

## Faith of Our Fathers

[A WEEKLY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG AND OLD.]  
OF OUR HAPPINESS IN THIS LIFE, IF WE KEEP  
THE COMMANDMENTS.

### 2. We must not seek for Happiness in Worldly Things.

St. Paul in like manner, after enjoining us to set our minds upon the joys of heaven, and not upon the perishable goods of this life, immediately adds, the mortification of our passions as the necessary means to accomplish this: "Mortify therefore your members," says he, "which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is the service of idols; for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of unbelief" (Col. iii. 5). He repeats the same thing in another place, by assuring us that the lust of the flesh are the source of all our sins, which excludes us from heaven, and therefore concludes thus: "I say then, walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; for the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another . . . now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are, fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, etc., of which I foretell you as I have foretold to you, that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God" (Eph. v. 16). Hence he declares to us, that, "If we live according to the flesh we shall die, but if by the spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, we shall live" (Rom. viii. 13). Where we see that this mortification of our corrupt flesh is declared to be a necessary condition of salvation. And on this account he gives the fulfilling of this condition as a distinguishing sign of our belonging to Christ. "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences" (Gal. v. 24). Nay, he assures us that it was one of the principal ends for which Christ came into this world, to teach us this necessary virtue: "The grace of God our Saviour," says he, "hath appeared to all men, instructing us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, and justly, and godly in this world" (Tit. ii. 21). It is true, indeed, that the practice of this self-denial and mortification is difficult to flesh and blood, but we must remember that salvation is at stake, that no one is "crowned, except he strive lawfully" (2 Tim. ii. 5), that "we fight for an incorruptible crown" (1 Cor. ix.), "a never-fading crown of glory" (1 Pet. v. 4, for "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that cannot fade, preserved for us in heaven" (1 Pet. i. 4), for the possession of heaven itself; and Our Saviour expressly declares, "That the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence; and the violent carry it away" (Matt. xi. 12). Consequently there is no medium; either we must do violence to our corrupt nature denying ourselves, and mortifying our passions and lusts after the enjoyments of this world, as Christ so strictly requires of us, or there will be no heaven for us. And on this account it is that Our Blessed Saviour gives us all this warm and affectionate exhortation, "Enter ye in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat; how narrow is the gate and straight is the way that leadeth to life and few there are that find it!" (Matt. vii. 13). Those who seek their happiness in the enjoyments of this world, walk indeed in a broad road, where self-love is under no restraint, where their passions and lusts have full scope, and where every liberty is taken to gratify all the desires of the flesh and blood; but, alas! they are so far from getting their aim, or finding that happiness which they seek, that they find nothing in all these things but vanity and vexation of spirit, and at last end in eternal misery and perdition. Whereas they who seek their happiness only in God, walk, it is true, in a narrow road, where self-love and all its lusts are crucified, and violence is done to all their corrupt inclinations; but they soon find to their happy experience that this proves a source of real peace and content to the soul here, and leads them to eternal life and everlasting bliss hereafter. It is a narrow road, but it is a road, where all the difficulty is only in the first beginnings; for when these are courageously overcome, and men begin to "taste how sweet the Lord is," they find their "way beautiful, and all their paths the paths of peace" (Prov. iii. 17). For as the Holy Ghost Himself declares, "I will lead thee by the paths of equity, which when thou shalt have entered, thy steps shall not be straightened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not find a stumbling block" (Prov. iv. 11).

Q. 5. Nothing can be more plain and decisive, than all those testimonies of the eternal truth are, to show us the necessity of not seeking after the enjoyments of this world, but of mortifying our natural attachments towards them. But how can all this be reconciled with the maxims and practice of the great bulk of Christians, which are just the reverse of this heavenly doctrine of the Son of God?

A. Or rather how can the maxims and practice of the great bulk of Christians be reconciled, with these Divine truths? It is indeed a source of melancholy reflection, to compare the conduct of Christians now-a-days with the rules of Christianity; and to see how much the spirit of the world with all its maxims, has intruded itself into the hearts of men, and usurped the sovereign power there, notwithstanding the above dreadful comminations denounced against the world and all its lovers, by the great God. To hear the way that many Christians speak, and to see how they behave, one would be apt to believe that the world is the only God they adore, whose favor the court, upon whose protection they depend, whose laws they revere, and whom alone they study to please. What the world will think, and what the world will say, seems to be the only ultimate motives that decide in their deliberations; and though Almighty God has expressly declared that "if any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise; for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. iii, 18). Ye how few true Christians are to be found who are not ready upon every occasion to transgress the most sacred duties of a Christian, for fear of being laughed at by the world? Whatever lengths they go in all the extravagancies of the world, in luxury, in high living, in dress, in dangerous and sinful amusements, the common excuse is, "we must be neighbor-like, one cannot be singular to be pointed at; there is no living in the world without complying with its ways; we only do as others do: there are many who do much worse than we," and the like; and under such pretexts as these, they give way to all the inclinations of self-love, and to every impulse of curiosity, sensuality, and vanity. Such a conduct as this, in those who pretend to be disciples of a crucified Saviour cannot indeed be reconciled with the belief of his gospel; but the truth is, they do not believe it, as delivered by its Divine Author; blinded by their passions and worldly attachments, they cannot understand it in the sense intended by Him; immersed in sensual pleasures, slaves to the esteem and opinion of the world, and grasping at riches as their only good, their understandings are so darkened that they cannot see, and their hearts so hardened that they will not believe the plainest declarations of the Son of God: "The sensual man perceiveth not the things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand" (1 Cor. ii. 14). When the Jews refused to believe in Christ He was not surprised, but said, "How can you believe, who receive glory from another, and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?" (John v. 44). And even those among their rulers who did believe Him, yet durst not confess Him, "for they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God" (John xii. 43). And when Our Saviour had declared some very important doctrines to the people, "The Pharisees, who were covetous, heard all these things, and they derided Him" (Luke xvi. 14). And such is the unhappy case with these worldly-minded Christians; they cannot bear the light of this heavenly doctrine, so contrary to the dispositions of their hearts, and therefore they fall upon a thousand shifts to interpret His words their own way, and by such limitations, reflections, and exceptions as they are pleased to annex to them, they endeavor to modify them according to their own fancy; for being determined not to regulate their sentiments and conduct by the Gospel, they flatter themselves they can reconcile the Gospel to their worldly maxims and practice. Thus they not only strive to make friendship with the world themselves, but even to make friendship betwixt Jesus Christ and the world, notwithstanding the infinite and irreconcilable opposition which He Himself has declared there is between them. But such nominal Christians would do well to remember, that to walk in the broad road with the many, is to walk in the "road that leads to destruction"; that "many are called, but few are chosen; and that those happy few are they who walk in "the narrow road that leads to life."

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