

BIBLE ECHO

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by A.T. Jones

Even this side of the cross of Christ, which itself should be the everlasting destruction of it, the same dead formalism, an empty profession, has exalted itself, and has been the bane of the profession of Christianity everywhere. Very soon, unconverted men crept into the church and exalted themselves in the place of Christ. Not finding the living presence of Christ in the heart by living faith, they have ever since sought to have the forms of Christianity supply the lack of His presence, which alone can give meaning and life to these forms.

In this system of perverseness, regeneration is through the form of baptism and even this by a mere sprinkling of a few drops of water. The real presence of Christ is in the form of the Lord's supper. The hope of salvation is in being connected with a form of the church. And so on throughout the whole list of the forms of Christianity, they have heaped upon this, ten thousand inventions of their own in penances, pilgrimages, traditions and hair-splitting distinctions.

And as of old and always with mere formalists, the life is simply and continually the manifestation of the works of the flesh--strife and contention, hypocrisy and iniquity, persecution, spying, treachery, and every evil work. This is the Papacy.

This evil spirit of a dead formalism, however, has spread itself far beyond the bounds of the organized Papacy. It is the bane of the profession of Christianity everywhere today, and even the profession of the Christianity of the third angel's message has not entirely escaped it. It is to be the worldwide prevailing evil of the last days up to the very coming of the Lord in glory in the clouds of heaven.

For "this know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

This all-prevailing form of godliness without the power, and which even denies the power, is the dead formalism against which we are to fight the good fight of living faith. The living faith which is brought to the world in the third angel's message is to save us from being swallowed up in this worldwide sea of dead formalism.

How is it with you individually today? Is yours a dead formalism or a living faith? Have you the form of godliness without the power? Or have you by living faith the living presence and power of the living Saviour in the heart, giving divine meaning, life

and joy to all the forms of worship and of service which Christ has appointed and working the works of God and manifesting the fruits of the Spirit in all the life?

Except as the means of finding Christ the living Saviour in the word and the living faith of Him, even this word itself can be turned to a dead formalism now as it was of old when He was on the earth. He said to them then (Revised Version), "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me. And ye will not come to me that ye may have life." (John 5:39,40)

They thought to find eternal life in the Scriptures without Christ; that is, by doing them themselves. But "this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son"--as we find Him in the Scriptures and not in the words of the Scriptures without Him. For they are they that testify of Him. This is their object. Therefore, "he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." (1 John 5:11,12)

"True godliness elevates the thoughts and actions; then the external forms of religion accord with the Christian's internal purity; then those ceremonies required in the service of God are not meaningless rites, like those of the hypocritical Pharisees."--Spirit of Prophecy, vol. ii., p. 219.