

Sayings of William Law

God, as considered in himself, in his holy being, before anything is brought out of him, is only an eternal will to all goodness. This is the one eternal, immutable God, that from eternity to eternity changes not. God can be neither more, nor less, nor anything else but an eternal will to all the goodness that is in himself and can come from him. As certainly as he is the creator, so certainly he is the blesser of every created thing, and can give nothing but blessing, goodness and happiness from himself, because he has in himself nothing else to give. It is much more possible for the sun to give out darkness than for God to do or be, or give out anything but blessing and goodness.

I know of no hell, either here or hereafter, but the power and working of wrath, nor any heaven but where the God of Love is all in all, and the working Life of all.

All our natural tempers, be they what they will, are all of them in reality only so many different kinds and forms of a spirit of prayer which is inseparable from the heart as weight is from the body. Pray we must, as sure as our heart is alive; and therefore when the state of our heart is not a spirit of prayer to God, we pray without ceasing to some or other part of the creation.

We can achieve this only through the spirit of prayer: 'Everything calls for it, everything is to be done in it and governed by it.' 'Ask not therefore how we shall enter into this religion of love and salvation? for it is itself entered into us, it has taken possession of us from the beginning. It is Immanuel in every human soul; it lies as a treasure of Heaven, and eternity in us; it cannot be divided from us by the power of man; we cannot lose it ourselves; it will never leave us nor forsake us.'

True faith is coming to Jesus Christ to be saved and delivered from a sinful nature, as the Canaanitish woman came to Him and would not be denied. So far as we, by true resignation to God, die to the element of selfishness and our own will, so far as by universal love we die to envy, so far as by humility we die to pride, so far as by meekness we die to wrath, so far we get away from the devil, enter into another kingdom and leave him to dwell without us in his own elements.

The greatest good that any man can do to himself is to [permit] this inward deformity to show itself, and not to strive by any art or management, either of negligence or amusement, to conceal it from him.

All our salvation consists in the manifestation of the nature, life and spirit of Jesus Christ in our inward new man. This alone is Christian redemption, this alone delivers from the guilt and power of sin, this alone redeems and renews.

There is but one salvation for all mankind, and that is the life of God in the soul. God has but one design or intent towards all mankind, and that is to introduce or generate his own life, light and spirit in them, that all may be as so many images, temples, and habitations of the holy Trinity. This is God's will to all Christians, Jews and heathens. They are all equally the desire of his heart. Now there is but one possible way for man to attain this salvation. There is not one way for a Jew, another for a Christian and a third for a heathen. No; God is one human nature is one, salvation is one, and the way to it is one; and that is the desire of the soul turned to God.

'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done' is the one will and one hunger that feeds the soul with the life-giving bread of heaven. This will is always fulfilled, it cannot possibly be sent empty away, for God's Kingdom must manifest itself with all its riches in that soul which wills nothing else.

The spiritual life is nothing else but the working of the spirit of God within us, and therefore our own silence must be a great part of our preparation for it, and much speaking or delight in it will be often [a great] hindrance of that good which we can only have from hearing what the spirit and voice of God speaks within us.

If you have no inward peace, if religious comfort is still wanting, it is because you have more wills than one. For the multiplicity of wills is the very essence of fallen nature, and all its evil, misery and separation from God lies in it; and as soon as you return to and allow only this one will, you are returned to God, and must find the blessedness of his Kingdom within you. Nothing can put an end to this multiplicity of wills in fallen man which is his death to God, nothing can be the resurrection of the divine nature within him, which is his only salvation, but the cross of Christ - not that wooden cross on which he was crucified, but that cross on which he was crucified through the whole course of his life in the flesh.

God, the only good of all intelligent natures, is not an absent or distant God, but is more present in and to our souls than our own bodies. And we are strangers to heaven and without God in this world for this only reason, because we are void of that spirit of prayer which alone can and never fails to unite us with the one only Good, and to open heaven and the Kingdom within us. A root set in the finest soil, in the best climate, and blessed with all that sun and rain and air can do for it, is not in so sure a state of its growth to perfection as every man may be whose spirit aspires after all that which God is ready and infinitely desirous to give him.

For the sun meets not the springing bud that stretches towards him with half that certainty as God, the source of all good, communicates himself to the soul that longs to partake of him.

William Law

He is remembered in the C of E on 10th April.

In William Law's day it was accepted in church circles that there was only one God, one Saviour, and one humanity; that all mankind was considered as one in its collective humanity. There was one Adam, representing the fall of mankind, and only one 'second Adam', Jesus, who shows the way for the return of this one humanity back to at-one-ment with the Divine. The popular focusing on Jesus by Christians makes sense when Jesus is seen as the representative man, standing for any and all humanity.

God breathed into Adam, and so into the whole human race, the inspoken Word of Life, the seed of salvation, the spark of the divine nature which *is* Christ within us; and this gives each of us the ability to be redeemed, to be born again into the life of paradise. This capacity depends on the use of our free will in order to turn away from self and turn towards God. God's love is always ready to meet us and to make us one with him. However, this at-one-ment is not any kind of purchase. It is the 'process' of Christ who is already within us, the 'inward essential growth' of the divine life from the seed which is present in every person, a process which in some sense recapitulates in every individual the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord himself.

'Christ given for us is Christ given into us.' It is through our turning to God in prayer that this renewal is begun and continued within us. And correspondingly if we turn towards earthly things and direct our prayer to the creation rather than the Creator, we move inexorably towards the condition of wrath, in separation from God. Heaven and hell both begin in this life.

Sin leads to separation. The incomprehensible perfection of the Deity is marred by self-will, resulting in personal life as we now experience it. The self comprises covetousness, envy, pride and wrath. It is 'hell in nature.'

Law believed that the wrath/anger lay in the human only and that Christ's office was to remove that wrath in us. His sacrifice furthers the work of regeneration. Christ expiates the sins of the world by restoring human beings to their lost righteousness. Light and darkness emanate from all that is done by humanity. Darkness is the evil and misery perpetrated by fallen angels (the offspring of Lucifer) and humans. As it is from God, this darkness is without evil. It is the ground of good.

'If we follow the desire for God when it arises in us, 'it will lead [us] to the birth of Jesus, not in a stable at Bethlehem in Judaea, but to the birth of Jesus in the dark centre of [our] own fallen soul.'

'The place of religion is within; its work and effect is within; its glory, its life, its perfection is all within; it is merely and solely the raising of a new life, a new love, and a new birth in the inward spirit of our hearts.'

'A Christian is not called to be moderately good; he is called to perfection. He is not required to patch up and improve his existing self; he is to put off the old man altogether and put on another self conformed to Christ.'

By the operation of the powers of eternity, light is born in the soul and reconciliation with God achieved. Thus we stand in the midst of heaven and hell with the thin wall of matter separating us from them. The new birth will be obtained by patience, meekness, humility and resignation to God; a multiplicity of rules obstruct the all-important 'simplicity of Faith'. Christ is now able to assist 'his Church, his own body' as once he assisted the outcasts and sinners. There is no way to God but the heart. Let us 'sink down' into these four virtues, and progress in the spiritual life will be made.

'The one true way of dying to self is most simple and plain, it wants no arts or methods, no cells, monasteries or pilgrimages, it is equally practicable by every body, it is always at hand, it meets you in everything, it is free from all deceit, and it is never without success. If you ask what is this one true, simple, plain, immediate and unerring way, it is the way of patience, meekness, humility and resignation to God. This is the truth and perfection of dying to self ...'

'For to seek to be saved by patience, meekness, humility of heart, and resignation to God is truly coming to God through Christ; and when these tempers live and abide in you as the spirit and aim of your life, then Christ is in you of a truth and the life that you lead is not yours, but it is Christ that lives in you. For this is following Christ with all your power. You cannot possibly make more haste after him, you have no other way of walking as He walked or depending on him, but by wholly giving up yourself to that which He was, viz.; to patience, meekness, humility and resignation to God.'

The Revd Dr Martin Israel & the Revd Neil Broadbent

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