

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE VIII.

CHRIST'S ESTIMATE OF THE HUMAN  
PERSONALITY.

BY LESTER REDDIN, B.D., MILTON, PA.

EVERY article of merchandise has a given value, that is, a "power to command other commodities in exchange." Value depends on utility, rarity, or the amount of thought, muscle, and time necessary to produce the article. Commercial values are expressed in terms of the unit of legal currency. When two articles have the same value, they are said to be *equi-valent*. However great the value of any article may be, its equivalent can still be estimated in terms of the unit of currency. A monetary equivalent for the Pitt diamond in the Louvre in Paris has been estimated at two and one half million dollars, and it is alleged that the sum of six million dollars was once offered for Leonardo Da Vinci's celebrated "Mona Lisa." The range of values is confined to the realm of the impersonal; man, a personal being, transcends the realm of values and takes his place in the realm of worth and dignity. Therefore no equivalent for man can be fixed: personality cannot be expressed in terms of the impersonal, nor worth in terms of values.

Although Christ antedated the great German metaphysician, Immanuel Kant, by seventeen centuries, he recognized this distinction between the realm of worths and the realm of values. Hence his anthropology is at the farthest remove from that of Charles Dickens's Mr. Thomas Grad-

grind, "with a rule and a pair of scales and the multiplication table always in his pocket, ready to weigh and measure any part of human nature and tell you exactly what it comes to." In the estimation of Christ, man "differs with an advantage" from the birds (Matt. vi. 26; x. 29) and from a sheep (Matt. xii. 12), because he is a person and they are impersonal: he has worth and dignity; they have value only. In the interrogation, "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" he emphasizes the impossibility of computing, in terms of worldly values, the worth of the human soul. The "pearl of great price" can be bought, even though the price be so great as to necessitate the selling of all that the merchantman has to obtain it, but he "whom certain of the children of Israel did price" at thirty pieces of silver, conceived of nothing less than his own life that might be given as a ransom for the souls of men. There is an obvious reminiscence of the teaching of his Master in the words of Peter to his readers: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. i. 18-19). That such a price must be paid evinces the immutability of God's moral standard; that Christ willingly paid the price is demonstrative of his exalted estimate of the inherent and indefeasible worth of the human personality. Perhaps this sublime truth would lend some support to the "*one-species*" theory of the divine and human natures, a theory which has been advanced by certain American writers in defense of the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ.

To Christ, man is not simply a means; he is an end within himself, and as such he takes precedence of the world of things. They exist for him. To the teleology of the book of Genesis (i. 26, 28, 29), which represents the animal and

vegetable kingdoms as designed especially for man, Christ adds that the divinely appointed religious institutions, typical of which is the Sabbath day, were also designed for the good of man.

Identifying himself with humanity in the hour of his temptation in the wilderness, he declared that the real life of man depends on a higher sustenance than bread; namely, "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." But, on the other hand, man is not defiled by that which "entereth in at the mouth," but rather by the unworthy imaginations and purposes of the heart.

Although the idea of the equality of all men in capability and responsibility is precluded by the teaching of Christ in the parables of the Talents and Pounds, he insists that all men are equally endowed with a right to the recognition, sympathy, and encouragement of their fellows; and those who refuse to accord this right to others do so at their own hazard. It were perilous to defame that inherent dignity which attaches to the personality of each individual. "Who-soever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." These words of the Master have their echo in the words of "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," who speaks disapprovingly of cursing "men who are made after the similitude of God" (iii. 9). The greatest earthly calamity that can befall man is not comparable to the woe which he brings on himself who puts an obstacle to the highest moral endeavor in the way of even the weakest human being. "It were well for him if a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were thrown into the sea, rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble" (Luke xvii. 2).

Christ was interested not only in the static, but also in the dynamic, aspect of the human personality. He desired that men should bring to the highest degree of perfection their God-given powers of soul. A perfection akin to that of the Heavenly Father is the goal for which he would urge all to strive (Matt. v. 48). To the Buddhist the *summum bonum* is the absolute extinction of the individuality; and even the Christian mysticism of Germany in the fourteenth century, of which a noted exponent was Meister Eckhart, "the father of German speculation," conceived of the ultimate suppression of self as the highest spiritual attainment. But it was the purpose of the Founder of Christianity to develop to its highest and noblest expression the personality of man. It seems far too much to assert that "for him there is no such word as ἀπεριή in the sense of elevated manliness." It is true, there are no recorded instances of his use of the word, but the idea is, by no means, foreign to the spirit of his teaching. He everywhere sought to instill resoluteness of character. Perfection is not by contraction, but by expansion. Not even the Beatitudes were designed to teach the effacement of self, but rather to encourage self-expression in its highest and noblest aspect. The type of character therein depicted is active rather than passive, as is seen from the nature of the climax reached in the final member of this "beatific octave"; for one with a supine, colorless personality need have no fear of being persecuted for righteousness' sake.

In order that he might spur the individual on to the highest within him, Christ adjusted his methods in dealing with men to their varying temperaments and degrees of interest and intelligence; seeking now to excite fear (Matt. v. 21-30; vii. 13, 14, 21-27), now to inspire courage (Luke ix. 62); appealing now to pride (John viii. 40, 56), now to shame

(ver. 7); now repressing rash discipleship (ix. 57-58), now seeking to stimulate the sluggish (ver. 59-62). By his rigid challenge to the Syrophenician woman he stirred to activity within her those powers which differentiate her from a dog. A dog may give evidence of fear in the presence of probable chastisement, but it is impossible for it to have a feeling of humility in the presence of a morally superior as did this daughter of an alien race. Christ felt an affinity between himself and those in whose hearts there was a desire for the morally sublime. He loved the rich young ruler who from his youth had cultivated certain virtues and was still inquiring concerning further good; and he welcomed as an addition to his circle of friends Nathanael, "an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile," whose conception of the good was so lofty that he could conceive of no good thing coming out of Nazareth. It is true, Christ mingled freely with those who were reputed to be notorious "sinners"; but this was that he might give them higher ideals of righteousness, and not that he found their companionship congenial. When he was weary from travel and from conflict with sin and was in need of human sympathy and companionship, he went to the Bethany home in which the love of the good and the beautiful was dominant.

But perfection can be attained only through normal functioning; and in the estimation of Christ the soul reaches its highest activity in its Godward functioning. The dictum of John Fawcett, the hymnographer,

"Religion is the chief concern  
Of mortals here below,"

is a correct transcript of the mind of the Master. Hence he summons to activity every functioning power of the soul.

Herein is seen a striking divergence between his conception of the compass of the soul activities in the sphere of religion and the views of those who in more recent times have endeavored to set forth from a philosophic point of view the real content of religion. With Hegel, religion consists in intellection; with Schleiermacher, it is feeling; while Kant reduces it to a matter of the will only. There is an element of truth in each of these views which is comprehended in the teaching of Christ, and indicated in his attitude toward men, in whom he sought to awaken nobility of thought, feeling, and volition.

#### I. INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY.

Although there is no basis in the teaching of Christ for the vagaries of Gnosticism which Harnack has characterized as the "acute Hellenizing of Christianity," intellectual functioning holds no insignificant place among the duties which he prescribes and the possibilities which he holds out to the Christian. Agnosticism avers that men must remain in ignorance of "every thing that lies beyond the sphere of sense-perception." Christ, on the contrary, assures us of the possibility of KNOWING "the only true God" (John xvii. 3) and the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xiii. 11; cf. John vii. 17; viii. 32). Paul speaks of a knowledge that "puffeth up" (1 Cor. viii. 1); with such knowledge Christ has no sympathy, but there is, indeed, a knowledge which he heartily commends to men, and encourages the pursuit thereof. Psychologists tell us that curiosity (i.e. inquiry) is the mother of knowledge. Christ fosters such inquiry concerning the higher objects of cognition. He deplored the ignorance of the Samaritans who knew not what they worshiped (John iv. 22), the Sadducees who knew "not the Scriptures,

neither the power of God" (Mark xii. 12:24), the Pharisees and Sadducees who could not discern "the signs of the times" (Matt. xvi. 3), Nicodemus, "a teacher in Israel" who had no knowledge of the sublime truth of regeneration (John iii. 10), and his own disciples, James and John, who proposed calling down fire from heaven to consume the inhospitable Samaritans (Luke ix. 54-55).

The importance of the imagination in spheres other than the religious is generally recognized. In familiar speech the incredible and the alleged impossible are often spoken of as "unimaginable," it being implied that that which is "imaginable" is conceivably possible. The competency of the imagination to serve the interests of knowledge through the construction of working hypotheses is appreciated by students in all lines of scientific investigation. It was a conviction of Sir Benjamin Brodie that "physical investigation, more than anything besides, helps to teach us the actual value and right use of the imagination." Truth must first be imagined, then discovered. The eminent Oxford scholar, B. Bosanquet, says, "Most of the unifying conceptions of modern science are working hypotheses," and the source of such hypotheses is clearly enough indicated by the words of John Stuart Mill: "There are no other limits to hypotheses than those of the human imagination." Professor Tyndall in his "Fragments of Science" has an essay under the caption, "Scientific Use of the Imagination," by which he means this very use of the imagination as an instrument for scientific investigation; and he cites one instance in which "the scientific imagination is authoritative." This power of the mind which has proved so potent in the quest for scientific truth is no less important in the Godward functioning of the soul. Accordingly we observe that much of the teaching of Christ—e.g., his parables, metaphors,



similes, etc.— was cast in forms appropriate to stimulate the imagination. The importance of faith in the body of Christ's teaching is manifest to every student of the Gospels, and faith in its representative aspect, that is, as "a realizing sense," has been very aptly defined as "a religious use of the imagination."<sup>1</sup> By this it is meant that the objects of religious faith, although wholly behind the sphere of sense-perception, are seized by the imagination (rhetorically, "the eye of faith"), and depicted as vividly to one's self as though they were really palpable to the senses. It is this aspect of faith that is brought prominently to our attention in the lone post-resurrection beatitude, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 29); and it is through the "religious use of the imagination" that Abraham receives favorable mention in the controversy of Christ with certain unbelieving Jews who arrogantly boasted of their descent from the father of the faithful.

## II. THE FEELINGS.

Schleiermacher, thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Romanticism, advanced the idea of a special religious faculty in the psychical constitution of man to which he referred all Godward functioning. In his conception "religion is sense [i.e., in his own language, "capacity for sensibility"] and taste for the infinite." But such a theory is psychologically indefensible and, from the point of view of exegesis, unnecessary. Christ addressed himself to the same sensibilities in man that are exercised in activities other than the religious. Hence his dictum, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. vi. 24).

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Johnson, *An Outline of Systematic Theology*, p. 255.

1. *The Affections.* Love to God is given the place of primacy in the catalogue of Christian duties. It is true that there are few passages in the Gospels in which Christ refers to this primal duty, but this fact does not prove, as some have supposed, a relative unimportance of the subject. To the lawyer who apparently was interested in "great" things, he declares that the greatest commandment in the Law is the command to love God with all the power of one's being; and he deplores the fact that those who were persecuting him because he had healed an invalid on the Sabbath day had not the love of God in them (John v. 42).

2. *The Emotions.* There are to-day two conflicting views concerning the place which the fundamental emotion, FEAR, holds in religion. One class of thinkers hold that fear is "a disease to be eliminated in a process of spiritual development," while in the opinion of another class fear is "an essential factor in spiritual life." Christ gave the weight of his testimony in favor of the latter view. "I will warn you," he said, "whom you shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke xii. 5).

In his temptation Christ gave renewed emphasis to the Mosaic commandment (Deut. vi. 13; x. 20) concerning the worship of the Supreme Being (Matt. iv. 10), and in his conversation with the woman at the well he explained that true worship, which is dependent on the intelligence of the worshiper (John iv. 22), is spiritual in its nature (ver. 24). But what is spiritual worship but the religious functioning of the *ÆSTHETIC EMOTION*, that is an æsthetic appreciation of the majesty, sublimity, and holiness of the Deity?

## III. VOLITIONAL ACTIVITY.

Thomas Reid, the Scotch philosopher of the eighteenth century, says: "Every man is conscious of a power to determine, in things which he conceives to depend on his determination. To this power we give the name of Will."

Christ everywhere postulates man's freedom in the exercise of this power. Those vexed problems of the metaphysical aspects of the will — such, for example, as its relation to the processes of thought, around which scholastic controversy centered — receive no consideration in the teaching of Christ; but his appeals to men are based on the assumption that they are capable of choosing between worthy and unworthy motives. An index to his estimate of the will may be found in the wide range of words,<sup>1</sup> indicative of volitional activity, employed by him. He requires that exercise of the will which is accompanied with "*the feeling of effort*," and which, oftentimes, leads to "*action in the line of the greatest resistance*." Yea, what more sweeping demand could be made on the human will than the command of Christ to his followers to forgive, times without number, those who "sin" against them? Surely this requires superlative self-mastery.

The will of the Father is the ultimate end toward which he would direct all human volition, yet he desires not passive acquiescence in the divine will, but rather a conscious self-determination to act for that holy end. It is thus that man performs his highest volitive function, and it is thus that he attains to that spiritual enlightenment by which spiritual things are discerned. He who "wills to do his will" is promised an illumination of soul, a clarity of vision, a spirit-

<sup>1</sup>θέλω, ἀθετώ, ἐκλέγομαι, ἀποδοκιμάζω, ἀφίημι, τίθημι (εἰς τὴν καρδίαν), πρόθυμος, βραδὺς τῇ καρδίᾳ.

ual discernment, which the eating of the forbidden fruit never could bestow upon the first progenitors of our race (John vii. 17).

Symmetry is essential to the perfection of character, and symmetry can be attained only by giving appropriate vigilance to each of the duties of life, whether small or great. This Christ insisted upon. Not even in spiritual matters would he countenance the "robbery of Peter to pay Paul." It is a correct proposition of Systematic Theology that the law of God is "a transcript of the divine nature," and, at the same time, is "adapted to man's finite nature as needing law." There is a psychological basis for even the positive requirements of religion: they are divinely adapted to the nature and condition of mankind, and therefore their faithful observance gives a discipline not otherwise obtainable. But, on the other hand, they are not to be unduly magnified at the cost of moral requirements. The law of tithing was incumbent on the Jews, and Christ approves the extension of the practice even to the less significant products of the garden; but he as heartily disapproves the neglect of "the weightier matters of the Law." "This ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." To this principle under which he here particularizes, he gives a much wider scope; proportionate development of character is the end sought throughout his teaching.

Christ taught self-seeking of the higher order. Students of biology have observed that "the deepest instinct of every organism is self-preservation." This instinct is both racial and individual, and nature has provided play for it in the processes of fission and copulation and the coöperative measures of symbiosis and commensalism. This law of self-preservation is even more demonstrative in the realm of per-

sonality. Here means are consciously employed to bring about this desired end. He who "knew what is in man" recognized the primacy of this fundamental instinctive impulse of the human heart. This he never sought to expunge from human nature; he would not stifle *egoism*, but rather raise *altruism* to a level with it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." With the Christian enlightenment as to what the distinctive function of man is, the *eudæmonism* of Aristotle and the *energism* of the Neo-Aristotelian philosophers become truly Christian. The peripatetic philosopher's definition of the goal of human endeavor as "the exercise of man's living powers, according to their highest virtues, in a life affording full room for their development" is the philosophical counterpart of the spiritual ideal presented by Christ to men and reflected in the words of Paul: "That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ." Christ teaches that a man may fall so far short of that goal that "it were good for that man if he had never been born."

His doctrine of prayer, which holds no insignificant place in his teaching, is very clearly a doctrine of self-seeking. It is true that prayer for the multiplication of missionary forces and for mercy on one's enemies is enjoined by him; but those things for which an enlightened self-interest would prompt one to ask certainly are included in his list of the worthy objects of prayer.

It cannot be gainsaid that Christ taught self-denial; that he emphasized its psychical as well as its carnal aspect. He attached to it an importance which has been a stumbling-block to his own and to subsequent generations. He made it the prime condition of discipleship. But it is particularly worthy of notice in this connection that his aim was not annihilation, but conservation; and hence the self-denial

which he taught was not designed to atrophy one's personality, but rather to assist the soul to perform its noblest function. With his challenge to self-abnegation he presents the hope of self-preservation. "If thy eye cause thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is *profitable for thee,*" etc.; "If thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is *profitable for thee,*" etc. To the grain of corn that falls into the earth and dies he guarantees a self-multiplication of thirty, sixty, or a hundred fold; and it is a comforting assurance that "whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it."

Psychology takes into account three discriminative aspects of the "empirical ego," or objective self, in the personal consciousness of each individual; namely, the "material self," or self-consciousness as projected through the manifold sensations and activities of the body; the "social self," or self-consciousness as projected into social life; and the "spiritual self," which Professor James has defined as "the entire collection of states of consciousness, the psychic faculties and dispositions taken concretely." It is to this higher, spiritual self that Christ makes his appeal, that he depicts the dreadfulness of losing one's "own soul [self]," that he extends the hope of enlarging the sphere of one's personality in this life (John vii. 38) and of shining "as the sun in the kingdom of the Father."