

which is the turning point into spiritual life, the sinner is unsaved—the “old man” is there, only more decently clad—the old corrupt nature is there, having undergone no thorough transformation. The Spirits’ work is wanting—the “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”—and union to Christ are wanting, without which no fallen man will ever be justified and holy. That soul is yet a lost soul. In view of eternity, the difference between the “almost” Christian and the Atheist is just—nothing!

If these statements seem harsh and untenable to any readers, let them reflect before they reject them. Some may be disposed to reason in this way: “The ‘almost’ Christian is in many respects a good man, upright, useful to society, even treating religion with respect, and reverencing his God. Granted that Christians ‘altogether’ may be more devout, more spiritual in their sentiments, their thoughts more in heaven, and giving them credit for their superiority; yet, for all practical uses, and surely religions main design is to make men practically good, there is no such vast disparity between the man that is ‘almost’ and the man that is ‘altogether’ a Christian, as would warrant such denunciations on the former. There is the objection fairly stated. Now for its answer.

Sin in this world, casting its deadly blight upon all—its wages, its inseparable accompaniment and result is death. God in grace has restrained wickedness and wicked men. God wards off for a while its most fearful consequences, and keeps the disordered world in conerance, that he may make this present life of man probationary—a “day of mercy.” Sin has corrupted our whole being—an actual removal of our nature is necessary before sin and its consequences can be removed.—“Marvel not” that it is said, “Ye must be born again.” There are men in this world not fit to associate with other men, till they have undergone a radical change of a certain kind; and no sinful man can be fit for heaven, for the presence of God, till he is transformed by the Spirit—made a new creature—born again from above. In order to do this God must receive and renew the heart, and that the “almost”

Christian does not yield to Him. Sin and death lie in the heart withheld from God. The fair exterior at present is but the result of a combination of circumstances, for which God, not the almost Christian, is entitled to praise. If God let that man go; if He allowed sin to flow unchecked to its destiny, you would soon see what our world would turn to, even if all in it were “almost” Christians. Even now, and as things are constituted, “almost” Christianity could not exist, but for an “altogether” Christianity beside it, which if it serves in any way, it does far more hamper and obstruct.

The “almost Christian, allowing him every good feature and principle he possibly can possess, is an exemplary man, loves his children, his friends, and his kind, and is a benefactor in the community. Yet he withholds his affections from God, sees no beauty in Jesus to draw him with his whole soul to that Lamb of God, and lead him to consecrate life, talents, his all to Him who in mercy has spared him and done him good, and who in grace designs to get His highest glory in the salvation of a countless multitude from sin and everlasting ruin. If, instead of being almost a Christian, he has been a miscreant, nurtured in ignorance and crime, to whom the sight of good was irritating, his conduct would not appear so revolting; but he has been led to see the worth of virtue, he has understanding to comprehend, and reason to prefer truth; he has affections to bestow on objects deserving affection, and yet keeps God’s truth at a distance, and gives to the Divine love and excellencies, at best, but a cold recognition. To come so near to God, to be approached so closely by God, to hear Him say, “A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear?”—and yet resist God’s appeal; to allow Christ to stand knocking at his door, and refuse to let Him in; to be moved by the Spirit of grace, and yet resist the Spirit’s main design to place him on the side of God and truth, and make him a decided, regenerate, right-hearted man; all this marks the man who continues “almost” a Christian, the possessor of an aversion to God more deeply rooted and virulent than we can ever see among the vilest of un-