

# 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 *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. VI.—SPIRITUAL REALITY IN ORDINARY LIFE.

WHEN the disciple of Christ has realized that he is indeed ideally a member of his Divine Master, has been translated into a new atmosphere, and that his whole life has become related to a new society, he hopes at first that the truth that all things are become new will easily become the dominant and effective factor of his whole existence. As time goes on, and he finds himself necessarily mixing in the same social surroundings as before, influenced by the same bodily wants and conditions, passing his days with the same friends, reading the same newspapers, immersed in the same literature, sharing in the same recreations, taking his part in the same worldly organizations, recognising the same duties as a citizen, with the same intellectual and æsthetic tastes, listening to the same light and cheerful conversation, and moving about amongst numberless pleasant and respectable people, who cannot be credited with any consciousness of the obligations and privileges of a regenerate life, there is a very strong tendency to yield to the immediate pressure of the influences that are tangible, immediate, and earthly, and to reckon the spiritual realities as remote, or at best only to be vividly felt on intermittent occasions. The religious life in the Church of Christ is liable to be overlaid by the continual pressure of ordinary life. The circumstances of ordinary life ought of course all to be transformed by the facts of the inner life, the life that is hid with Christ in God; but we find that this is not always the case.

There are, for example, some ministers of the Word and Sacraments who are worldly, who are perhaps anxious about promotion, or eager for earthly honours, or who spend the greater part of their time in amusements or secular pursuits, or who are inconsistent and even faulty in their conduct. There are some laymen who think that any thought or conversation about the religious life is all very well for Sunday, but that unless it is banished on the other six days of the week, it is an infringement of their prerogatives. And, indeed, we have to remember that almost all worldly and fashionable men and women, almost all persons of evil life or unbecoming conduct in all classes of society, are nominally Christians. It is not necessary to go farther than that thought in order to remember how glaring is the contrast in the majority of cases between the Christian ideal and the common experience. And we have only to look into our own hearts and measure faithfully our own conduct, in order to prove the interest which we ourselves personally have in this consideration.

How can we safely move as our Lord wishes us to do in the world, and yet keep from the evil? It can only be by earnestly and prayerfully bending ourselves to realize more fully and unremittingly His Divine Presence. "Abide in Me," said our Lord, "and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing." This is the most precious and fertile truth of the Christian life when once faith has become operative. We cannot suppose that it is thoroughly and intelligently grasped by all Christians. Our Lord is far more to us than the object of our allegiance, or the pivot of our faith. He is more than a Divine character for our imitation, or a Master whom we have to serve. He is more even than the revelation of God, and the keystone of the system of doctrine on which we rest. He is a living presence in our hearts, who can be there continuously and without interruption from the present moment to the very latest breath of our lives. We can know Him as dwelling within us in all the fulness and detail of His character of love and sympathy, and wisdom and graciousness, which shines forth on every page of His Divine Gospels. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." This is no mere rhetorical phrase or poetical ornament. It expresses the deepest secret of our spiritual life. We are privileged to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ in us, the hope of glory. St. Paul travailed again with his converts, until Christ was completely formed in them. To our beloved Saviour, as we know Him in the pages of the evangelists, we can take every thought, every idea, every choice of action, every suggestion, every friendship, every acquaintance, every amusement and pleasure, every difficulty and hesitation, and ask Him what He thinks of it. And the answer will not be merely an analogy supplied by our reasoning faculties from our understanding of his ways and lessons. It will be more than a direction of our conscience enlightened by the recollection of His teaching. It will be direct from Himself in proportion to the earnestness of our faith and the sincerity of our prayer. We can never in this life fully explore "what is the exceeding greatness of God's power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places . . . and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." "I will not leave you comfortless. I

will come unto you." "Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." We are already "risen with Christ." To Him we are already "raised up together and made to sit in the heavenly places."

The practical bearing of this vital and essential truth is that besides being to us all that He is in other ways, our Lord is our own familiar friend, with whom we can converse and take sweet counsel. "Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants: for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth; but I have called you friends." "Whosoever will do the will of the Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother." At any moment we can look up to this adorable and Divine Being as revealed in the Gospels, and ask Him His advice, His help, His guidance. We have not to entreat Him to condescend. He is here, with us, our brother, our nearest and dearest and truest. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

Ordinary life consists of the several outlines on which our scheme of existence is framed, and the daily details of which it is made up. First, with regard to general outlines. We cannot all choose our professions and employments. For many of us the choice seems fixed by circumstances. Nor can all professions and employments be considered ideal. From the Christian point of view the calling of the healer, the calling of the teacher, and the calling of the minister of the Word and Sacraments would be the highest; in many callings there is much of the earth inseparably associated. But all callings alike that are not immoral can be consecrated. There is no employment so humble or so repulsive that cannot be used as a means of grace. Our Lord Himself was engaged for many years in one of the humblest of occupations; and there must have been much of discomfort, roughness, and unpleasantness in His wandering life. We have all of us to accept much as it comes; and to see that our consciences undertake nothing in which He could not share. In all our concerns He must be our partner. If we are constantly alive to our responsibilities in our relations as employer or employed, and in all the various aspects of our ways of business, they cannot but be helps to our religious life. In any case, they must be tests of our spiritual reality. If a man is inclined to extract every advantage he can out of his commercial enterprise, without considering the interests of those who work for his advantage, but treating them as mere inanimate pawns on a chess-board, he cannot flatter himself that the Lord Jesus Christ is with him

in such an estimate of his position. On the other hand, if the justice, pity, tenderness, and love of the Saviour of the world be admitted as the dominant factor of business relations, then each incident of the most commonplace and unspiritual transactions becomes an opportunity for the exercise of self-discipline, virtue, and the cultivation of the ideal.

The other part of ordinary life consists of the details of which it is composed. Here we think of such departments as home, conversation, society, and recreation. It is, of course, impossible for human beings, while in the world, to be unceasingly conscious of the Divine element in their lives. Such an attempt would almost inevitably lead to the overthrow of the human brain, limited as it is by physical conditions, and by inherent imperfection and feebleness. The attempt "to tune ourselves too high" must necessarily tend to the cracking of the string. But each day can be so arranged as to produce the quiet unconscious sense of fixed principles and a definite order. The life as a whole consists of the separate days as units: as one day, so the year; as the year, so the aggregate. There will, of course, at the beginning, be the private dedication of ourselves afresh to God, and the earnest entreaty for the continued counsel and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then there will be the assembly of the whole family for worship, meditation, and instruction. It is difficult to understand how a household can consider itself Christian without such a wholesome and invariable custom. Such a state of things as is revealed in a recent powerful novel on the life of an English servant could hardly exist without the protest of the individual conscience, even of the simplest and most ignorant, if family prayers were universal, simple, earnest, and graced by the unction of the Holy Spirit. In Scotland the habit may be said to be the rule, even in the huts of the lowliest peasants. In England its restoration is far more worthy of promotion than many an enterprise, ecclesiastical or religious, that has been pursued with ardour and self-sacrifice. Let me urge on this influential assembly to do their very utmost to receive it in every cottage where their responsibilities extend.

Then there is the daily reading of the Word of God. Whether the passage be long or short, whether read in the morning or evening, it cannot be safely neglected. Many persons have banded themselves together into unions for this purpose, and receive every year a syllabus of selected passages of no great length, but of varied and important bearing. Such associations may very likely be of great help in fixing a habit, in supplying a guide, and of giving the encouragement of sympathy. At all events, the spiritual life cannot grow if it

is not sustained by regular consultation of the revealed will of God.

Further, any invasion of the Lord's Day in its twofold aspect of rest and worship must be firmly and quietly resisted by those who wish religion to permeate ordinary life. Religious impressions in England depend more on the observation of the first day of the week than on any other external help.

In other ways the constant realization of the presence of Christ will drive away from the home its chief enemies—the spirits of frivolity, carelessness, self-assertion, self-will, the quarrelsome temper, and all that is unseemly.

With regard to conversation, the consciousness which we have of the Divine indwelling will be regulative rather than exclusive and imperious in its effect. To aim always at improving and religious talk would be artificial; the strain, even for the best, would be too great. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," and the heart is to take its full share in the concerns of this world, as well as to ponder on that which is to come. Nothing that is human is alien to the Christian disposition; there is a time to laugh and be merry, as well as a time to be thoughtful; a time to play, as well as a time to work; a time to love, as well as a time to aspire. What is needed is that nothing should be said or thought that is incongruous to the Christian ideal; the idle talking and jesting of which St. Paul spoke were clearly about things improper and unbecoming. The spiritual life would be hindered by gossip, slander, censure, backbiting, detraction, exaggeration, untruthfulness, dissimulation, crossness, and all forms of ill-temper; everything approaching to coarseness and vulgarity by self-restraint in all these points would be sustained.

As to recreation, we all need times of relaxation. There is nothing incongruous between sport and the truly religious life. Whatever is really manly is fitting and becoming. We all of us have our own different tastes for recreation, and they vary greatly according to our circumstances and resources. What is one man's meat is another man's poison. We can lay down no rule for others, nor attempt to judge them. All depends on the temper in which the relaxation or amusement is carried out. We may remember that our Lord went to a marriage-feast, and that He dined with a Pharisee. Whatever is in itself neither foolish nor harmful need not be incongruous to His Spirit. If we condemn others in what their own conscience allows, we may be classing ourselves amongst that evil generation who, when the Son of man came eating and drinking, said, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber!"

Lastly, as to society. How can the spiritual life be promoted

in the ordinary intercourse of the drawing-room or the workshop? The right principle seems to be to take it as it comes; neither to seek it nor to avoid it; to go where your duty sends you, to receive those who naturally come to your house. Here, again, at each moment we may have with us the Lord of wisdom and goodness. We should be so thoroughly imbued with His benign temper, His friendly sympathy for humankind, His scorn of lies and hatred of wrong, that wherever we go His Divine Presence checks ungodliness and folly, and purifies and sweetens the atmosphere.

I have said nothing about the help received through the ordinances of the Church, because that consideration is something different from the right use of ordinary life. It is only necessary to say that the ordinances of the Church are all directed towards strengthening in us this spiritual faculty of being conscious of the indwelling presence of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, of hearing the voice of our Saviour as the sheep hear the words of the good shepherd, and of following him in and out and finding pasture. This is not once in our lives only, it is not once every day; it is at every moment that we are to look to Him for guidance and light, and obey His gracious invitation—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.

---

## Reviews.

---

*The Philosophy and Development of Religion*: being the Gifford Lectures for 1894. By OTTO PFLEIDERER, D.D., Professor of Theology in the University of Berlin. In two volumes. Blackwood and Sons. Price 15s.

THIS extremely clever and excessively one-sided book, though it is made to hang together in a somewhat artificial fashion, is in reality two separate books, of which the first gives us Dr. Pfeiderer's *Philosophy of Religion*, and the second his account of the evolution of the Christian faith. There is nothing new in the Professor's pages, for everything he says here has been said by him before, either in his four-volumed "*Philosophy of Religion*," or in his "*Paulinism*," both of them excellently translated into English.

Pfeiderer's position as a loyal adherent of the Tübingen school, which has fallen into disrepute of late, is so well known that one need only restate it here in brief. He is, frankly and consistently, an anti-supernaturalist; and, therefore, in his view Christianity is not a Divine deposit of truth put into the world at a given time and place by the hand of God, but the highest revelation of man's spirit to itself, the final