

Singular and Sincere Piety

“And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation.” – Genesis 7:1

Summary:

Noah’s righteousness was both singular before his generation and sincere before God. He stood alone against a universally corrupt world, showing that true faith must resist the powerful pressure of popular opinion and follow Scripture through good and evil report. Yet distinctiveness alone is not enough: God looks beyond outward actions to motives, affections, and the heart. Religious appearances may deceive people—and even ourselves—but nothing is hidden from God. Believers must therefore seek a piety that is courageous among the ungodly, honest before God, free from hypocrisy, and willing to be tested by his truthful judgment.

Outline:

1. Noah’s piety was singular

- He stood righteous in a universally corrupt generation without human companionship or encouragement.

2. The crowd powerfully pressures conscience

- Approval and fear can weaken convictions, undo good resolutions, and silence known duties.

3. Faith must obey God even when alone

- Search Scripture impartially and follow truth through evil report and good report.

4. Noah’s piety was sincere before God

- God judges the heart, motives, and principles—not outward acts and reputation alone.

5. We must examine ourselves in God’s light

- Reject hypocrisy and self-delusion, and seek a character that can bear the eye of God.

Text

Here we see a striking portrayal of Noah's piety, marked by singularity and sincerity. In relation to his fellow creatures, it was singular; in relation to the Supreme Being, sincere: "righteous ... in this generation" and "righteous ... before me in this generation." Righteous in a universally depraved generation, for "all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth," Noah had no one to accompany or encourage him; all opposed him. Never had anyone been so religiously singular, differing not only from his neighbours but from the entire earth. This was both the danger and triumph of his piety.

The influence of public opinion and example is powerful. Alone, conscience and reason may inspire good resolutions, especially during trouble or illness. But once a person rejoins the crowd, he changes: his resolutions fade, impressions weaken, and the world's current carries him away. Seeking to please the Jews, Festus left Paul bound. Herod, seeing their approval, seized Peter as well. Many Pharisees believed in Jesus but feared confessing him and being expelled from the synagogue, loving human praise more than God's.

Singular:

Who has not been swayed by others' smiles or frowns to act against judgment and conviction? Who has not avoided a known duty by wondering, What will my friends think? What will the world say?

We should privately reflect, search the Scriptures impartially, set rules for conduct, and follow them with the Most High's strength, through good report and bad.

"But I shall be singular." You will be singular; and while the world remains unchanged, every Christian must be singular. Let anyone guided by the Spirit and Gospel pass through life's various paths—whom will he resemble? The majority? Scripture says, "Follow not a multitude to do evil." "Be not conformed to this world." "Come out from among them, and be ye separate."

"But I shall be singular." Suppose you are. People seek distinction in beauty, wealth, or wisdom; yet the righteous person surpasses his neighbour.

Religion is always praiseworthy. Being religious among the religious is commendable; being godly among the ungodly, even more so. What is innocence without danger, or success without contention?

To remain steadfast amid evil, always devoted to the Lord's work, is the heroism of piety. It reflects an understanding of religion's infinite importance, genuine love for its nature, pure motives, and a noble mind bold enough to think and act independently.

Sincere:

But Noah's piety was as sincere as it was singular: "Righteous ... before me in this generation." Being religious before God requires far more than appearing so before people. What people highly esteem is often an abomination in God's sight. Human law judges actions, but God's spiritual law examines both principles and practice. The Lord looks upon the heart. Thus Scripture speaks of "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father."

Many things seem fair until exposed to God's countenance. Before him, professed friendships may be selfishness, and prayers and praises mere forms of godliness. We may attend his house, hear his words, commend the preacher, and speak lovingly, while he sees hearts pursuing covetousness. How dreadful that he will one day reveal all: what we have always been before him will be displayed before the assembled world.

If many people were seen as God sees them, they would blush to leave home. To what everlasting shame and contempt must they awaken at the last day! A person is said to have four characters: one with friends, one with enemies, one with himself, and one with God. The last two should—and often do—agree; "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

We often mistake hypocrisy for self-deception. Hypocrisy is not deceiving ourselves but deceiving others. It means wearing a mask rather than showing our true face; it means playing a role that does not belong to our character. We fear this is all too common. What hope does the hypocrite have, even after gaining everything, when God takes away his soul?

Self-delusion is rarer, especially among those who live in the Gospel's light. Scripture speaks plainly, and genuine religion's many clear marks make it difficult to doubt whether we love God, live by faith, pursue earthly things, or set our hearts on things above.

Yet a person may deceive others—and himself—about his spiritual state, thinking himself something when he is nothing. Some may carry this delusion to the very door, confidently knocking and saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," only to hear, "I know you not." Let us therefore earnestly examine the character

we bear before God, whose judgment determines our destiny and is always according to truth. Zechariah and Elizabeth were honoured as both righteous before God. Of Noah, God said, "He is righteous before me in this generation." Noah was not perfect, but his piety could endure God's scrutiny.

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 17, Evening), first published in 1854.