

NEXT STEPS



WEEK 5

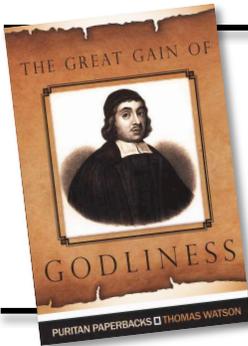
...keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good;
keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

— 2 TIMOTHY 4:5 (MSG)

Here are some more OPTIONAL assignments for this week. Remember, it is completely up to you whether you do them or not. Doing any of these NEXT STEPS will not make you holy or more godly. They're simply tools to use to draw you closer to God. If you find them helpful, great! If not, try something else. But whatever you do, take a NEXT STEP!

1. READ AND MEDITATE ON HEBREWS 12:1-7

Spend some time in this great passage this week. Just read it and think about what it is saying. Ask God to show you any NEXT STEPS it may hold for you to take.

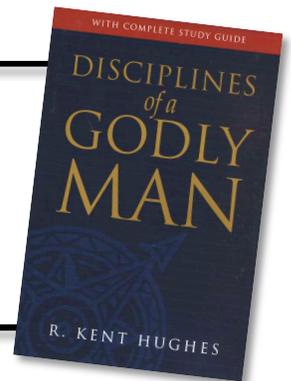


2. READ "THE GREAT GAIN OF GODLINESS"

Written by Puritan pastor and theologian, Thomas Watson, this book is Watson's exposition of Malachi 3:16-18. In it he'll defend the idea that there is great gain in godliness. Take your reading to a new level with this insightful and inspirational book by a man of God. You can pick up a copy in the church bookstore on Sunday.

3. READ "DISCIPLINES OF A GODLY MAN"

Our churches and homes need men willing to follow the path of godliness no matter what the cost. Using engaging illustrations, scriptural wisdom, and practical suggestions for daily life, Hughes offers frank biblical discussion on major areas of Christian manhood, including family, godliness, leadership, and ministry. Pick up a copy in the church bookstore on Sunday.



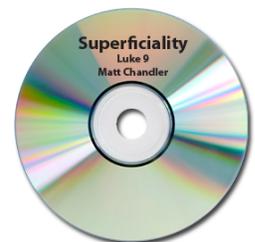
4. READ ONE OF THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES

Here are some more sermons and articles you can read at your leisure. Remember, this is NOT assigned reading. They are simply designed to spur you on your walk and to help you think biblically and spiritually. Don't read them alone, but find someone who might want to read and discuss them with you. Put down the newspaper, turn off the TV, and read.

- *Superficiality* by Matt Chandler (available this week as an audio CD)
- *The Form of Godliness Without the Power* by C. H. Spurgeon
- *Training In Godliness* by Walter H. Norvell

5. ANOTHER GREAT SERMON BY MATT CHANDLER

Many of you said you enjoyed the last sermon by Matt Chandler, so here is another one I think you'll find challenging and enjoyable at the same time. Mark unpacks Luke 9 and drives home the topic of superficial Christianity. Listen to it, then give it to a friend. When he's done, talk about how to apply what Matt has to say to your lives.



Superficiality

LUKE 9

Matt Chandler

If you have your Bibles, let's go to Matthew 13. We're eventually going to get over to Luke 3 but first I want us to look at Matthew 13 because it's going to set us up pretty well for what John the Baptist is talking about. And just to let you know out of the gate so you can be prepared for it, some of this is difficult stuff but it's stuff we've got to look at and pay attention to because ultimately our joy is on the line and what I know about you, even though I may not know you, is that you're serious about your joy.

Because everybody is. Now, if you study or read the gospels, in particularly the active ministry of Christ, one of the things that you're going to see, one of the things that's tremendously consistent in the ministry of Jesus is crowds. Wherever Jesus is, there are large crowds that gather. In fact, even size of some of the crowds is supernatural. I don't know how logistically it happened. Probably one of the more popular stories is where Jesus takes a little kid's lunch. He doesn't snatch it, He doesn't take it but it's evident that the crowd's hungry, the little kid has a couple of fish, a couple loaves of bread and He takes that and He feeds what the Scriptures is 5,000 men. So most historians would say if there's 5,000 men, then there are probably around 20,000 men, women and children that had gathered to listen to Him preach and teach. So without any kind of service location, without any billboard out front, without any e-mail, without any kind of thing like that, 20,000 people gathered to listen to Jesus teach.

And over and over and over again in the gospels, you're going to hear phrases like, "...and the whole city came out to hear Him...and the whole region came out to hear Him...and large crowds were gathering to hear Him." Wherever Jesus was, there was a massive crowd. On more than one occasion, that crowd became a mob. On more than one occasion, the crowd tried to overpower Him and force Him to be king. In fact, one of the examples of this would be where in the five days before Jesus was arrested, He comes into Jerusalem and the whole city comes out to meet Him and screams out "Hosanna, You're the king. Hosanna, You're the king" and they're throwing palm branches down in front of Him and the whole city is in love with this man. I mean, this is rock-star extraordinaire. He can't go anywhere where He's not being bothered by the paparazzi, He can't go out to eat. In fact on more than one occasion, the Scriptures say that He and the disciples were unable to eat. They couldn't even sit down and eat. On other occasions, the crowds got so big and so pressed into Him that they had to literally try to escape some way. This is a man who drew massive, massive, massive crowds. And of those crowds, on a whole there was a level of repentance and there was a confession of love for Christ. And we know at least in Jerusalem that the whole city comes out and says, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna. You're our king. We'll follow You. You're the one." There's this real apparent love for Jesus.

But here's where it gets a little peculiar. Despite the fact that tens of thousands of people somewhat repented and somewhat confessed love for Jesus, when all is said and done, there are 120 men and women in an upper room. So somehow tens of thousands of people disappear and only 120 are left. That's pretty peculiar, isn't it? In fact, it's always blown my mind that on Monday, the whole city comes out and says, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna..." and on very early Friday morning, that same crowd screams out "Crucify!" It's a really interesting animal. It's not surprising to Jesus. First, because He's God, but secondly, because He said it was coming. I mean, He said, "Hey listen. This is what the kingdom's going to be like when it hits." And so that's what I want to you what it's like. This is a very scary idea, but it's in there and I love you. So we've got to talk about it. Matthew 13, verse 1, "*That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him,...*" See? I'm not lying to you. I'm

not making that stuff up. "...great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down." So get the picture. He starts out teaching by sitting down on the beach, He's just kind of teaching, the crowd's growing pressed, He scoots back a bit and He's got two choices: walk on water or get back in the boat. He's like, "I'm going to save that walk on water thing for later," so He gets in the boat. *"And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.""* Nobody gets this story, not even His disciples. I mean literally, they all gather to hear Jesus and He's like, "Let's begin. There was a farmer who went out and just started throwing seed everywhere." Alright, that's not how you plant. "He threw his seed everywhere. Some got eaten by birds and some got choked by thorns. Amen. We're dismissed."

And so the disciples come up to Him right afterwards and they're like, "Uh, this ain't working. We don't even understand it. And if we don't understand it, who are your disciples, then the crowd doesn't either." So Jesus is going to come back and explain it. Pick it up in verse 18. *"Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path."* So here's what He says. There are going to be men and women who hear the gospel, who hear the word of the kingdom, who hear about the grace and mercy of Christ and they don't quite understand it. And instead of running down, instead of holding fast, instead of trying to get to the bottom of it, although it is intriguing although it does resonate with them, for whatever reason, they're just going to walk away from it. And that thing that was at one time was resonating with their soul and intriguing just disappears. Let's look at what happens next. *"As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away."* So this is a person, a man or a woman who hears the word of the kingdom of God, they hear the grace and mercy of Christ, they hear about the cross, they hear about these things and they buy it. I mean, they buy in and in an instant they're like, "I'm in. I'm completely in." And they start with a bang. Think Thursday night youth camp for you church folk. Think prolonged invitation. Think "Sing it again" until everybody is down front going, "I will never sin again" and then we dismiss and three or four weeks later, we're right back where we were. Okay, that's what happens, "Yes," boom, they're in, start out with a bang, in a few weeks it gets difficult and they're out. And then two more here.

"As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." Let me just be real honest about this type of person. All this type of person does is say "Yes, I'll follow Jesus, but it's on my terms. I'll follow Him, but here's what it looks like." And the funny thing is that Christ just doesn't really play that game, ever. There's pictures of how asinine this is everywhere. Like my two year old doesn't set the rules in our house. He doesn't get to tell me how things are. And in the same way, us saying to God, "I'll take your salvation, but here's what it looks like. You can have this area and this area and this area, but this, this is mine and I'm going to run it my way, this is mine and I'm going to run it my way and this is mine and I'm going to run it my way." And basically, Jesus says that the word's going to get choked out altogether. Then there's one more type here. Verse 23, *"As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another*

sixty, and in another thirty.” The reason this text is difficult is because what I want to do is go, “I’ll take D, please.” I mean, I want the good soil, I want my life to be on the good soil and right now all I’ve got is today to be faithful. And I know some of you are like, “What? Are you saying that my pastor doesn’t have assurance?” No, I have absolute assurance right now, but let me promise you this. If a year from now I want nothing to do with Jesus, if a year from now I say everything I said and taught out of the word was a lie, then know this: I never really had Him to begin with, it was all about my pride, it was all about me and I never really had Jesus. Alright, so that makes me a little nervous. What if I’ve got no root?

And Luke 3 is going to make this whole idea worse. Because of the tough nature of some of this, I want us to start in verse 18 and then we’ll come back and pick it up in verse 3. “*So with many other exhortations [John the Baptist] preached good news to the people.*” Now, John the Baptist is going to say some very difficult things, and he’s not seeker-sensitive. In no way is he going, “What if I offend people?” In fact, his intro is, “You brood of vipers...” So he’s going to say some difficult things. What I want to do is, after we wade through what is very difficult things, I want to come back and tell you why it’s such good news, why those difficult things are such good news. Let’s pick it up in verse 3 now. “*And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism...*” Now, we’re in sort of a quandary already because he’s at the Jordan, preaching to the Jews but he’s preaching that they need to be baptized but Jews didn’t get baptized, only gentiles who wanted to become Jews did. So John the Baptist is attacking, right out of the gate, their Judaism, which isn’t safe in the 1st century at the Jordan. “*...proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'*” That’s John’s job. Jesus is going to come behind him, bringing with Him the kingdom and the gospel and here’s what He’s going to do. “*Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*” So let me chat about this because it makes it sound like Jesus is going to make the whole world flat. But who wants a flat world? I don’t. I like the mountains, I like the valleys. So let me try to explain and break down the code here. What’s going to happen in Christ, what’s going to happen in the cross, what’s going to happen in the coming in force of the Holy Spirit is that the valleys or the low places are going to be lifted. So the base parts of the human soul, the wicked areas, the dark places, through Christ, are going to be brought up and healed. That’s the good news. The high places, those are going to be brought low. Self-exaltation, self-pride, self-will, it’s going to be absolutely blown to kingdom come. Because the coming of the gospel is this, “Throw yourselves on the free mercy of God. You cannot be saved by good work.” So that blows up self-exaltation, doesn’t it? Specifically for the 1st century Jew whose whole mindset is that “God loves me because of my heritage, my Jewishness and because I obey the law.” So the coming of the gospel’s going to blow up the high places. Self-exaltation, self-worth, it’s going to blow it up because it’s going to force you to throw yourself completely on the mercies of God.

He’s going to straighten out what is crooked. This is what you’ve always heard about the gospel. He’s going to take those sinful areas of our heart, lust, rage, manipulation, lying... I think one of the weird parts of humanity is that we have these really crooked things about us that we don’t even know. Like, have you ever lied when you didn’t need to lie and you don’t even know why you were lying? Have you ever made more out of yourself, maybe exaggerated a little bit? I mean, how weird is that? Like to lie to protect yourself is one thing. I’m not saying it’s right, I’m just saying it’s understandable. But just to lie and not even know why you’re lying when there’s no reason, that’s a really strange part of the human soul. So one of the things Jesus is going to do is correct all the crooked ways in us. A the manipulation, all the lying, all of that, He’s going to correct. And the last thing it says He’s going to do is He’s going to make smooth the rough

places. And I think this has to do with more than just any obstacle that stands in the way of us seeing salvation. It's my belief that the majority of us lack depth in Christ not because of bad/wicked things but rather morally neutral things. And what I mean by that is things that the Scriptures wouldn't outright call sinful but we just have so much of them in our lives that we drown out the voice of God, drown out time to be with Him. So we just busy ourselves with morally neutral things, and then we think we're doing alright because we're not doing bad. And so Jesus is going to remove those things. And for those of you who have chased hard after Christ, it's an odd thing to have Christ engage you and say, "I want to remove this from your life" when there's nothing evil about it. He just wants it out. And the last thing is says is with the coming of Jesus, we're

going to see salvation. Now this has been a pretty big deal to the Jews because the whole Old Testament points outside of itself of a coming salvation. So he's saying here, "Jesus is coming." So, you can see why large crowds are going to follow Jesus. I mean, if this is the promise, then I want those things. I want Christ to fill the base things in me. I mean, Chandlers for the last 150 years have been pretty wicked dudes. One of them got hung for robbing trains and it just gets worse after that. I want the base things out of me. I want the crooked paths made straight. I don't want to be a liar and a manipulator. I want obstacles removed so I can see salvation. I want those things.

So the question then is: How do we get them? And John's going to say how you don't get them. And then by default, we'll know how you do get them. And then we'll get into what I think is the difficult part. Here's John's sermon now. I like his introduction "*He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*" Now, calling a Jew in the 1st century a brood of vipers, I don't know that we have an equivalent. The Jews completely embraced the creation story that you've heard about Eve being deceived by the serpent and therefore every difficulty, every hardship and every bit of wickedness in the world is due to the serpent's deceit of Eve. And so he just called them sons of the devil. Who did he call sons of the devil? God's chosen people who obey God's law. They thought everyone else in the world was issue and they were the light. In fact, Abraham is told in Genesis 12 that the Jews were going to be the light by which the rest of the world came to know God. And so John the Baptist shows up and his intro to this very proud, very religious, very moral people was, "How are you doing, sons of the devil?" I mean, it's a pretty gutsy intro there. Look at what he says next. "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"*" That's a rhetorical question. Let me tell you what he's saying there. He's saying, "You're out here listening to me because God is warning you. Think about it. These men and women, very proud, very religious, very moral have come out to the Jordan to listen to a man dressed in animal skin eating bugs calling them children of the devil. There's got to be something supernatural in even that draw. And he's saying, "Who warned you of the impending wrath?" He's saying, "You came out here because God has started stirring in your soul that something is coming.

And they had always believed in the divine blessing, that with the coming of the Messiah there was going to be blessing and there was going to be wrath. And so John the Baptist is saying, "Which one do you want?" Well, if you've ever had that choice, blessing or wrath, most people don't go, "I'll take the wrath please. Thank you. How is that packaged?." So listen to what he says. Verse 8, "*Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.*" Now, this next line is going to start letting us know what he's saying here. "*And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*" It seems that the Jews here felt like they had God a little bit boxed in. And here's why. God had promised them, and He's going to keep His word,

that He is going to use them to change the world, to be the gate through which salvation flows. And so they knew that God couldn't wipe them all out. Because if God wiped them all out, then that wouldn't occur and God's promise would be broken and God can't break His promises. So what they did was this kind of "Judaism just good enough." And so they went, "Hey, I'm a Jew by heritage so God isn't going to be able to destroy me. And what I'm going to do is do just enough law to be accepted by God." And so, they went to the temple, they would have gone to the synagogue on Saturday, they would have been externally good, they obeyed the external laws in order to look clean against the backdrop of a pagan world. But we're going to find out when Christ comes that their hearts, despite this fact, are nowhere near God. John the Baptist shows up and says, "Your heritage and your morality are inadequate for salvation. Your repentance has been a false repentance."

Your love for God is a shallow love, therefore inadequate. And the axe is at the tree, and He'll chop you down and burn you. And if you think that He can't do this because of His Abrahamic promise, He'll make that rock Abraham's children. You don't get to pigeon-hole God." See what I mean by not seeker-sensitive? I mean he's not walking out to a bunch of people who are stoned, drunk out of their minds with Metallica t-shirts on. That's not what he just walked into. Not that there's anything wrong with Metallica; that black album's awesome. Now, he's walking up to very devout, very religious men and women who morally went well beyond anything in the ancient world. And John the Baptist is tearing into them saying, "You think that your heritage, who your parents were, you think that your behavior, what you've morally accomplished by strength of will is going to be enough to save you, but I'm telling you God's wrath is coming for such things." He's saying that there's a true repentance and then there's a false repentance, and the false repentance is inadequate. And so the crowd, rightfully so, is absolutely freaked out by this. But it resonates with them. It resonates because they start going, "What do we do then?" I mean, they run into the water and say, "Baptize me. I know Jews aren't supposed to get baptized. I'll get baptized. What do we do?" Now if you're a thinker, here's where the text gets really, really interesting because here's what John the Baptist just said. John the Baptist just said that your works, your acts of service, your acts or morality, your list of things that you have morally done and not done, they're not going to be enough to save you. And then they ask him, "What shall we do then?" And then he gives them a list of things to obey. Does that sound a little loopy to anybody? "Look, a list of things isn't going to save you." "What will?" "Here's your list." I mean, it's a really interesting animal here, but there's something here.

And here's what it is. Over and over and over again in the New Testament there's two ideas that I'm going to put together for you of 1) bearing fruit and 2) self-examination. The Scriptures are going to say over and over and over again, especially Paul. Paul says that no man shall neglect the painful work of self-examination. In the book of Hebrews, I think that was written by Paul, some theologians say Luke, whoever it is, he says that we should all be nervous if we haven't entered into the Lord's rest. Be afraid if you have not entered into the Lord's rest. So this idea of bearing fruit and this idea of self-examination that leads me to this end. It seems then that what John is about to teach is an objective evidence of genuine repentance. So what he's about to say to these men and women, "Do this...do this...do this..." is not done for approval but rather is a result of throwing themselves on the free mercy of God. So let's read this and then I'll tell you why it's good news. Look at verse 10, "*And the crowds asked him, 'What then shall we do?' And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.'*" So for the man or woman who has thrown themselves completely on the free mercy and grace of God, one of the transformations that occurs when we do that is we begin to see all that we have and all that we own and that we've been given in a very different light. Here's what this is saying. The man or woman who has completely thrown themselves on the grace and mercy of Christ is not someone who sees someone who is freezing

to death and praises God that they have six jackets. They are not men and women who see the starving in the world and praise God that they have storehouses of food in their pantry. Now I'm not saying that there's not an overt, unbelievable gratitude for the gifts of Christ, but rather it becomes impossible when you throw yourselves on the free mercies of God to then look at the poor and the wounded and the starving and the cold and the hurting and go, "Praise God I'm not like them. Hasn't God been good to me that I'm not there." But instead that you give away your coat. You eat and you give away your food. Whether or not we have genuinely repented and thrown ourselves on the full mercy of God or whether we have a false, inadequate love for God is revealed here. How do you view your things?

How do you view your stuff? How do you view your money? How do you view your food? So we can play the game. I mean, this is church, we can play it. We can learn the language, we can learn when to raise our hands and when not to, we can journal, we can read a bunch of Christian books. Or we can by them, read the first chapter and then put them away. But we can do that and play the game or we can lay this on our lives and over our lives and go, "Have I thrown myself on the mercies of God?" Because one of the products of genuine repentance is giving away tunics and food. The funny thing is, through all of this, you're going to see him attack two things: possessions and sex. Because those two things are really base instincts that are problematic for our holiness.

So let's look at this next one. *"Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than you are authorized to do.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.'"* Another result, another objective evidence, another fruit of genuine repentance is that we don't use our power, we don't use our influence and we don't use our position to extort and to take, but rather to give. It's an interesting animal that he tells the common man "give" and he tells those who have positions and jobs that were historically wicked to "quit taking." He tells the one to give and the other to quit taking. So that's all there is in this text as far as objective evidences of genuine repentance goes, but there are many more in the New Testament. And John the Baptist also starts attacking Herod because Herod married his brother's wife, he was really a sexual deviant. Let me tell you the level of sexual deviancy he gets to. His wife who is his brother's wife, her little daughter came in and did a little belly dance for him on his birthday, which would be a little awkward wouldn't it? And then he gets so enthralled that he's like, "I will give you anything you want, girl." What does she want? John the Baptist's head on a platter. But come on, a sane man wouldn't cut off a man's head just because a half-naked chick asked him. But he cut off his head, put it on a platter and brought it to her. But here's the thing about sexuality, sexual deviance in particular. It will always take you deeper than you ever fathomed it would go. And some of you know exactly what I'm talking about because pornography in this venue stopped being enough and so it carried on to this venue and that stopped being enough, and I'm telling you, it's going to end very, very dark. And I'm not saying you're going to cut off somebody's head but I am saying, it's going to end very, very dark. Which is why the Scriptures have so much to say concerning sex.

So why is this good news? Because if you think you're having a hard time hearing it, I had to study it for three weeks. To lay these objective evidences on our lives and go, "Have I genuinely repented or am I just playing a game for the Lord? Do I just kind of give Him lip service or do I really love the Lord? There are two reasons why the commands of God in Scripture are such good news. Let me tell you what the two of them are. These things enable us to see whether or not we're born of God. They enable us to see whether or not we really have thrown ourselves on the free mercy and grace of God. And here's why that's such good news. Let's say we lay that on our lives this morning. Let's say we lay that on our lives and go, "No, I

don't do that, I don't see that way, I don't live that way,” and it becomes apparent to us through self-examination that we haven't thrown ourselves on the free grace and mercy of God. Well then here's the good news in that. Now you know and you don't have to be confused by the churchism that gets thrown into the mix. And now we can throw ourselves on the free grace and mercy of God and ask for forgiveness and ask for help. It's why it's such good news. And here is the second reason why it's such good news. I've been fervent about this since I got here. Christianity, when I first started looking into it, it just sounded so threatening. Like “Do this or...” I mean, it's kind of a weird thing to be nine, ten years old and have your parents and other adults say things like, “Mommy and Daddy are going to be in heaven. Do you want to be in heaven with Mommy and Daddy? Or there's hell. What do you want?” “Heaven please.” “Here's how you do that. Repeat after me...” Like, so much of it seemed threatening. “Do this or... Do this or... God doesn't like this. God doesn't like that.” It just seemed like God was really angry, and not only angry but pretty much against anything that I thought was funny. Some of that's still true. But it wasn't until college...I went to a college that theologically leans toward the left. And I was grateful for that because it made me study. I think if I went to a place where I just agreed, I'd be like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah,...” But because I was, “Wait a minute. That can't be right,” I started studying. Here's one of the things I found just so saturated in Scripture that I couldn't believe I never heard before. The commands of God are about joy.

God is not glorified in begrudging submission to rules, but rather by my joy in submitting to Him. And the illustration that I always use that illustrates this perfectly is marriage. Like, if you came to me and said, “Matt, how's your marriage to Lauren?” and I went, “Well, I gave my word, so I'm in. To be honest with you, I think that woman is horrible and she sucks the life out of me. But I made a promise.

I made a promise to stay faithful and I'm a man of my word. So for the rest of my long, long life...” Is anyone going, “Oh, I want some of that. I want that for me. When I was a little girl/boy, I dreamed of just that, a commitment that was so strong that it can endure the most horrific of circumstances.” But I'm telling you, that's what people have done with Christianity. That's the package. But in the Scriptures, Christ is going, “No, I'm not glorified by your begrudging submission. I'm glorified by your joy. And so, I'm trying to lead you to joy.” And so the commands of God about wealth and stuff is not about God or the church trying to control your wealth or get your money, it's about your joy.

Because God's most glorified in your enjoyment of Him. So listen, God's not sexually repressed. For the record, it was His idea. “Be fruitful and multiply.” You know how that happens, right? Try to find anything more erotic than Song of Solomon, chapters 3 and 4. God's after your joy. So this is why there should be a ferocity towards obedience. So here's what we've got to do this morning. I mean, you've got to do it. You can avoid it, but by avoiding it, you still play a part in the story. Because here's the truth: every one of us is in this story. And you've got a role to play here. You've got a part in the story, whether you like it or not. Rail against it all you want, but you've got a part in the story. And even if you're like, “Aw, forget it.” All you've just proved is that you're the first type where the seed just went on the path. So how do we find out what part we are in the story? Well, it's self-examination, how you view your stuff, how you live your life, how you view your job, how you view your neighbor, how you spend your money. All of

this has to be put over your life and you have to look at it because there are very deep, very eternal things at stake. And I know this is difficult and I know nobody wants to call you a sinner. Because God knows you can't grow a church and be validated as a preacher in the Post-Modern world calling people sinners. But it's what we are. We're broken. And everybody knows it, they're just trying to use colorful language to describe it in new ways. Alright, so you've got to do it. That's the most frustrating part of my job. I can't do it for you. I can just examine my own

life, I can just lay the Scriptures on my own heart, I can examine and go, "Is there fruit? Am I bearing fruit? Is there change? Can I see a growth in love, joy, peace, patience? Are the valleys coming up? Are the hills going down?" And where I've failed at those things, I run to the mercy of Christ, I beg for forgiveness, I ask the Holy Spirit for help and I get back up and go. So do you pass? That's what I'm asking. Do you pass? Will you pass the painful work of self-examination? Because John's message is "Repent, for the axe is laid against the tree." Turn, cling, lay yourself at the Lord's feet. Ask for mercy, ask for help, ask for forgiveness. There's movement when you throw yourself on the free mercy of God.

Let's pray. I want to be real clear about what we're talking about and what we're not talking about. I think the majority of preachers and teachers are introverts and cognitive. So I think what happens sometimes is we make Christianity about reading books and journaling and thinking. And I definitely think that's the path the Lord put some of us on, but some of us are not going to be big readers and we might never own a journal. And I think the Lord loves you too. Here's where it lands. Are we relying on heritage and good work for salvation or have we thrown ourselves on the free mercy and grace of Christ? If the answer is, "Man, I don't know," then there are objective evidences that help answer the

question. And the good news is that if we'll do the painful work of examining our hearts, examining our lives, then we'll be able to see whether or not we do need to throw ourselves on that grace and mercy or whether we have. And listen, the valleys get filled up slowly and the mountains get whittled down over time. And it teaks the breadth of our lives for the crooked paths to be straightened out and those rough places to be made smooth. I think this is why we continue to work our our salvation with fear and trembling, why we continue to throw ourselves on the free grace and mercy of Christ. But for those who have genuinely repented and come to know Him, there's going to be growth, there's going to be progressive sanctification, there's going to be a loosening of the hands on the things of this world, there's going to be those things. And I don't think you can do it in a few minutes. I think it's going to take some time, a few days, maybe some weeks. "Jesus, I thank You for these men and women and I thank You for a chance to come and read what's a really difficult word and a hard word and not one that's making us leave here felling chipper. At least I hope not because there's a graveness to this and a seriousness to this. My prayer is for clarity, clarity of thought, clarity of belief, clarity of position. And my prayer is for joy, freedom and joy. Help. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

Training in Godliness

By Walter H. Norvell/Published Date: September 21, 2009
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Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. – 1 Timothy 4:7-10 ESV

Training the Body

Increasingly, the world is devoted to health care and physical fitness. The current debate over the best way to reform the nation's health care system swirls in the midst of an atmosphere thick with ads for organic foods, low-fat/high-fiber diets, weight loss programs, home gym equipment, workout garb, and health club memberships. People want to be fit in their bodies, and that's, of course, a very good thing. But it's not the most important fitness we should be seeking.

I am the original couch potato. When I used to get the urge to exercise I would lay down until the urge went away. That was true of me until the doctor told me I had Type 2 diabetes. I started training in hopes that I could control my diabetes with exercise and diet. I started walking, serious walking. Soon I was walking over twenty miles a week. I set goals like walking from home to the next town 11.7 miles away. Then the doctor said to try jogging. So I began to walk and jog my daily four miles. Soon I could jog the entire distance. Then the doctor said to try weightlifting. My thought was "When is enough enough?" but I started learning how to lift. Happily, this has all done some good. I'm lighter and my blood sugar tests are well within safe limits. No pills, yet. So I train my body for a better quality of life.

Training in Godliness Has Lasting Value

Paul encouraged Timothy to train in godliness. While I train to reach new levels of health in my body, training in godliness is of far greater value. Life here is short, maybe eighty years; but life in eternity is forever. Dealing with diabetes and its related ailments is worth the trouble, and keeping fit and healthy is but a question of good stewardship; but we must never lose sight of our destiny. Our destiny is eternity. Godliness fits us for eternity.

A runner trains hard so muscles and lungs and heart are suited for a marathon which lasts a few hours. But godliness prepares mind, body, soul, and heart for eternity. Why shouldn't we be training for our future and permanent life? As Paul wrote these words to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, he set the words in the midst of a number of issues which show the need for training in godliness. In Paul's instructions we can find practical ways to train in godliness.

Training in Godliness Helps Us Avoid Myths

Paul warned that some would depart from the faith with deceitful lies and myths (1 Tim. 4:1-3). They would use those lies to place unscriptural requirements on others. Timothy and those he taught were to avoid such lies by knowing the truth of the faith. Only truth would guide them in personal behavior and personal relationships. Spiritual fitness is related to *training in good doctrine*. Those with the spiritual responsibility of teaching must be sure that their preparation and teaching align with the faith in every way. All believers must place themselves in learning situations so their understanding of the faith increases. How are you growing in your ability to understand and apply God's truth?

Training in Godliness is Not All about the Life Hereafter

Training in godliness is more than pie-in-the-sky promises. Training in godliness has much earthly good as well as preparation for eternity. The present effect of godly training is changed lives and kingdom work. In fact, it is so beneficial that training in godliness is worth toiling and striving for it. Paul's goal was godliness in those he taught. Paul encouraged Timothy to use his spiritual gifts, to give attention to the public reading of God's Word, to encouraging others, and to teaching (1 Tim.4:16). Paul's advice to Timothy was that Timothy "immerse" himself in these things. Timothy wasn't to simply dabble in spiritual things or attend them when he had the time; *he was to "persist" in such efforts*. Others were to see his progress as he guarded himself, to be sure he was growing in godliness.

God accomplishes training in our lives which fits us both for heaven and for our service until we get there. How is the goal of godliness being achieved in your life? Are you increasing in holiness?

We Train Because We Have Hope

Our motivation for training in godliness is the hope we have in God. Our God is a living God who relates to us personally, meeting our needs for salvation and for living every day. This hope is not just for us, but for all who will believe. We seek to grow strong in our spiritual lives and to build the kingdom of God in response to this hope.

William D. Longstaff penned the words of the hymn *Take Time to Be Holy* in 1882¹. Convicted by a sermon to grow in holiness, Longstaff came to Christ and challenged other believers to grow, always with an eye toward heaven. Meditate on Paul's words as you reflect on this encouraging old hymn. What suggestions do you find for growing in godliness?

Take Time to Be Holy

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.

By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

Longstaff's lyrics remind us of many disciplines and other godly practices that train us in godliness: prayer, abiding in Christ, study of the Word, fellowship with the saints, ministry and benevolence, seeking God, solitude, witness, faithful obedience, trust, meditating, self-control, spiritual direction, and love. The last line reminds us of the eternal purpose in such training—serving God eternally.

Training in godliness is our task and privilege as we experience life in the kingdom of God. As we train in godliness, we cooperate with God in kingdom service. We experience His presence now as we prepare to be in His presence in eternity.

¹ <http://www.gaffneyledger.com/news/2008/0620/columns/046.html>.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

THE FORM OF GODLINESS WITHOUT THE POWER
DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, JUNE 2, 1889,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”
2 Timothy 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.”

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 catalog, 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-colored glasses—he is no smooth-tongued Prophet of a golden age into which this dull earth may be imagined to be glowing. There are sanguine Brothers and Sisters 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. 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 13 that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” There will spring up in the Christian Church and round about it, a body of faithless men who profess to have faith—ungodly 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 today, 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!

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.” So that if there is in any the body of religion without the *life* of religion, it leads to decay and thus to corruption—and that has a tendency to decompose the 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 Divine Grace to turn away! May none of us ever be spots in our feasts of love, or clouds without water carried about of winds. 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 discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. First, I shall speak of the men, and secondly, of their folly. And when I am done with that, I shall have some words of instruction to give by way of conclusion.

I. 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 a 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 Lord’s Supper will secure this. Where there is not the life of God in the soul, neither holiness or godliness follow 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!

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 there with Mr. Great-Heart and Father Honest and Christiana and the children.

Christ's people are called sheep for one reason—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 of the Holy Spirit.

Some go further than public worship. 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 spoke often one to another.”

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. Tongue godliness is an abomination if the heart is destitute of Divine 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—to sit at the Master's feet and learn as Mary did.

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, we shall be as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. 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 needed. I speak to each one of you. And if I singled out anyone 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 thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” 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-incriminated 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, 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. Your prayer will always be, “Search me, O God and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

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 mold. 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. 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 God's 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." Not generation but REGENERATION, makes the Christian. You are not Christians because you can trace a line of fleshly descent throughout twenty generations of children of God.

You must, yourselves, be born again. For except a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 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.

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 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 anyone 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.

I have seen the form of godliness taken up on account of friendships. Many a time courtship and marriage have led to a formal religiousness, but a 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 a great searching of heart among us all and that we may candidly consider how we have come by our form of godliness. 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. 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, or 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.” Only “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” “You must be born again.” Beware of everything which springs up in the field without the sowing of the husbandman, 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!

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. 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. Today 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 necklace. 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. 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. 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 money 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.

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. 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.

Of all people these are the hardest to reach and the least likely to be saved. They hide behind the earthworks of a nominal religion. They are out of reach of the shot and shell of Gospel rebukes. They 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 were 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 near 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 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 forever.

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 they who are without this are dead while they live. What is the general history of those who have not this power? 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.

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." 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 the Truth of God 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 either.

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 more—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.

II. 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.

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 is 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. Brothers and Sisters, 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 worth 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 jeweler 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.

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 anyone 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. 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 of him. He follows after Christ with love, out of his heart’s desire after Him and not from the force of fashion, or the power of fear.

To have the form of godliness without the power of it is to lack constancy in your religion. You never saw a mirage, perhaps. But those who have travel in the East, when they come home, are sure to tell you about them. 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 a 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. And so 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.

Be careful, poor Child—you may blow your bubble and the sunlight may paint it with rainbows. But in an instant it is gone and not a trace of it remains. Your transient globe of beauty is for you and your 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 of God 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 heart. 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 you forever.” 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! O, beware of 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. 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 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 gladly 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 Divine Grace. If He leads you to seek after holiness. If He 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 having. The “form” of godliness is not all—there is a blessed “power.” The Holy Spirit is that power and He can work in you to will and to do of God’s good pleasure. Come 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 You 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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