


Continue

# Sermon on having a form of godliness but denying its power

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.  For men shall be 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, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;  Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” 1 Timothy 3:1-5. One of the major signs that reveal that we are living at the end of time is the empty, hollow condition that exists within many of our churches. The apostle Paul saw that just before Christ’s return a non-theological, non-doctrinal movement would creep into the church disguised under the name of Christianity. This movement would have all the outward forms of religion but will reject the life changing power of God’s word. Even though many of the modern, contemporary worship styles that we see today are full of emotional manipulation and sensory gratification, too many of them are void of sound Biblical teaching. The light and music shows may make the church look hip and trendy for millennials, but these stunts will NEVER revive or save anyone. There is only one thing that can revive us and bring life back to the church: “It is the spirit that quickeneth (gives life); the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” John 6:63. “Having a form of godliness” is describing a movement in the church that will replace God’s word with selfish gratifications and desires. It is an attempt to give life to the church through a false sense of excitement. A new allegiance to the current, the hip, the cool and the commercial is replacing our allegiance to God’s word. We see Paul’s end-time prophetic word being fulfilled in the following video that comes from Hillsong Church, a charismatic Christian denomination. Their worship service is the gold standard that many churches and youth groups are trying to pattern. They use very little Bible and a whole lot of emotional spectacles. <span data-mce-type=”bookmark” style=”display: inline-block; width: 0px; overflow: hidden; line-height: 0;” class=”mce_SELRES_start”></span> This new, end-time phenomena is sweeping the churches and leaving our young people Biblically-illiterate. They are certainly being entertained, but they are not being taught solid-biblical truth and morality. Sadly, the church is exchanging truth for comfort and righteousness for entertainment. Our pastors have become motivational speakers and cheerleaders instead of Spirit-filled preachers who stir and convict the hearts of sin. Because of this universal, spiritual crisis the churches are failing in their Christian duty to truth. They have drifted off course and are losing the battle against the prevailing culture. While the watchmen on the walls of Zion sleep the church is under attack, the marriage institution is being destroyed, the family unit is being redefined, the blatant murder of millions of babies (abortion) continues and other assaults against our Judeo-Christian values are transpiring all around us. And what are the Biblically-illiterate churches doing? They are preparing rock concert-like shows for their lukewarm members instead of safeguarding the spiritual condition of our people with the word of God. The religion of these last days has simply become an emotional experience without any burdens, no self-denial and no self- sacrifice. The church today may have a nice exterior, but underneath is a sick, aching, sinful heart. Once the music stops playing and the lights go off the unregenerate heart is still unsatisfied – without rest and without the peace of God. All the show and fanfare we see in some of our houses of worship leave the church-goers feeble. They go home empty and without any assurances of victory in the warfare against Satan. On the other hand, the apostolic faith and the faith of the Protestant Reformers of the 16th Century was a very different experience than what we are seeing today. These believers were fearless and powerful, and through the power of the Holy Spirit they stood up against the prevailing iniquity of their day and won. Why? Because their experience was deeply rooted in the word of God, with all of its unpopular and culturally-difficult truths. They were not afraid to preach against sin or on the subjects of repentance and the fear of God. They didn’t water down the gospel in order to gain adherents. They were faithful to their God-given call to preach “all the counsel of God” Acts 20:27. This is what God’s church needs today. This is how the church receives life and power, and this is the only way we will survive the dark days ahead. Reading, understanding and applying God’s word into our lives and into the life of the church is the only way to awaken us from our spiritual decay. This means teaching and preaching all of God’s word including His commandments and reproofs and not just a few selective verses. If fact, you can be in solitary confinement locked away at some prison far away from any lights, fog machine or cool music – and God’s word alone will still be sufficient to save the soul of any hardened sinner. Praise God! “The only safety for any of us is to plant our feet upon the Word of God and study the Scriptures, making God’s Word our constant meditation…The Holy Spirit’s influence renders that Word, the Bible, an immortal truth, which to the prayerful searcher gives spiritual sinew and muscle” (Manuscript Release, Vol. 21, p. 131). “None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?” (Great Controversy, p. 593). Please follow and like us: 0 0 0 The Form and the Power of Godliness. A SERMON Preached at the Opening Services OF THE NEW St. Ann's on the Heights, BROOKLYN, N. Y., On Wednesday, October 20th, 1869, By CHARLES P. McILVAINE, D. D., D.C.L., Bishop of the Diocese of Ohio. BROOKLYN: PRINTED BY H. M. GARDNER, JR., Corner of Fulton and York Streets. 1869. Transcribed by Wayne Kempton Archivist and Historiographer of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, 2008"Having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof."--2 Tim., iii. 5. _____ THERE is an impressive prediction at the head of this chapter, of the condition of the visible Church in the days that shall immediately precede the coming of the Son of Man. "In the last days, perilous times shall come." And then the Apostle proceeded to mention certain deplorable features of character which he foresaw would have a special ascendancy and conspicuousness in the Church of those days. Prominent among them, are these: "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof." Connected with the description, are also these: "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." "They will not endure sound doctrine." "They shall turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables." [* 2 Timothy III: 13, and IV, 3-4.] It is a very wide impression among those who "wait for their Lord," that the time of his second appearing draws near; and therefore that we are now close to, if not in the very beginning of the perilous times thus predicted. Certainly there is much in the aspect of these times to countenance the idea; at any rate the Apostle's description applies in an alarming degree to the present generation, in various branches of the visible Church. We shall confine our present attention to that one feature of the prediction which is contained in the text [9/10] "Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Under which words, we must speak, first, of the power of godliness; secondly, of its form; then of that divorce of one from the other, which denies the power while retaining the form. I. "THE POWER OF GODLINESS"--What is it? We answer, it is the substance, or reality of godliness, as distinguished from all its forms. And godliness here is a term for that inward and spiritual grace which is the life and being of all genuine piety before God. Its only abiding place is the heart, which we are therefore exhorted to keep with all diligence, because out of it are the issues which make the visible life of righteousness. Just as prayer in the Spirit is essential to all reality of prayer, in distinction from the words of prayer; just as the inward grace of Baptism, signified in the sacramental "sign or form," namely: "death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness," is the reality of the true Baptism, in distinction from its outward administration; just as when one comes to the Lord's Table, without "a true penitent heart, and lively faith," he receives the outward part or sign in the Lord's Supper, without the grace it signifies, and thus the form, without the power of that godliness which lives by faith upon the sacrifice and mediation of Christ; while another, approaching the same holy table, with the sacrifice of a contrite heart, and drawing near with faith, is a partaker not merely of the sacrament of the death of the Saviour, but of that death itself, in all the benefits of His passion, to his soul's health. And so, in the whole life of a true believer, of which in its essential being and sustenance, the two sacraments are the concentrated expression, the power or reality of godliness is none other than, as St. Peter expressed it, "the hidden man of the heart," in distinction from all visible ways and works of its manifestations before men. "I am the life," saith the Lord. "He that abideth in me, and [10/11] I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." The fruit is the effect of the life, and its evidence--not the life. "Your life, (saith the Scripture) is hid with Christ, in God." [* Col. III. 3.] As branches of that "true vine," his people abide in Him by a hidden communication of spiritual life, wherein they receive of His Spirit, just as the natural vine-branch abides in its vine, only as it is in communion with its hidden current of life. The Apostle has it thus: "The law of the Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." [* Romans, VIII: 2.] That blessed Spirit of life, shedding abroad in the heart, the love of God, creating in us the faith by which we are justified in the righteousness of Christ, and the holiness which makes us meet for his presence and glory, carrying on the hidden work of grace, into more and more conformity to the mind of Christ, till it become perfect in his likeness--such is godliness in its reality and power. Until it enters and takes possession within us, we are "dead in sin." As soon as it so enters, we are "alive unto God." As its essential being is in that new and inward life, its only beginning is in a new and inward birth. "Born again by the Holy Ghost," "transformed by the renewing of the mind," having "a new heart," in place of the old; such, according to the Scriptures, are they to whom the Gospel has come "not in word only, but in power and the Holy Ghost." The inward depth of that great transformation, its thorough reality as a work of internal renewal, or new creation, is given by Saint Paul, when he says to the Christians at Ephesus, that if they had "been taught as the truth is in Jesus," they had "put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and were renewed in the spirit of their mind, and had put on the new man, which after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." [* Ephes. IV: 21-24.] Such is godliness in the power, whether abiding in a heart [11/12] just now made new by the Spirit of God, or in a believer almost full grown in grace; whether time may not have been allowed, to make itself visible in the fruits of holiness, or whether it be already full clothed therein. We must be careful not to confound "the hidden man of the heart" with the manifested man in the outward walks and deeds of righteousness. The child of God, is "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works." [Ephes. II: 10.] Good works do not constitute him that new creature, they follow upon a workmanship of grace, of which they are the essential fruit and evidence. Now such godliness is power, just because it is life. It is the power of a faith which purifies the heart, and gets victory over this evil world. In some of God's children, it is more a power than in others, according as some are riper in grace than others; precisely as this natural life, essentially active and a power, varies in powerfulness as men differ in the maturity and activity of their faculties. True godliness cannot be a mere inoperative seed or unconscious germ of spiritual being. It is a leaven that must leaven. The godliness is itself the power. And the new creature, in Christ Jesus, living by faith and working by love, is the godliness. It is just the image of God, lost in the first Adam, renewed in the second Adam, "the Lord from heaven." Without it, you can no more attain to fruits of righteousness, than you can raise a tree to fruitfulness, while the root is dead. All works are "dead works," before God, that come not of that new heart. Paint them, dress them as you may, to give them the aspect of life, they are not written among the living. And just what that hidden life is to the individual christian, it is to the whole Church, which cannot have any true godliness but as its several members are children of that new heart. All the ability of the Church for its real, living work in this world, all its existence as a living Church, depends on that. [12/13] It is written: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." And the Church overcomes the world for Christ, in the war and victory of his Gospel, only as it contains those who being so born of God, do in their personal striving so overcome. Be not deceived. There may be much outward aspect of life and growth, and none in truth. Church edifices may be built on every side, and adorned with all the magnificence that wealth and art can give. Our borders of sacramental communion may be greatly extended. Signs of flourishing increase and vigorous activity may stand in bright array before eyes that look only on the outward appearance; while to that which looketh on the heart, and finds the heart of the Church only in the hearts of its several members, that whole appearance, and all beneath it, may be only what St. Paul said he would be, "though he should give all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned--and have not charity," the love of God in his heart--"NOTHING." These teachings, I know, are old things, said over and over again by faithful Ministers of Christ, as they ought to be. They are too much the very marrow of the teaching of the old Bible and the old Apostles, who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and of the old Church, to be else than old wherever the preacher keeps to "the old paths" in which the feet of Jesus led. I rejoice to believe that they are old, and loved because so old, in this congregation. Very sad will it be for you, Brethren, if ever the old Manna of this pilgrimage, that spiritual meat of which your fathers ate and never wanted other, shall become so distasteful, that you will hunger for something new instead of it, something more progressive, something, in other words, less of inspired teaching, more of the carnal mind. Many years ago, and during all the years when it was my happiness to be the pastor of that beloved flock from which this has grown, and in that dear Old Church, where so many dear ones, now gone to their Lord, were "begotten again by [13/14] the word of God," and the power of His Spirit, and where it pleased Him to give most precious fruits of grace to the seed of his truth--there, my constant teaching was, as it has been (I bless God) ever since, those same old things, of grace and faith, of the new heart and the new man, "justified by faith," and so "having peace with God, through Jesus Christ." And thus it must be, till I put off this tabernacle, the Lord being my helper. They are just the great truths which there is a continual and dangerous tendency among professing christians to get away from, to lose sight of their transcendant importance, to put something less vital in their place, to mix them up confusedly in a crowd of inferior matters, and thus very easily and sadly to confound the outside of godliness with its reality, and satisfy themselves with a name to live, while they are spiritually dead. It is exactly here that "the god of this world" labors to blind the minds of men, "lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine unto them." II. The "FORM OF GODLINESS." Certain of the church visible are described as having a form, while they deny the power of godliness. Let it be noted that no objection is indicated in the Scriptures to the having a form. Godliness, in "the power thereof," can have no contact with this world without a form, any more than our souls, without the bodies they live in. Angels, when they come from heaven on embassies to men, put on a form of outward appearance in order to be known. And when the hidden man of the heart goes about his mission in this world, he must do likewise. When for that end, he puts on a certain expression of his affections, his worship, his love, and his faith, by words, in posture of body, in sacramental, and other visible ordinances, which associate him with his brethren in Christ, who do the like, then he takes on a form of his godliness. It may be fixed or variable, written or unwritten, the most meagre, or the most manifold, the merest rag of a garment, [14/15] or the most elaborate and cumbersome; but it is his form of godliness. And since the public worship of christian people is the most observed and concentrated of all the externalism by which their inward religious life is manifested and professed before men, it has come to pass that whenever a form of religion is spoken of, we are understood as referring chiefly, if not exclusively, to a form of worship, whatever that may be. With us, our book of liturgical offices is our form of godliness. With other worshiping people, where no liturgy is used, there is no less a form, though the form be much less. You will observe that when the Apostle speaks in the text of the power of godliness, he says "the power." Because there can be but one. It is God's workmanship in all his people, and must be the same in essential character everywhere. But on the other hand, where form is spoken of, it is not the form but "a form." Because, while the godliness is unchangeable, its modes of appearing and doing its work in the world may be various. It is instructive to consider, under these general principles, namely, the divine law that godliness must have a visible form in this world, and the divine allowance of varying forms, how little of those which the Churches of different times and circumstances have adopted is of any specific divine appointment. Two, and only two, has the Lord ordained, to be everywhere essential to the Church in its external and visible being, namely, the signs or forms essential to the two holy Sacraments. And it is instructive to note among the several forms in which the Churches of different nations and times have clothed the administration of those sacraments, how little is derived from such precept or example of the Lord, or his Apostles, as may be considered binding upon succeeding ages; in Baptism, the water, and the few words from the Lord's commandment to accompany it; in the Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine, with the few simple sentences accompanying its institution. [15/16] And when you have added to these that very brief and comprehensive form of prayer--the Lord's Prayer; all the rest, unless we except the laying on of hands in Confirmation and Ordaining, all the rest in the whole domain of worship is left to the conscientious discretion of the Church, determining what is wisest for the promotion of God's worship, in spirit and in truth, according to the varieties of people and circumstances, under guidance of the Scriptures, with a reverent consideration of the examples of the purest ages of the Church, and under the superintending influences of the Holy Ghost. Compare this conspicuous feature of the Christian dispensation, with the exceeding multiplication and minuteness of forms prescribed by divine command under that of the Law; the former having for its object the sending the light to all nations, and making out of them one "holy nation;" the latter, aiming only at the conservation of the light; and hence its jealous partition wall of ordinances separating that one nation from all others. Compare also the scantiness of teaching in the New Testament concerning anything pertaining to the visibility of worship, with the fullness and solemnity of its teachings, when the power of godliness and its essential spiritual manifestations in the outer life are concerned; the "line upon line," the "doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." In the presence of that impressive difference, and in the hearing of the Lord's command, "Go, preach the Gospel to every creature;" in the presence of St. Paul, giving his last injunctions to Timothy, as Bishop of the Church at Ephesus, in view of the perilous times approaching, and saying not a word about anything in the form or visible institutions of the Church, while with intense solemnity he writes, "charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word--[16/17] instant in season, out of season;" in that presence, how appears that morbid religiousness which seems to concentrate the whole life of religious worship, in matters of show and pomp, in ceremonies and symbols; and hungers after them, as one is exhorted to hunger and thirst after righteousness; which seeks the increase of such things as if it were written--the more form, the more godliness; and sets itself to create a laborious book-learning out of frivolous distinctions of days and hours, of vestments and postures, of lights and colors and stitches, urging such miserable trifling upon the conscience, and contending for it as if were "the faith once delivered to the saints;" while it seems to be thought a very small thing, comparatively at least, whether the pure Gospel be preached, or something else which is not the Gospel; a matter of quite inferior concernment whether the minister, placing all the stress of his office in what he calls his sacrificial priesthood, knows in the least how to set the fulness of the salvation of Christ before the necessities of a sinner, if he shall only know how to manipulate that Judaistic show of Priest, Altar and Sacrifice, with all its surroundings of priestly exaction and lay submission, in which that whole formalism finds its pride and crown. Do not understand that we are aiming, in the least, at the depreciation of your attachment to well-adapted and properly-authorized forms of worship. We have no idea of teaching that such, and our own, in particular, should not be very highly valued for their proper uses, affectionately cherished, faithfully observed, jealously guarded against irreverence and mutilation, and especially against all such mutilations or additions as tend to introduce unscriptural doctrines. But the best are easily lifted into a false importance, and made to hinder instead of helping the truth; like the moon's cold disk, as lately seen, eclipsing instead of reflecting the sunlight. Like the garments of our bodies, they may be good to protect the health they can not impart, or evil to deform the simplicity [17/18] they can not adorn. Too much leanness they may have, or too much cumbersomeness, for the good of godliness. Like the vail of cloister-life, they may purposely hide in mystery what God has revealed to be plainly seen of all men--the beautiful, open face of Gospel truth. Their distinctive character, good or bad, may spring from humble devotion or the pride of churchmanship; designed more to make a vain show than to help inward prayer. They may sympathize in spirit with that woman of the Apocalypse, the symbol of a fallen church, whom the pen of inspiration exhibits as arrayed in scarlet and gold, and precious stones, courting admiration as her chief joy, saying, in every feature, "Look on me"--and of whom the word of God says, "How much she hath glorified herself." [* Rev. XVII.] Or they may exhibit a beautiful simplicity, shining in the light it indicates, like that other woman of the Apocalypse, the figure of a living, faithful church, "girt about with truth," and standing in its right relation to God and man--the woman "clothed with the sun," herself concealed in the light she reflects, and saying to all the world, "Look unto Jesus, the only light of life, and to testify of whom is all my glory." [* Ib. XVII: 7.] III. We come to THAT WIDE SEPARATION between the form and the reality of godliness--"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Mind, it is not said what sort of form, good or bad. It may be all right, the sacraments in their place, and all the accompaniments right. The point is that, having a form, no matter how good, so far is it from any certain connection with the reality of godliness in the individual, or in whole church communities, that it may be most strictly observed, not only in entire divorce from all inward and spiritual grace, but in the actual denial of all such grace. What does such denial imply? It does not necessarily imply the conscious holding that there is no such thing required [18/19] or attainable as a power of godliness other than the form--though it may soon come to that. It does not imply that the man is at all aware of any denial, or does not imagine the precise opposite of himself. St. Paul speaks of certain who "profess that they know God, and in works deny him." [* Tit. I: 16.] As a man may deny the Lord by simple neglect or indifference, or by taking something instead of him for his hope, while calling him his only Master and Saviour; so may we deny that inward reality of godliness of which he is all the life. It is a very common and sad state of professing Christians that, knowing, perhaps, in their understandings, the godliness we have described, and having no thought of gainsaying its truth or necessity, their personal piety is so entirely a matter of external observance, and so indifferent are they to any thing better, that in their habitual spirit they do practically deny it, exactly as they who "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts," do so simply by having nothing to do with them. This measure of denial may go no further. But often it does. Such indifference to the spiritual of religion not unfrequently increases till it attains to the manifestation of a decided aversion. It can no longer endure "sound doctrine;" such doctrine as St. Paul meant by that expression, who made so much in his ministry of being "justified by faith," for peace with God, and of being "led by the Spirit of God" as essential to the evidence that we are children of God. [* Romans V. 1 and VIII.: 14.] No words from the pulpit does that condition of mind endure with more dislike than those which most nearly expound such passages as these from St. Paul: "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" "The carnal mind is enmity against God';" "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." [* Rom. VIII.: 1, 7, 9.] The contrast of this condition of mind with the real godliness [19/20] is so glaring that, to escape its condemnation, the man must either renounce it or go further in it. What hitherto he has denied only in spirit, he gets to denying more positively. That there is any thing in religion beyond the observance of religious rites, connected with a good moral demeanor, and a certain measure of self denial and alms-giving; that there is any "death unto sin" or "new birth unto righteousness," other than the baptismal sacrament; any partaking of the bread of life besides receiving the sacramental signs of Christ's body and blood; any coming to Christ, but coming to the ministrations of a priesthood, and thus to the alleged deposit of grace in the keeping of the church; that man in his heart now denies, though not yet willing so to declare himself in words. Now, it is not wonderful that this state of mind should exhibit an extravagant zeal for the whole ritual-form of godliness--to enlarge it, to adorn it, to invest it with a sentimental, mystical imitation of spiritual life, with deep, hidden meanings and mysterious sanctities, a vail of symbolism, and a cloud of ceremony, under which the man may hide himself from himself, and imagine he is alive unto God, and growing in grace. It is all his religion, and he must make the most of it. It must be forced to seem as religious as possible, and so he paints and clothes the corpse, as if alive, and tries to think it is alive. The more the imagination invests it with its nebulous drapery, the more spiritual it seems to become. Hence the revival of old mediaeval names and usages, having the savor of incense and the romance of a dim antiquity. Thus the minute reinauguration of cast-off trappings of ritualism which our reformers could not tolerate; gorgeous, sacerdotal vestments, full of false doctrine in their symbolic meaning.; the marchings, the banners, the crosses, the candles, and censers, and all those so called "imposing" inventions which centre upon, and are intended to teach and glorify, that whole profane pretense of a daily reoffering of the very sacrifice of the [20/21] body and blood of Christ, in which the whole system and aspiration of such formalism finds its climax and rest. Associated with all this, will be found the full, ripe growth of denial of the power of godliness. It is seen wherever is avowed the doctrine of what, in scholastic phrase, is called the opus operatum of the sacraments--that is, that sacraments have their efficacy in virtue of their own inherent power, independently of any repentance and living faith in the recipient. The denial appears more conspicuously and offensively in the taking away, by express decree, of the very nature of the sacraments as signs of invisible grace, and making them the very grace they signify. For example, the Lord's Supper, the sign of the Sacrifice of Christ, is made the very sacrifice once offered on the cross. The bread, after the priest's consecrating act, remains bread only in the form, while in substance it has been made the very body of Christ that was slain for us; so that even the wicked receiving that form, do, as is blasphemously maintained, receive that very body. That bread, that form, is thus regarded as the Saviour, the true God, "the Life." Supreme adoration is directed thereto. The whole force of the church, so teaching, aims at making universal that faith and that idolatrous worship. Around that deified form, all its ritualism revolves as the one object of adoration of all believers, and to be supremely glorified. Thousands of faithful men and women have been martyred for refusing that worship--"the adoration of the host," as its name is. In that awful elevation of a sacramental form into divinity, as the sinner's highest worship and only trust, we have the professed godliness of that system of faith. And what is it but a systematic denial of all that the sacrament was designed, not to be, but to signify; the denial of the only godliness of the Scriptures and of the Gospel, just as really as the worship of an idol is the denial of God? No further step in this progress remains, but that to which the reaction of an extreme so terrible has so often led, namely, that infidel denial of all claim [21/22] to the supernatural in religion; that which sets down all in the Scriptures about an inward and spiritual grace as a fable, and accepts nothing in religion, beyond man's natural instincts reason, but such outward forms as Christians or heathens (it makes no difference which) may adopt. But while in all this the power of godliness is so denied, does it follow that there is no other power? Such formalism as we have just described, when once it takes possession of a strong church organization, has great power; power against godliness; an awful power of superstition, to deceive and be deceived; to create tormenting fears in weak minds and gloomy consciences; to awaken a fierce fanaticism, and to use it; to raise up a despotic priesthood; to enthrone the confessional and dictate humiliating penances to an enslaved laity. It can "compass sea and land to make one proselyte," and when made it will hear, as the Pharisees, with their like vigorous and dead formalism, heard in the condemnation of Jesus, "Ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves." [* Matt. XXIII.: 15.] It had power in a past century to build out of the sale of indulgences the costliest and grandest temple in the world for its gorgeous sacrificial rites, and to fill it with abominable idolatry. It has power now to set up in that same temple the throne of him who claims supremacy over all princes and dominions, to bind and loose the allegiance of nations, to change laws of God's enactment, to pronounce himself infallible, to proclaim "lying wonders" [* 1 Thess. II.: 9.] as God's miracles, to change the creed of the church and the gospel of the Son of God, by decreeing new articles of faith to be believed on pain of damnation; and it has power and the will to persecute unto death those who "search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so." Such spiritual death, in any of its stages of formalism, can not be unfruitful in growth of moral corruption, any more than this human body, its vital spirit gone, can help going to corruption, [22/23] and then becoming a fruitful development of hideous life. Only allow it room. Let it be unchecked by restraints and rebukes of a better religion at its side. Then see the company with which St. Paul foresaw it will be associated in those days when it shall have reached the climax of its power. "In the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;" and then comes, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." [* 2 Tim. III.: 1-5.] Such, we learn, is to be the exhibition among members of the visible church, in the times just before our Lord's second coming. And such was the aspect of the Jewish church at his first coming. The form given from Sinai was still in use, encumbered as it was by the ritualistic additions of Scribes and Pharisees. But where was the life? Such life as used to cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." "The sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." So had all that sort of religion departed; so had a dead though zealous formalism usurped its place, and such grievous corruption of morals had come in under a scrupulous observance of a minute and cumbersome ritual, that Jesus addressed them in these scathing words: "Ye hypocrites! well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." "Woe unto you, Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed [23/24] appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. [* Matt. XV.: 7, 8 and XXIII.: 27.] Those were perilous times to the steadfastness of the few who still "worshiped God in the Spirit, and put no confidence in the flesh." For there was "a remnant of grace." The contrite publican prayed in the temple, as well as the self exalted Pharisee. There was an aged Simeon who rejoiced in the birth of Christ, as well as elders and priests who rejoiced in his crucifixion. It was the same thing in the times just before the Reformation, in the sixteenth century. Popery had imitated Judaism, not only in priesthood and sacrifice and ritualism, and in overriding the Scriptures with traditions that made them of none effect, but in substituting for God's laws the commandments of men. At no period had religious forms been more minutely observed, or more diversely expanded into all conceivable applications, and never had the spiritual reality been so rejected and despised. Never had the mere form a more complete experiment; never so disgraceful a failure. There was no hinderance of opposition or protest. Public sentiment gave it open field. The rulers of the nations gave it all their power. Aesthetic art was at its height. All the attraction and influence of ceremonial pomp, sentimental symbolism, altars of lofty magnificence, priests radiant with gold and jewelry, and wielding an awful power over the consciences of the people, were at command. And yet, if ever since the last days of the Jewish priesthood the terrible description of St. Paul of what is to be in the last days of this dispensation was fulfilled, it was then; Romish divines being the witnesses and recording the testimony. The same cause, the same effect. The vital spirit of godliness denied, such religion as remained had no power to purify man's evil nature. "The strong man armed," unregenerate man, "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," could no more be mastered by such restraints [24/25] than Samson by the green withes of the Philistines. Sacramental ritualism was most flourishing, and so was all iniquity. As priestly rites abounded, sin did more abound. It was not that the two abounded in opposing lines, but in the same, the same ecclesiastical, the same lay ranks. The same classes that luxuriated in the ritualism were "the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." Nor was it in spite of the imposing rites that iniquity abounded, but by their connivance and indulgence; for universally, whenever the necessity of inward holiness is ignored, and conformity to outward rites becomes the accepted substance of godliness in a powerful communion, it will ensue that to be religious and immoral at the same time is no longer incompatible. Drunkards and blasphemers can now enter into the kingdom of God, because they can observe the form and go to mass as much as others. The adulterer is religious, because he is a devotee; the highway robber, because he makes his votive offering before the image of Mary, and his confession to a priest. The history of the reign of Romish supremacy, all along the centuries, establishes this. Indulgences to sin had no need of a special proclamation. The whole system was an indulgence to make void the law of God and yet expect salvation. That was a dark night, those years of Rome just before the intrepid Luther sounded the call to reformation. Devout men there were, of the power of godliness, who "kept the faith" in their hearts, and hoped for better days. Perilous the times to them, and especially if they tried to make their light shine before men. They watched and prayed and waited and did not faint, though sometimes at the cost of bitter sufferings and death. At last came the better days. The Scriptures broke jail and came forth. The true Gospel was preached again. Its power appeared again. Sinners were made new creatures in Christ Jesus, and "turned from idols to serve the living God." A genuine holiness revived. God's worship "in spirit and in truth" established its temple in many hearts. As the truth [25/26] made men free, the power of a usurping priesthood fell off. Men took knowledge of the truly godly Christian that he had been, not with the priest, but with Jesus. But St. Paul warns the church that perilous times are yet to come. Perhaps we have them, in a serious degree, already. Whether perilous to the body, is not the main question; but perilous to souls, to them of little faith, to men not well anchored in the truth; to those who walk by sight instead of faith, who rather hang on to the outside of the ark than enter within, and who keep their eyes upon the flood instead of "looking unto Jesus." It would seem that St. Paul intended us to understand that the manifestation of the genuine effects of a dead formalism in the church will in the last days exceed in awfulness and trial any thing in its previous history. And it may be expected that many a heart that seemed to stand well will then give way to the pressure. "There will come in the last days (saith St. Peter) scoffers walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming?" From the pulpit, no doubt, will be heard, as like things are heard even now, "The Gospel is a failure," and the camp of Satan will shout for joy to hear such words from such places. Then they that fear the Lord will speak often one to another, to cheer each other's hearts while they wait for the Lord's appearing, "whose fan is in his hand." And in that day, when the great harvest of his grace shall be gathered, and all his redeemed ones "shall appear with him in glory," then will all men and angels bear witness that not one promise of his word has failed. Meanwhile, in the trial of those times, when the world and the flesh, under the rule of "the god of this world," will seem to have gained a final victory, it will be a great consolation, as it is now, to remember that it was all predicted and provided for in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles. And faith will [26/27] feed on that evidence that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And now, my brethren of this congregation, this is a happy day to you. You have begun the enjoyment of this beautiful, spacious, and well-appointed church, and thus have opened a new chapter in your parish history. To me also, scarcely less than to you, is this an interesting day. It is more than thirty-six years since I gave up the pastoral care of the beloved flock from which this has grown, to take my present office. Very many of the dearest remembrances of my ministry are associated with it as it was in those days. Very few remain who were of it then; and I am a stranger personally to the most of you. But there is no minister living to whom the spiritual interests of this parish are so near, except your beloved Rector. Allow me, therefore, to conclude this discourse with a few words of special address. This church, with its whole equipment, and including all the ordinances and services ever to be had therein, is your form of godliness. I could speak as strongly of the beauty and appropriateness of the forms within, as of that which incloses them. We call it a church, because it is a form of the true church that worships here, "the blessed company of God's faithful people." You may call it a temple of God; and it will deserve the name, just so far as that "holy priesthood" composed of all that are in Christ Jesus," and made nigh by the blood of his sacrifice, shall here present themselves as living sacrifices, acceptable to God through him. Be careful, brethren, that no attachment to all this handiwork--the form within and without--shall ever beguile you into forgetfulness of what the true temple is, and its infinite importance compared with all the outward of its worship; lest you incur the Apostle's rebuke, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" It is that indwelling of the Spirit that makes the temple, so [27/28] that every heart that has it is God's temple, as St. Paul says again, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you?" [* 1 Cor. III.: 16 and VI.: 19.] Keep that essential difference between the visible and invisible immovable in your minds. How does God express it? "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that ye build unto me? To this man will I look--even to him that is of a contrite spirit." [* Isaiah LXVI: 1, 2.] It is the man, not the magnificent house he worships in--the man of a contrite heart, that God looks to as the house of his abode. Now, then, think of a spectacle which I trust will often be seen of God in this house, as its greatest possible glory--a "sinner that repenteth;" a heart just now a temple of the world's idolatry, cleansed, made new, a contrite heart, worship in spirit and in truth enthroned therein, and the new life begun. Think how that appears to God, in comparison with all this beautiful house and all the visible within it, and all that man's wealth and art could add to it. Think how the "joy in heaven" is gathered over that "one sinner that repenteth"--that "temple not made with hands (and to be) eternal in the heavens." But how unimportant to the world's eye, in presence of the world's glory, that new creation, more wonderful than all the material universe; that "day-spring from on high," more glorious than the morning when the sun arises on this earth--"God's workmanship" of grace. Dear brethren, let that essential and infinite difference direct and rule you in all your estimates of religious values. It is the vast gulf between all the earthly that we must leave behind us at the grave, and all the heavenly and eternal in the heritage of the people of God. By it let your estimate be formed of the value of a faithful minister in your pulpit, keeping his eye continually not on things that are seen and are temporal, but on the unseen and eternal, counting all things worthless for your salvation, compared with "the excellency [28/29] of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that you may win and be found in him." By the same rule, now that you have lavished so much expense and care on all this for yourselves, let your estimate be made of what you are now bound to do, in cooperation with your pastor, to promote in each heart among you, and each household, the vigorous growth of an active power of godliness, full of love to God and zeal for the gospel of his Son. Think how, instead of making this your rest, as if in getting up this whole provision of means you had accomplished the great end, you should now aim to make this the radiating centre of a wide activity in good works, branching out into all the spiritual wants of this great population, striving together to plant the faith of the Gospel in every destitute heart. Think how, since your work on this house is finished, and your time and care devoted to it are released, that unfinished work of the Gospel in all this land and the whole world claims now your labors and sacrifices--what demand it makes on your cares, and substance, and self-devotion. The Gospel, given for every creature, must go to every creature. And how, brethren, will these stately walls, with all their garniture, the record of your gifts and willingness, rebuke you, all the hours of your worship here, if your zeal and love, your readiness to give and work, to build up the kingdom of God in all the world, shall not bear some good proportion to what has given us this gratification to-day! I know well the history of this parish in its past years; how its example of giving and doing, arising out of an internal life in the Spirit, is known in all the churches. May its future be to the past as this house is to the former; as this congregation, in the abundance of its worldly means, to that of which your fathers and mothers were members; yea, as the extent of this great city to the "village" it was, and was named, when I came to it. In the words of the prayer of St. Paul for his beloved in Ephesus, I conclude this discourse. [30] "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. AMEN."


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