it is to be feared, will reap the fruit of their criminal indifference through an awful eternity.

From this view of the subject, I learn that where there is a desire to serve God, it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not. The holy purpose will be recognized, even when circumstances prevent the performance. Nathan, when informed of David's purpose to build a house for the God of Israel, said, "Go and do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you."

David, though not permitted to erect the temple, received the most gracious assurance of the divine approbation: which Solomon took special notice of, in his

beautiful prayer at its dedication: "The Lord said to David my father, forasmuch as it was in your heart to build an house for my name; you did well in that it was in your heart nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son which shall come forth out of your loins, he shall build the house for my name."

Let no one then despise the day of small things, since the inward ardent desire to promote the cause of Christ in the earth, may be accomplished through the "good hand of our God upon us," by our children, and our children's children.

Blessed Lord! be pleased to give me the precious grace of simplicity and godly sincerity. May all my desires be to you, and to the glory of your name. Reign in my heart the Lord of every motion there. Purify my motives. Elevate my purposes. Preserve me from seeking the applause of men Guard me from the poisonous influence of flattery and self-love. Clothe me with humility; and whatever I do in word or deed, may I do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Assist your servant, Lord, to pray;
Illuminate my mind;
Oh! guide me in that heavenly way,
Where sinners comfort find.

In mercy, Lord, your ear incline
To every fervent prayer;
Let rays of love, and grace divine,
My soul for heaven prepare.

Reveal your great salvation, Lord,
Dispel each rising doubt;
Oh! speak that soul-enlivening word,
"Your sins are blotted out."

Then shall I raise the cheerful song.
To my redeeming God;
And join the raptured choral throng,
In Zion's blest abode.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill).
If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).