

Christian Retirement

Part 56

By [Thomas Reade](#)

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ON THE CHARACTER OF MARTHA AND MARY

With what beautiful simplicity is the interview between Jesus and the sisters of Lazarus related by Luke, in the 10th chapter of his Gospel. How gentle and yet how forcible is the reproof which our Lord gave to Martha. How gracious the testimony which he bore to the piety of Mary. Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard his words. Happy and favored station! She sat at the feet of him who is infinite wisdom, and heard, with teachableness and delight, those gracious truths which proceeded from his lips. The Lord inclined her heart, as he did Lydia's, to attend unto the things which he spoke unto her. His words fell like good seed into a soil prepared by sovereign grace, and brought forth the blessed fruits of righteousness.

Martha was cumbered with much serving, and careful about many things. Her mind was ruffled at the apparent inattention of Mary, who had left her to serve alone. But Jesus, instead of reproof, bestows his commendation on Mary's conduct; since he came to their house, not for the purpose of feasting himself with their earthly dainties, but to feast them with the delicious truths of Gospel grace.

This family picture is often exhibited in the Christian world. We are naturally more inclined to the bustle of religious occupations, than the retired devotional exercises of meditation and prayer. Martha's hospitality was in itself commendable, and sprang from love to her Savior; but the hurried state of her mind, and the neglect of a precious season for spiritual improvement, were highly reprehensible. She forgot her own spiritual needs, and the great object of Christ's visit. She was cumbered with much serving. Her spirit got ruffled. An improper feeling carried her away beyond the bounds of affection and decorum. She even interrupted our Lord in his discourse with Mary, and wished him to dismiss her with a suitable reproof for neglecting her household concerns. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? bid her, therefore, that she help me." The reproof, however, unexpectedly fell upon herself. "Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful; and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." This faithful

admonition was no doubt sanctified to her; for "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

We cannot contemplate this family scene without being struck with the value of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. A mind active and ardent, alive to neglect and susceptible of irritation, is generally admired by the world, as indicative of a noble spirit; while a retired, noiseless, yet humble and obedient frame of heart, is ridiculed or despised, as low and unmanly.

But the Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. That which is highly esteemed among men, is an abomination in the sight of God.

Like Mary, I too am privileged to sit at Jesus' feet; for when I read the Holy Scriptures, I read the word of Jesus. When I hear the Gospel faithfully preached, I hear the Gospel of Jesus. With what reverence, then, should I listen to the words of eternal truth: with what delight should I receive the glad tidings of salvation, proclaimed by him who came down from heaven to seek and to save that which was lost; and who has graciously declared, that all who look unto him, who come unto him, who receive him, and believe in his name, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Lord, give me faith, and hope, and love, that all my affections may be fixed upon you; and my whole life devoted to your glory. But alas! how often do I resemble Martha! Daily do I need her salutary reproof.

The various occupations and businesses of life; the multiplied cares and anxieties about earthly things; no, even the very labors required in actively conducting religious institutions, have a tendency, without great watchfulness and prayer, to weary the spirits; to clog the wheels of the mind in its ascent heavenward; and to render us unfit for that tranquil, spiritual posture of soul in which Mary was found, when she sat at her Savior's feet.

To be actively employed, is good for the Christian; while a too great seclusion unfits the mind for general usefulness. There is, however, a happy combination of activity and retirement, which at once strengthens the mind, and preserves its spirituality from decay.

The characters presented to our view in the Holy Scriptures are drawn by the unerring pencil of truth. There we see man as he really is, both in his best and worst estate. The excellencies of the saints are recorded with remarkable conciseness; while their defects and falls are dwelt upon with awful particularity. The reason seems to be apparent: to humble the natural pride of man; and to demonstrate, that he who glories, must glory in the Lord.

The Bible tells us the unwelcome truth, that "Man in his best estate is altogether vanity;" that "there is not a just man upon earth, who lives and sins not." It is absurd, then, to expect perfection; but not unreasonable to expect consistency.

While I labor to promote the spread of the Gospel through the benighted regions of the earth, I must beware lest I neglect to cultivate, by close communion with Jesus, the work of grace in my own soul. When, like Martha, I find my mind cumbered with much serving; when I begin to feel an increasing distraction of thought, and a growing unfitness for spiritual meditation; then let me be take myself with redoubled frequency to Mary's happy station.

At the feet of Jesus, I am permitted to ask for every blessing. In secret fervor of spirit, I may there implore that all-sufficient grace, which is so freely promised to all who sincerely seek the heavenly treasure.

Lord, enable me to cultivate diligence with devotion; to employ my humble powers in your service, both in the active range of Christian benevolence, and in the passive exercise of self-denying resignation. Mold my will to yours, Let holy love be the ever-moving spring of all my actions; that whatever I do in word or deed, I may do all with a view to your glory, and the spiritual good of a perishing world.

Descend, blest Spirit, in my heart,
And give me Mary's better part;
An interest in the Savior's love,
A foretaste of the joys above.

Dispel the darkness of the mind:
In you alone sweet peace I find;
Whose kindly office it is to bless,
Through Christ the Lord, my righteousness.

Oh! may I walk with holy fear,
While journeying as a pilgrim here;
Feel my weak soul by you sustained;
And in the path of life maintained.

Descend, blest Spirit, from above,
You God of peace, of joy, and love,
Seal your salvation to my heart,
And never from my soul depart.

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