

No.

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"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD." COL. 3. 1.

"RELIGION OR CHRIST".

An Address (revised) at

At Walham Green,

4th Dec. 1911.

by

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An Address by Mr. P.W. Heward,
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Hebrews 9 read.

Our little Bible Reading this afternoon, dear friends, is on the subject of "Religion or Christ". The subtitle is, "The Preciousness of a personal Saviour". There is much religion at the pres-

ent time. We find religion in the very arrangements of the land. Public events have a thread of religion in them. The majority of the people profess to be Christians, profess to be religious. Do not misunderstand me; I believe, and we need to realize it very solemnly, I believe there is a growing not only of indifference, but of absolute atheism. Particularly we find it among young men, whether Jew or Gentile. So many there are who deny the Lord Himself, but for the most part among older ones there is an acknowledgment that there is a God and a profession of belonging to Him. Some few years ago we had occasion to send round to a large number of houses in Forest Gate, and in the enquiries which were to do with work among the children, the question was asked what they belonged to. I do not know that I should approve of the method now. The question was asked, and I believe I have the book still, and practically every house claimed to be religious and claimed to belong to some denomination. It was a very remarkable result, and I have thought of it since. How many there are who claim to belong to some religion and claim to be professing Christians. Yes, there is much religion. The buildings that we pass as we walk along the main road show that, though at the present time there are many grand buildings for commerce, the so-called churches and chapels are still among the grandest buildings, and a few years ago this was more noticeably the case, for it is only of late that so much money has spent on the exteriors of many ordinary buildings for ordinary commerce.

In many neighbourhoods, if one journeys out on a fine summer evening, one finds a goodly number of open-air meetings still. There is a vast amount of professing religion. Now the question comes to one's heart as one looks around upon all this, What is God's view of religion of a land like England? How would it appear to Him Whose eyes are as a flame of fire? What really is the nature of this religious-

ness that we see illustrated everywhere? Granted that it is less illustrated than in the past, there is sufficient of it remaining to make us ask our hearts, What does God think of this? and I am inclined to think that if with an open Bible we look into the religion of the present day, we shall of a necessity come to the conclusion that a vast amount of it is merely outward and not real. It is not for us to reform the world or decide for the world. We go preaching that God may call His dear people out of the world, but I am not prepared to say which must be the more hateful to God - open infidelity, or mere religious form without the life. Both must be abominable. I know that in some ways it is easier for us to go through this world as believers. There are a number of outward forms of religion around us. In other ways I believe it would be easier for us to live in a pronouncedly heathen country, where we should have to make manifest our distinctness and where we should expect opposition, trial and difficulty. But we cannot weigh up before God the respective value of mere formal religion and atheism. We know that they are both hateful, but I do want to make one point clear before going any further, and that is that though I am unable to weigh up these two, and though I believe that sometimes religion may be as abominable before God as atheism itself, though I am unwilling to say

all that, I feel that as a child of God I must be so careful how I attack the present-day religion, for if the result of my attacking it makes men throw off the veneer and declare their true character the more, the throwing off of the outward fear of God may be for all I know one of the most terrible leadings up to the climax of this wicked age. So do not think when I speak to you about the religion of to-day that I mean we are to go forth and preach against that religion and pull down religion with a kind of conceit. We must go forth to the unsaved and tell them their religion is in vain, and that they need Christ. But indiscriminate talk of mere religious forms is a most serious thing. I believe that ritualism is a most solemn and wicked thing before God, but yet when a man throws off ritualism he often becomes more careless as to the things of God. Hence I cannot attack ritualism as ritualism, for fear it only leads a man from one thing that is bad to one that is worse. Unable to distinguish between the different forms of iniquity and to weigh them up and to see which is the worst, feeling they are all sinful before Him Who delights in nothing but godly obedience in the Name of Christ, feeling that all are abominations before Him, I would realize, and I believe that God's dear people present would realize, that it is not for them to improve the world, or to deal with the world as the world, and the world's ceremonies and forms, but that it is theirs not to be merely controversial, but to emphasize and to illustrate the blessedness of a personal acquaintance with a personal Saviour.

A vast amount of the nominal Protestantism of to-day is merely seeking to get rid of Roman Catholicism and substituting in its place something which may be just as abominable before God. For a dead Protestantism is not better. Oh dear friends, if speaking sternly, and with the Word open, we must speak sternly against mere religion; let us be very careful to realize that it is not our part to make a general attack on the religiousness of to-day, but rather to show the individual unsaved ones that their best works, and their worst works are alike corrupt before Him Who seeth not as man seeth, and Who is of purer eyes than to behold evil.

It may be well in this connection to ask ourselves, What is religion? for we have been talking about a word without defining it. Perhaps this was necessary first, but it is well that we should grasp the term. The English word means by derivation a "binding back, and by usage a "holding in" to certain forms and ceremonies, and outward apparent respect for God. I cannot help thinking that the term "a binding back" is a most expressive one. For religion simply binds back but it leaves the inside untouched. Bind back a lion, and the lion still would like to bite and kill. Bind back the bear, and the bear would still like to give a deadly embrace. The heart is not changed by ropes. A chain does not improve the nature, and religion is only of the nature of a chain or a rope. It is a binding back; that is the use of the English word.

Of course, there is the term that God uses which is translated by the word "religion" (It is a different thought). Where we read in James that "Pure religion and undefiled is to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" - where we read of that, there is not simply the thought of a binding back, but there is in measure the thought of binding back there, but the religion THERE spoken of is not apart from an inward life but the expression of an inward life, and I believe that those of us who know something of the Lord, value religion in its right place. We realize we have to mortify our bodies and that we have to hold ourselves back. Is not a fruit of the Spirit self-control? and is not that the true religion, to keep ourselves unspotted from the world? It is the expression of an inward life, and that is the right place for religion, religion that springs from a living union with the Lord and that makes us guard and govern and keep back ourselves from sinning against Him, and makes us concerned to show the commandments and to keep ourselves in the Love of God. That religion that holds back the flesh, and keeps it under, and buffets the body, and brings it into subjection - that is the true religion, that is what God's dear people need to

keep before themselves as the manifestation that they are born from above. This idea is beautifully brought out not only in the verse I quoted, but in James 1.16 where it says, "If anyone seemeth to be religious and bridled his tongue but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." And you see the true religion is to bridle the tongue. It is the thought of holding it back. There was only One Who needed not to bridle His tongue, the Perfect One. We need to bridle our tongues and that is religion. A bridled tongue and a body kept unspotted from the world, never going into the ways of the world or using our hands for the work of worldliness, - that is true religion, because of an inward devotedness to the Lord.

Having noticed the form of the word and the expression that God uses, I should like to go back to the more general consideration of "Religion or Christ". Judaism was a religion. The sacrifices that they offered year by year continually could never make the comers thereunto perfect; they were ordinances of the flesh, and they sanctified to the purifying of the flesh. The law of Moses gave many hints of the coming Saviour, but the Levitical arrangements and the animal sacrifices could not touch the conscience. The best thing an animal could give was its skin, if I might so express it - a bodily righteousness. It died, and its blood was poured out, but it could not feel wrath; it could feel pain, but it could not feel wrath, therefore it could not take the punishment, nor could it give anything except a coat of skin which we have in Genesis 3. Well, that is simply a purifying and a providing for the flesh. They were fleshly ordinances.

We are told as to Moses and Aaron that the Levitical priesthood was according to the law of a fleshly commandment, it dealt with the flesh throughout, The law dealt with man in the flesh. There was no baptism on admission into Judaism, for that would have implied burying the flesh. Judaism rather suggested that man was to keep the law and thus to use the flesh and to train the flesh. Of course the law was good, that man might see his helplessness, but the law did deal with the flesh in a very distinct way. What the law could not do in that it was weak, IT WAS weak, that law itself, through the flesh, then you cannot view the law simply as the law, you must view it as the law joined with the flesh. It does not say what the law could not do in that the flesh was weak, but IT was weak through the flesh, that is to say the law plus the flesh was Judaism, the law commanding the flesh. Judaism dealt with the flesh. It was religion, "This do and thou shalt live"; "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not", and in the ten commandments the "Thou shalt not"s predominate. There is a stress on the NOT, NOT, NOT, NOT, Bind back the man, hold him from this evil or from that evil, keep him from it. It was a religion.

Christianity is more than a religion. Judaism came rightly and dispensationally to man, and wanted something from him, and then offered something to him. The man's work first, God's work next. Christianity is God's work first, and then man's work next. The Jewish Sabbath followed man's work. "Six days shalt THOU do thy work", then the Lord gave a day of rest, but in the present dispensation, the first day is the Lord's Day and the six working days come afterwards. The Lord's gift first, and then obedience, not to gain salvation, but as the expression of love unto Him Who loved us. This is not merely a religion; it is an inward work; it is a gift of grace. There is the making the root good first that the fruit may be good afterwards. John the Baptist came along with that baptism that buried people, and he said, "NOW the axe is laid at the root of the tree". Judaism dealt rather with the branches, but the forerunner of the Lord Jesus went deeper than the branches. He said the axe is laid at the root of the tree. There is a wonderful force in that word ALREADY or NOW the axe is laid to the root of the tree. It was not so in Judaism, but the axe was laid at the ROOT OF THE TREE in connection with the preparation for the ministry of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And so, dear friends, we have brought before us that Christianity is more than a religion. It is the work of God's grace in the heart. Judaism says, "This do and thou shalt live". Christianity says, "Live and thou shalt do this". For the Lord speaks unto us in our death, and makes us live, and then we are enabled by grace, and we delight by grace, to do that which is well-pleasing unto Him. Hence it is not ours to preach at the present time merely a religion, but to preach and rejoice in

a personal Christ. Forms and ceremonies belong to the Law of Moses. There were any number of carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of the reformation, but now that the time of the reformation has arrived, those who are the children of God by faith in Him realize that they have not merely an IT but a Person, not merely a something to obey but a SOMEONE to enable, not merely a striving after life but the gift of life, not merely the commandments and a work outside us, but "I will write My Law upon their hearts. I will give My Law upon their hearts, and write them upon their minds". The Lord has in mercy put something within. Yes, we have more than religion, we have Christ.

And now we do well to consider the personal application of this solemn thought that we have a personal Saviour, Who is so precious. Oh dear friends, can we say by grace that we have this personal Saviour? And that we realize His personal preciousness? Do we know what it is to realize that we have not merely come to a Jerusalem Temple, but "to Whom coming as unto a Living Stone", 1 Pet. 2.4. Our foundation is not material; our city is not earthly. Our Foundation is Christ, and our city is heavenly. Judaism, as we are told in John 10, was a fold having a door, and the Lord Jesus came up to that door, and the porter opened to Him, but He went into it and He led His sheep out. He led none into that fold. And then after that parable there is another distinct parable, and in the distinct parable there is no fold. It is wrongly rendered so, but it is THERE SHALL BE ONE FLOCK; and there is no door to which Christ comes, but He says in the second parable, I AM THE DOOR. Judaism was a fold with a door; Christianity is a flock with Christ as the Door, a Living Door, a Personal Door. We have a personal Saviour, and love to Him draws us back from things that are wrong. Love to Him directs us to do what is right. Fellowship with Him enables us to be well-pleasing unto Him. We have a personal Saviour Who died personally for us upon Calvary, if we are those who rejoice in Him. Oh, do we realize this, we have a Personal Saviour at the right hand of God now interceding for us, while we talk of Him? We have a personal Saviour Who by His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God's Son, is now working in our hearts. We have a personal Saviour for Whom we look, "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God". Everything is personal, and we realize that we have indeed been brought individually, and I trust we may be brought collectively, to the realization more of Himself being in the midst. This is no mere improvement, this is no mere reformation in the common acceptance of the word- it is an entire change, and it gives a new view of life.

We cannot think too much of having a personal Saviour. Do not misunderstand me; I should feel there was something wrong if you said, Oh I have got a personal Saviour, and so I do not need to keep myself unspotted from the world. A personal Saviour leads to this - pure religion; it is the same thought that is in John 15. The Lord says I do not call you servants, but I called you friends; but immediately after, He calls them servants. Do you see the thought? They were not servants first, but friends first, and servants next. Service comes of friendliness. It is the same idea elsewhere, where we read of the term servants and sons. "Thou art not a servant, but a son", but then the truest idea of servants is emphasized in the present dispensation. "Paul a bondservant" - is there a contradiction? By no means, for what is the truest service? Let an illustration be given. Paul says of Timothy "As a son with the father, so he laboured with me in the gospel". The best service is the service of sonship; and so in connection with our relationship to the Lord Jesus, we should have all the true religion, but it will be the true religion in the right place. It will not be, WE MUST DO THIS, and WE MUST DO THAT with merely a MUST, but we shall be ashamed of ourselves if we need a MUST. Love loves to do it without a MUST, and the Lord's hint is the Lord's "MUST" to affection. But we do not view it as a MUST. MUST is a hedge which I wish to break down, but love unto the Lord is a magnet which draws us toward it, and that is a big difference.

Oh that we, if we are indeed born again, might know more of a personal Christ, and fellowship with Himself, and if there be any who know not the Lord and know not His mercy, oh how we long that they might not trust to forms and ceremonies, to ideas, to works of the flesh, for the flesh profiteth nothing, and the best things the flesh can do are but as filthy rags before Him. He seeth the iniquity that is marked, "Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much

soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord". Man's best is but confusion before the Lord. How important that in this meeting and in all meetings we should emphasize that it is not by works or righteousness that we have been saved, nor by works of righteousness that any can be saved, but that it is by God's mercy and God's quickening, and God's bringing into a personal relationship with a personal Christ, that there might be a being placed within Him. For those that are chosen in Christ are brought to be in Christ when they are born of the Spirit.

May the Lord in mercy grant grace to emphasize more HIMSELF!

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