

# The Form of Godliness - Spurgeon

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## THE FORM OF GODLINESS WITHOUT THE POWER

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

2Timothy 3:5

Paul warns us of certain characters which will appear in the last times. It is a very terrible list. The like have appeared in other days, but we are led by his warning to apprehend that they will appear in greater numbers in the last days than in any previous age.

Lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. (2Ti 3:1, 2-note, 2Ti 3, 4-note)

These will swarm like flies in the decay of the year, and will make the times exceeding perilous. We are nearing that period at this very time. That these people would, some of them, be within the church is the most painful part of it; but they will be so, for they are comprehended in this last clause of the black catalogue, which we have taken for our text-

**"Having a form of godliness,  
but denying the power thereof."**

Paul does not paint the future with rose-color: he is no smooth tongued prophet of a golden age, into which this dull earth may be imagined to be glowing. There are sanguine brethren who are looking forward to everything growing better and better and better, until, at last, this present age ripens into a millennium. They will not be able to sustain their hopes, for Scripture gives them no solid basis to rest upon. We who believe that there will be no millennial reign without the King, and who expect no rule of righteousness except from the appearing of the righteous Lord, are nearer the mark. Apart from the second Advent of our Lord, the world is more likely to sink into a pandemonium than to rise into a **millennium**.

**Ed Comment:** As an aside Spurgeon did believe in the millennium [see Millennium 1 -Millennium 2 - Millennium 3] even though he did not speak of it that much. Here is a quote from Spurgeon...

"Some think that this descent of the Lord (Ed: Context is reference to the Second Coming) will be post-millennial—that is, **after the thousand years of His reign**. I cannot think so. I conceive that the advent will be pre-millennial—that He will come first, and then will come the **millennium** as the result of **His personal reign upon earth**.

A divine interposition seems to me the hope set before us in Scripture, and, indeed, to be the only hope adequate to the occasion. We look to the darkening down of things; the state of mankind, however improved politically, may yet grow worse and worse spiritually. Certainly, we are assured in verse thirteen that

evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. (2Ti 3:13-note)

There will spring up in the Christian church, and round about it, a body of faithless men who profess to have faith; unsaintly men who will unite with the saints; men having the form of godliness, but denying the power. We may call these hard times, if we will, but we have hardly yet come to the border of those truly harder times when it will go hard with the church, and she shall need, even more than to-day, to cry mightily unto the Lord to keep her alive.

With this cloud upon our spirit, we come to the text itself. Let us consider it carefully, and may the Holy Spirit help us!

### Man Is A Spiritual Creature

True religion is a spiritual thing, but it necessarily embodies itself in a form. Man is a spiritual creature, but the human spirit needs a body in which to enshrine itself; and thus, by this need, we become allied to materialism; and if not "half dust, half Deity," as one has said, we are certainly both matter and soul.

In each of us there is the form or body, and the soul or power. It is so with religion: it is essentially a spiritual thing, but it requires a form in which to embody and manifest itself. Christian people fall into a certain outward method of procedure, a peculiar outward mode of uttering their faith, which becomes to true godliness what the body is to the soul.

The form is useful, the form is necessary, the form ought to be vitalized; just as the body is useful, and is necessary, and is vitalized by the soul.

If you get both the form, as modeled in the Word of God, and the power, as bestowed by the Spirit of God, you do well, and are living Christians.

If you get the power alone, without the ordained form, you somewhat maim yourself; but if you get the form without the power, then, you dwell in spiritual death.

The body without the spirit is dead; and what follows upon death with flesh? Why, corruption, corruption so horrible, that even love itself has to cry, "Bury my dead out of my sight." (Ge 23:4, 8) So that if there be in any the body of religion without the life of religion, it leads to decay, and this to corruption; and that has a tendency to putridity of character. The raw material of a devil is an angel bereft of holiness. You cannot make a Judas except out of an apostle. The eminently good in outward form, when without inward life, decays into the foulest thing under heaven. You cannot wonder that these are called "perilous times," in which such characters abound. One Judas is an awful weight for this poor globe to bear, but a tribe of them must be a peril indeed. Yet, if not of the very worst order, those are enough to be dreaded who have the shadow of religion without its substance. Of such I have to speak at this time: from such may God give you grace to turn away! May none of us ever be spots in our feasts of love, or clouds without water carried about of winds (Jude 1:12); but this we shall be if we have the **form of godliness** without the power thereof.

With great solemnity of soul I approach this subject, seeking from the Lord the aid of his Spirit, Who makes the Word to be a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12-note, Heb 4:13-note).

First, I shall speak of the men, and secondly, of their folly, and when I have done that, I shall have some words of instruction to give by way of conclusion.

**First, let us talk awhile of "the men": They had the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof. Note what they had, and then observe what they had not.**

They had a **form of godliness**. What is the **form of godliness**? It is, first of all, attention to the ordinances of religion. These, so far as they are Scriptural, are few and simple. There is baptism, wherein, in figure, the believer is buried with Christ, that he may rise into newness of life; and there is the Lord's Supper, wherein, in type and emblem, he feeds upon Christ, and sustains the life which came to him by fellowship with Christ's death. Those who have obeyed the Lord in these two ordinances have exhibited in their own persons the **form of godliness**. That form is every way instructive to others, and impressive to the man himself. Every baptized person, and every communicant at the Lord's table, should be godly and gracious; but neither baptism nor the communion will secure this. Where there is not the life of God in the soul, neither holiness nor godliness follows upon the ordinances; and thus we may have around us baptized worldlings, and men who go from the table of the Lord to drink the cup of devils. It is sad that it should be so. Such persons are guilty of presumption, falsehood, sacrilege, and blasphemy. Ah me! We sit beside such every Sabbath-day!

The **form of godliness** involves attendance with the assemblies of God's people. Those who have professed Christ are accustomed to come together at certain times for worship, and, in their assemblies, they join in common prayer and common praise. They listen to the testimony of God by his servants whom he calls to preach his Word with power. They also associate together in church fellowship for purposes of mutual help and discipline. This is a very proper form, full of blessing both to the church and to the world, when it does not die down into mere form. A man may go to heaven alone, but he will do better if he travels thither with Mr. Greatheart, and Father Honest, and Christiana, and the children.

Christ's people are called sheep for one reason, that they love to go in flocks. Dogs do very well separately, but sheep do best in company. The sheep of Christ love to be together in the same pasture, and to follow in a flock the footsteps of the good Shepherd. Those who constantly associate in worship, unite in church-fellowship, and work together for sacred purposes, have the form of godliness, and a very useful and proper form it is. Alas! it is of no value without the power.

Some go further than public worship, for they use a great deal of religious talk. They freely speak of the things of God in Christian company. They can defend the doctrines of Scripture, they can plead for its precepts, and they can narrate the experience of a believer. They are fondest of talking of what is doing in the church: the tattle of the streets of Jerusalem is very pleasant to them. They flavor their speech with godly phrases when they are in company that will relish it. I do not censure them; on the contrary, I wish there were more of holy talk among professors. I wish we could revive the old habit,

"They that feared the Lord spake often one to another." (Mal 3:16KJV)

**Holy conversation causes the heart to glow, and gives to us a foretaste of the fellowship of the glorified** But there may be a savor of religion about a man's conversation, and yet it may be a borrowed flavor, like hot sauces used to disguise the staleness of ancient meat. That religion which comes from the lips outward, but does not well up from the deep fountains of the heart, is not that living water which will spring up unto eternal life (Jn 7:37, 38, 4:13, 14).

**"Tongue-godliness" is an abomination  
if the heart be destitute of grace.**

More than this, some have a **form of godliness** upheld and published by religious activity. It is possible to be intensely active in the outside work of the church, and yet to know nothing of spiritual power. One may be an excellent Sunday-school teacher after a fashion, and yet have need to be taught what it is to be born again. One may be an eloquent preacher, or a diligent officer in the church of God, and yet know nothing of the mysterious power of the Spirit of truth upon the heart. It is well to be like Martha in service; but one thing is needful, and that is, to sit at the Master's feet and learn, as Mary did (Lk 10:39, 40, 41, 42). When we have done all the work our position requires of us, we may only have displayed the **form of godliness**; unless we hearken to our Lord, and from His presence derive power (cp Jn 15:5, Jn 3:30-note, Col 1:29-note, 1Co 15:10, Heb 13:20, 21-note), we shall be as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal (1Co 13:1, 2, 3).

Brethren, I speak to myself and to each one of you in solemn earnestness; if much speaking, generous giving, and constant occupation could win heaven, we might easily make sure of it; but more than these are needful.

I speak to each one of you; and if I singled out any one more than another to be the pointed object of my address, it would be the best among us-the one who is doing most for his Master, and who, in his inmost soul, is thinking,

**"That warning does not apply to me."**

O my active and energetic brother, remember the word,

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1Co 10:12)

**If any of you dislike this searching sermon,  
your dislike proves how much you need it.**

He that is not willing to search himself should stand self-suspected by that unwillingness to look at his affairs. If you are right, you will not object to be weighed in the balances. If you are indeed pure gold (Job 23:10-note), you may still feel anxiety at the sight of the furnace, but you will not be driven to anger at the prospect of the fire, for your prayer will be,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Ed: cp David in Ps 139:1,2-note with Ps 139:23, 24-note)

I need not enlarge further. You all know what a **form of godliness** is, and most of us who are here present hold fast that form: may we never dishonor it! I trust we are anxious to make that form accurate according to Scripture, so that our **form of godliness** may be that into which the earliest saints were delivered. Let us be Christians of a high type, cast in our Lord's own mould. But do not become sticklers for the form and neglect the inner life: that will never do. Shall we fight about a man's clothes, and allow the man himself to die?

**But now, as these people had not the power of godliness, how did they come to hold the form of it?**

This needs several answers.

**(1) Some come by the form of godliness in an hereditary way.**

Their ancestors were always godly people, and they almost naturally take up with the profession of their fathers. This is common, and where it is honest, it is most commendable. It is a great mercy when, instead of the fathers, shall be the children; and we may hopefully anticipate that our children will follow us in the things of God, if by example, instruction, and prayer, we have sought it before the Lord. We are unhappy if we do not see our children walking in the truth. Yet the idea of birthright membership is an evil one, and is as perilous as it is unscriptural. If children are taken into the church simply because of their earthly parentage, surely this is not consistent with that description of the sons of God which is found in the inspired Scripture-

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (Jn 1:13)

Not generation, but regeneration (Titus 3:5-note), makes the Christian. You are not Christians because you can trace a line of fleshly descent throughout twenty generations of children of God; but you must, yourselves, be born again; for except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn 3:3, 4, 5). Many, no doubt, lay hold naturally on the **form of godliness** because of

family ties: this is poor work. Ishmael is a sorry son of Abraham, and Esau of Isaac, and Absalom of David.

### **Grace does not run in the blood.**

If you have no better foundation for your religion than your earthly parentage, you are in a wretched case.

#### **(2) Others have accepted the form of godliness by the force of authority and influence.**

They were, as lads, put apprentice to godly men; as girls, they were under the guidance of pious teachers; and, as they grew up, they came under the influence of persons of superior intelligence and character, who were on the Lord's side. This accounts for their **form of godliness**. Many persons are the creatures of their surroundings; religion or irreligion is with them the result of circumstances. Such persons were led to make a profession of faith (**Ed**: As in Titus 1:16-note) in Christ because others did so, and friends encouraged them to do the same. The deep searching of heart, which they ought to have exhibited, was slurred over, and they were found among the people of God without having to knock for entrance at the wicket-gate. I do not wish any one to condemn himself because he was guided to the Savior by godly friends-far from it; but, nevertheless, there is danger lest we fail to have personal repentance and personal faith, and are content to lean upon the opinions of others.

So have I seen the **form of godliness** taken up on account of friendships.

Many a time courtship and marriage have led to a formal religiousness, lacking heart. The future husband is induced to make a profession of religion for the sake of gaining one who was a sincere Christian, and would not have broken her Lord's command to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. Godliness should never be put on in order that we may put a wedding ring upon the finger: this is a sad abuse of religious profession.

Other kinds of friendship, also, have led men and women to profess a faith they never had, and to unite themselves visibly with the church, while in spirit and in truth they were never truly a part of it. I put these things to you that there may be great searchings of heart among us all, and that we may candidly consider how we have come by our form of godliness.

#### **(3) Certain persons assume the form of godliness from a natural religious disposition.**

Do not suppose that all unconverted people are without religion. Much religiousness is found in the heathen, and there are races which have naturally more of reverence than others. The German, with his profound philosophy, is often free, not only from superstition, but from reverence; while the Russian is by race naturally religious, not to say superstitious. I am speaking after the manner of men: the usual Russian takes off his hat to holy places, pictures, and persons, and he is little inclined to disbelieve or scoff. We perceive like differences among our own acquaintances: one man is readily fooled by skeptics, while another is ready, with open mouth, to believe every word. One is naturally an infidel, another is as naturally credulous. I mean, then, that to some the **form of godliness** commends itself, because they have a natural leaning that way. They could not be happy unless they were attending where God is worshipped, nor unless they were reckoned among the believers in Christ. They must play at religion, even if they do not make it their life business. Let me remind you of the questionable value of that which springs out of fallen human nature. Assuredly, it brings no one into the spiritual kingdom, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh," and only "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (Jn 3:6) "Ye must be born again." (Jn 3:7, 8) Beware of everything which springs up in the field without the sowing of the husbandman (cp 2Ti 2:6KJV-note), for it will turn out to be a weed. O sirs, the day will come when God will try us as with fire, and that which comes of unregenerate nature will not stand the test, but will be utterly consumed (cp 1Pe 1:7-note, 2Co 13:5).

#### **(4) I do not doubt that, in these silken days, many have a form of godliness because of the respect it brings them.**

Time was when to be a Christian was to be reviled, if not to be imprisoned, and, perhaps, burned at the stake (cp 1Pe 2:23note, Mt 5:10, 11, 12-note). Hypocrites were fewer in those days, for a profession cost too much; yet, strange to say, there were some who played the Judas even in those times. To-day religion walks forth in her velvet slippers; and in certain classes and ranks, if men did not make some profession of religion, they would be looked upon with suspicion, and therefore men will take the name of Christian upon them, and wear religion as a part of full dress. The cross is at this day worn as a decoration. The cross as the instrument of our Savior's shame and death is forgotten, and instead thereof, it is made the badge of honor, a jewel wherewith ungodly men may adorn themselves. Is this indicative of the deceitfulness of the age? Beware of seeking respect by a **hypocritical godliness**. Honor gained by a heartless profession is, in God's sight, the greatest disgrace. The actor may strut in his mimic royalty, but he must take off his crown and robes when the play is over; and what will he then be?

From the days of Iscariot until now, some have taken up the **form of godliness** to gain thereby. To make gain of godliness is to imitate the son of perdition (Jn 17:12). This is a perilous road, and yet many risk their souls for the lucre which they find therein. Apparent zeal for God may really be zeal for gold (cp 1Ti 6:9, 10, 11). The Emperor Maximilian showed great zeal against idolatry, and published a decree that images of gold and silver should be melted down. He was extremely zealous about this. The images were all to be melted down, and the metal forfeited to the emperor. It was shrewdly suspected that this great iconoclast was not

altogether swayed by unselfish motives. When a business brings grist to the mill, it is not hard to keep to it. Some love Christ because they carry His bag for him. Beware of that kind of godliness which makes a man hesitate until he sees whether a duty will pay or not, and then makes him eager because he sees it will answer his purpose.

**(5) Once more: I do not doubt that a form of godliness has come to many because it brings them ease of conscience, and they are able, like the Pharisee, to thank God that they are not as other men are.** (cp Lk 18:10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

Have they not been to church? Have they not paid for their pew? They can now go about their daily business without those stings of conscience which would come of neglecting the requirements of religion. These people profess to have been converted, and they are numbered with believers; but, alas! they are not of them (Mt 7:20-note, Mt 7:21-note).

**Of all people these are the hardest to reach,  
and the least likely to be saved.**

They hide behind the earth-works of a nominal religion; they are out of reach of the shot and shell of gospel rebukes; for these fly among the sinners, and they have taken up their quarters among the saints. Sad is that man's plight who wears the name of life but has never been quickened by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, I have very feebly tried to show what these men had, and why they had it.

**Let us now remember what they did not have.**

They had "the form" of godliness; but they denied "the power." What is that power? God himself is the power of godliness, The Holy Spirit is the life and force of it.

**Godliness** is the power which brings a man to God, and binds him to Him.

**Godliness** is that which creates repentance towards God, and faith in him.

**Godliness** is the result of a great change of heart in reference to God and his character.

**Godliness** looks towards God, and mourns its distance from him; godliness hastens to draw nigh, and rests not till it is at home with God.

**Godliness** makes a man like God. Godliness leads a man to love God, and to serve God; it brings the fear of God before his eyes, and the love of God into his heart.

**Godliness** leads to consecration, to sanctification, to concentration.

The godly man seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Mt 6:33-note), and expects other things to be added to him.

**Godliness** makes a man commune with God, and gives him a partnership with God in his glorious designs; and so it prepares him to dwell with God for ever.

Many who have the **form of godliness** are strangers to this power, and so are in religion worldly, in prayer mechanical, in public one thing, and in private another. True godliness lies in spiritual power, and as they are without this, they are dead while they live.

**What is the general history of those who have not this power?**

**(Step 1) Well, dear friends, their course usually runs thus: they do not begin with denying the power, but they begin by trying to do without it.**

They would like to become members of the church, and as they fear that they are not fit for it, they look about for something which looks like conversion and the new birth. They try to persuade themselves that they have been changed: they accept emotion as regeneration, and a belief of doctrine for belief in Christ. It is rather hard at first to reckon brass as gold, but it grows easier as it is persisted in. Patching up a conversion, and manufacturing a regeneration, they venture forward. At the first they are a good deal suspicious of themselves, but they industriously kill every question by treating it as a needless doubt. Thus, by degrees, they believe a lie.

**(Step 2) The next step is easy: they deceive themselves, and come to believe that they are surely saved.**

All is now right for eternity, so they fancy; and they fold their arms in calm security. Meeting with godly people, they put on a bold front, and speak up as bravely as if they were the true soldiers of King Jesus. Good people are charmed to meet with fresh brethren, and at once take them into their confidence. Thus they deceive others, and help to strengthen themselves in their false hope. They use the choice phrases of earnest Christians. Mixing with them, they pick up their particular expressions, and pronounce Shibboleth

in the most approved fashion. At last they take the daring step of denying the power. Being without it themselves, they conceive that others are without it also. Judging from their own case, they conclude that it is all an affair of words. They get on very well without any supernatural power, and others, no doubt, do the same; only they add a little cant to it to please the very godly folk.

They practically deny the power in their lives, so that those who see them and take them for Christians say,

“There really is nothing in it; for these people are as we are. They have a touch of paint here, and a little varnish there, but it is all the same wood.”

**(Step 3) Practically, their actions assure the world that there is no power in Christianity; it is only a name.**Very soon, privately, in their hearts they think it is so, and they invent doctrines to match. Looking about them, they see inconsistent Christians and faulty believers, and they say to themselves,

“There is not much in faith, after all. I am as good as any of these believers, and perhaps better, though I am sure there is no work of the Spirit in me.”

Thus, within their own hearts they believe, what, at first, they dare not speak: they count godliness an empty thing. By-and-by, in some cases, these people profanely deny the divine power of our holy faith, and then they become the greatest enemies of the cross of Christ. These traitors, nourished in the very house of God, are the worst foes of truth and righteousness. They ridicule that which once they professed to reverence. They have measured Christ's corn with their own bushel; and because they never felt the powers of the world to come, they imagine that no one else has done so.

Look at the church of the present day; the advanced school, I mean. In its midst we see preachers who have **a form of godliness**, but deny the power thereof. They talk of the Lord Jesus, but they deny his Godhead, which is his power; they speak of the Holy Spirit, but deny his personality, wherein lies his very existence. They take away the substance and power from all the doctrines of revelation, though they pretend still to believe them. They talk of redemption, but they deny substitution, which is the essence of it; they extol the Scriptures, but deny their infallibility, wherein lies their value; they use the phrases of orthodoxy, and believe nothing in common with the orthodox.

I know not which to loathe the most, their teachings or their spirit: surely they are worthy of each other. They burn the kernel and preserve the husk. They kill the truth, and then pretend to reverence its sepulcher; “they say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie.” This is horrible, but the evil is widely spread, and in the presence of it the children of God are framing compromises, selling their Lord, and becoming partakers with the despisers of his truth. “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” It is the sin of the age-the sin which is ruining the churches of our land.

**In the second place, we are to observe "the wicked folly" of this hypocritical conduct.**

**Those who rest in the mere show of godliness are acting in a shameless manner, and I will try to expose it.**

**(1) First, they degrade the very name of Christ.**

Brethren, if there is no spiritual power in godliness, it is worth nothing. We want no clouds without rain. Of shams and mere pretences we have more than enough. Those who have not the power of godliness, show us a very damaging picture of religion. They make out our Lord's religion to be comparable to a show at a country fair, with fine pictures and loud drumming on the outside, and nothing within worth a moment's consideration. The best of the show is on the outside; or if there be anything within, it is a masquerade where all act borrowed parts, but no one is what he seems to be. Gracious Lord, never suffer us so to act as to make the world think that our Redeemer is nothing more than the clever manager of a theater, where nothing is real, but all is pantomime. Men and brethren, if you pray at all, pray God to make you real, through and through. May you be made of true metal! It were better for you that you had never been born than that you should make Christ dishonorable among the sons of men, by leading them to conclude that religion is all a piece of acting.

**The folly of this is illustrated by the fact that there is no value in such a dead form.**

The **form of godliness** without the power is not worthy the trouble it takes to put it together, and keep it together. Imitation jewels are pretty and brilliant; but if you take them to the jeweller he will give you nothing for them. There is a religion which is all paste gems-a godliness which glitters, but is not gold; and in that day when you will want to realize something from it, you will be wretchedly disappointed. A **form of godliness** joined to an unholy heart is of no value to God. I have read that the swan was not allowed to be offered upon the altar of God, because, although its feathers are as white as snow, yet its skin is black. God will not accept that external morality which conceals internal impurity. There must be a pure heart as well as a clean life; the power of godliness must work within, or else God will not accept our offering. There is no value to man or to God in a religion which is a dead form. (see also **J. C. Ryle's sermon** on 2 Timothy 3:5 entitled "[Formalism](#)")

**(2) Next, there is no use in mere formality.**

If your religion is without spiritual life, what is the use of it? Could you ride home on a dead horse? Would you hunt with dead dogs? Would any one like to go into battle with a pasteboard helmet? When the sword fell on it, what use would such a helmet be? What an outcry has been raised about bad swords! Is false religion any better? In the depth of winter, can you warm yourself before a painted fire? Could you dine off the picture of a feast when you are hungry? There must be vitality and substantiality, or else the form is utterly worthless; and worse than worthless, for it may flatter you into deadly self-conceit.

**(3) Moreover, there is no comfort in it.**

The form without the power has nothing in it to warm the heart, to raise the spirits, or to strengthen the mind against the day of sickness, or in the hour of death. O God, if my religion has been a mere form, what shall I do in the swelling of Jordan? My fine profession will all disappear, and nothing will come of it wherewith I may face the last enemy. Peter called hypocrites "wells without water." You are thirsty, and you gladly spy a well. It is well surrounded with a curb, and provided with a windlass and bucket. You hasten to draw water. What! Does the bucket come up empty? You try again. How bitter is your disappointment! A well without water is a mockery. It is a mere pit of destruction, a deadly delusion. Are some of you possessors of a religion which never yields you a drop of comfort? Is it a bondage to you? Do you follow Christ as a slave follows his master? Away with such a religion! The godliness which is worth having is a joy to a man: it is his choice, his treasure, his all. When it does not yield him conscious joy, yet he prizes it as the only source from which joy is expected by him. He follows after Christ *con amore*, out of his heart's desire after Him, and not from the force of fashion, or the power of fear (cp 1Jn 4:18).

**(4) To have the form of godliness without the power of it is to lack constancy in your religion.**

You never saw the mirage, but those who have traveled in the East, when they come home are sure to tell you about it. It is a very hot and thirsty day, and you are riding on a camel. Suddenly there rises before you a beautiful scene. Just a little from you are brooks of water, flowing between beds of osiers and banks of reeds and rushes. Yonder are palm trees and orange groves. Yes, and a city rises on a hill, crowned with minarets and towers. You are rejoiced, and ask your guide to lead you nearer to the water which glistens in the sun. He grimly answers,

"Take no notice, it is the mirage. There is nothing yonder but the burning sand."

You can scarce believe him, it seems so real; but lo, it is all gone, like a dream of night. So unsubstantial is the hope which is built upon the **form of godliness** without the power. The white ants will eat up all the substance of a box, and yet leave it standing, till a touch causes the whole fabric to fall in dust: beware of a profession of which the substance has been eaten away. Believe in nothing which has not the stamp of eternity upon it. Go to, poor child; thou mayest blow thy bubble, and the sunlight may paint it with rainbows; but in an instant it is gone, and not a trace of it remains. Thy transient globe of beauty is for thee and thy fellow children, and not for men.

**In reality, this kind of religion is in opposition to Christ.**

It is Jannes and Jambres over again: the magician of hypocrisy is trying to work miracles which belong to God only. In appearance he would produce the same marvels as the finger of God; but he fails. God grant we may never be guilty of resisting the truth by a lying profession. False men do serious injury to true godliness; for, like Ehud, they come with a pretended message from God, and with their dagger sharpened at both edges, they strike vital godliness in its very bowels. Nobody can do so much damage to the church of God as the man who is within its walls, but not within its life.

**This nominal godliness, which is devoid of power, is a shameful thing**

I close with that. It is a shameful thing for this life, for the Lord Jesus loathes it. When he passed by the fig-tree, which was so early with its leaves, but so empty of fruit, he saw therein the likeness of the vainglorious professor who has no real holiness, and he said, "Henceforth let no fruit grow on thee for ever." His word withered it at once: it stood a terrible emblem of the end of a false profession. How shameful will such a fruitless, lifeless professor be in eternity, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed! What shame and everlasting contempt will await him when his falsehood shall be detected, and his baseness shall fill all holy minds with horror! What will be the hell of the false professor!

**I have done when I have added a few words of instruction.**

The **form of godliness** is most precious; let those who feel the power of godliness honor it and use it. Do not despise it because others have damaged it. Come forth, and make an open profession of religion; but see that you have the power of it. Do cry to God that you may never wear a sleeve which is longer than your arm: I mean, may never go beyond what is really and truly your own. It will be better for you to go to God as a lost soul, and cry for mercy, than to profess yourself saved when you are not. Yet do confess Christ without fail or fear. Do not be ashamed of Jesus because of the ill manners of his disciples. Regard the ill savor of false professors as a part of the cross which you will have to bear for your Lord. To be associated with some who are not true seems



inevitable in this life, however carefully we choose our company.

**My next is a word of discrimination.**

Those to whom my text has nothing to say will be the first to take it home to themselves. When I discharge my heart with a faithful sermon, certain trembling souls whom I would fain comfort are sure to think that I mean them. A poor woman, in deep distress, comes to me, crying, "Sir, I have no feeling." Dear heart, she has ten times too much feeling. Another moans out, "I am sure I am a hypocrite." I never met with a hypocrite who thought himself one; and I never shall. "Oh!" said another, "I feel condemned." He that feels himself condemned may hope for pardon. If you are afraid of yourselves I am not afraid of you. If you tremble at God's Word, you have one of the surest marks of God's elect. Those who fear that they are mistaken are seldom mistaken. If you search yourselves, and allow the Word of God to search you, it is well with you. The bankrupt trader fears to have his books examined. The sound man even pays an accountant to overhaul his affairs. Use discrimination, and neither acquit nor condemn yourself without reason. If the Spirit of God leads you to weep in secret for sin, and to pray in secret for grace; if it leads you to seek after holiness; if it leads you to trust alone in Jesus, then you know the power of godliness, and you have never denied it. You who cry, "Oh, that I felt more of the power of the Holy Spirit, for I know that he could. comfort and sanctify me, and make me live the life of heaven on earth!" You are not aimed at either by the text or the sermon; for you have not denied the power. No, no, this text does not belong to you, but to quite another class of people.

**Let me give you a word of admonition.**

Learn from the text that there is something in godliness worth the having. The "form" of godliness is not all: there is a blessed "power." The Holy Ghost is that power, and He can work in you to will and to do of God's good pleasure (Php 2:13-note).

Come you to Jesus Christ, dear souls. Do not come to the minister, nor to the church, in the first place; but come to Jesus. Come and lay yourselves at his feet, and say, "Lord, I will not be comforted unless thou comfort me."

Come, and take everything at first hand from your crucified Lord. Then shall you know the power of godliness. Beware of second-hand religion, it is never worth the carrying home.

Get your godliness direct from heaven by the personal dealing of your own soul with your Savior.

**Profess only what you possess,  
and rest only in that which has been given you from above.**

Your heavenly life, as yet, may be very feeble, but the grain of mustard seed will grow.

**You may be the least in Israel,  
but that is better than being the greatest in Babylon**

The Lord bless these words, and apply them to each one in his own way by his Holy Spirit. You can make either a blister of them, or a plaster of them, as conscience shall direct. God guide you, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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