

'We are become our own masters'

'If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.' 2 Timothy 2:21

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING: 1 Corinthians 3:9–17

The promotion of the glory of God, and the possession of his favour, are no longer recognized as the objects of our highest regard, and most strenuous endeavours; as furnishing to us a vigorous, habitual, and universal principle of action. We set up for ourselves: we are become our own masters. The sense of constant homage and continual service is irksome and galling to us; and we rejoice in being emancipated from it, as from a state of base and servile vilenage [feudal tenancy]. Thus the very tenure and condition, by which life and all its possessions are held, undergo a total change: our faculties and powers are now our own: whatever we have is regarded rather as a property, than as a trust.

So little sense of responsibility seems attached to the possession of high rank, splendid abilities, affluent fortunes, or other means or instruments of usefulness. The instructive admonitions, 'give an account of thy stewardship' and 'Occupy till I come,' are forgotten.

FOR MEDITATION: 'I am the master of my fate,' wrote the nineteenth-century poet William Ernest Henley, 'I am the captain of my soul.' These lines come from a poem entitled *Invictus*—which is Latin for unconquered. And while there is certainly a level on which this poem can be read as a call to courage, and valued as such; a more literal reading that implies we are the masters of our destiny runs counter to the mindset that ought to characterize the Christian. 'Ye are not your own,' the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, 'for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'

'To cultivate our hearts'

'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.' John 15:8

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING: Matthew 7:15–20

It is indeed true, and a truth never to be forgotten, that all pretensions to internal principles of holiness are vain when they are contradicted by [our] conduct; but it is no less true, that the only effectual way of improving the latter, is by a vigilant attention to the former. It was therefore our blessed Saviour's injunction, 'Make the tree good' as the necessary means of obtaining good fruit; and the Holy Scriptures abound in admonitions, to make it our chief business to cultivate our hearts with all diligence, to examine into their state with impartiality, and watch over them with continual care. Indeed it is the *Heart* which constitutes the *Man*.

FOR MEDITATION: Images of gardens and those who cultivate them are many in Scripture. Diligence, watchfulness and care are traits that all good gardeners possess. Gardeners take care that weeds do not overtake and choke healthy plants. Weeding, watering and pruning are often arduous tasks, but they are a testament to a gardener's diligence, watchfulness and care. Those who invest time and care in their gardens know what it is to harvest crops and fruit or to see the beauty of flowers. For those who rightly watch over their hearts it is much the same: the love of God flowers within them and bears good fruit. 'Blessed is the man,' we read in Psalm 1, '[whose] delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper' (Psalm 1:1–3).