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Visible Morality

“Man looketh on the outward appearance.” It is not by a few that visible morality is viewed as the narrow way that leads to life. It would be an impeachment of the understanding of my readers to say that mere morality is not conclusive evidence of Christian character, were it not for the multitude of hopes that are built upon this crumbling basis. An unblemished moral character is in itself so amiable that it not only commands the respect and esteem of others, but secures the confidence of those who possess it. If a man is honest, industrious, and temperate, faithful to his promises, and punctual in his engagements; if he possesses a friendly, humane, kind, generous, and noble spirit, he views himself, and is viewed by the world around him, to be a “good-hearted man,” and in a fair way to heaven! If he is correct in his external demeanor, if he avoids all overt acts of immorality, if he is innocent and harmless, if his honor is unsullied and his name without reproach, though he may confess that he is not so good as he should be, yet he believes he is much better than he is. He sees nothing to shake his hopes or alarm his fears. Look

abroad into the world and see the thousands that rest here for eternity. Melancholy view! The heart is indeed deceitful above all things, as well as desperately wicked.

The man who is merely moral is a stranger to the living God. While he sustains an unimpeached character in the view of the world, he may neither believe the principles of the gospel nor practice the duties of piety. He may be invincibly averse to every species of immorality on the one hand, but he is equally so to the exactness and spirituality of religion on the other. The infinitely important duties that he owes to God, he keeps entirely out of sight. Of loving and serving Him, he knows nothing. Whatever he does, or whatever he leaves undone, he does nothing for God. He may be honest in his dealings with everybody except God. He robs none but God. He is thankless and faithless to none but God. He speaks reproachfully of none but God. A just view of the relation that he bears to God forms no part of his principles, and the duties that result from that relation form no part of his morality. He contents himself with mere external conformity to the duties of the second table. Like the young man in the gospel, he may not have committed murder, nor adultery, nor theft, nor perjury, from his youth up, while, like him, he may have laid up treasures for himself and not be rich toward God. He is earthly and sensual rather than heavenly and spiritual.

In the sight of God, such a character is radically defective. The moral man is like Israel of old: an empty vine,