

20th CENTURY
New Testament Christianity in the Present Age
CHRISTIAN

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March 7, 1972

Mr. Albert Lemmons
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1701 Oakhurst Scenic Drive
Fort Worth, Texas

Dear Albert:

We need your article on "Formalism" for our special issue on
Sins that Go to Church. Can you get it to us right away?

Thanks for your help.

Cordially,

Norvel

Norvel

*Mail -
2/13/72*

(SINS THAT GO TO CHURCH)
FORMALISM
SUBSTITUTING AN HOUR OF WORSHIP FOR
A WEEK OF RIGHTEOUS LIVING

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Introduction

1. Isaiah 1:10-20 "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with it; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: ye, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

2. Hosea 6:6 "I desire mercy rather than sacrifice, and a knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

DISCUSSION

I. FORMALITY IN RELIGION

There is a tendency on the part of people in general from which we are not exempt in the church that when we have performed a regular external rite that this is all God requires and man is obligated to give. Too long men have been allowed to believe that their duty toward God was sufficiently discharged when they had performed certain rituals. One of the serious consequences of this misinformation is that moral obligations are often disregarded. At least there are many moral deficiencies in a religion of this kind. The Jews in the days of Isaiah were rebuked for providing a formal routine of festival keeping and sacrifice in which days were properly observed, and were deluded therefore by the subtlety of sin that by such actions they received the favor of God. This strange delusion was deeply rooted in Israel's heart for most of the great prophets spoke to the subject of providing sacrifices and rivers of oil to the altar of God and then completely disregard Jehovah in their conduct.

Many critics of Christianity have pointed out that the majority of "practicing Christians" think of their religion in greater part from the standpoint of conduct. This means following an order of worship but not becoming spiritually involved in the channels which that worship provides.

II. OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE

The reality of the religion of Jesus in the first century was such that no one suspected them of believing one thing and practicing something else. The discrepancies which our contemporary world have in regard to the reli-

gion of Jesus lie in the fact that many say and do not. It is one thing to believe a message and another thing to change the thought and life patterns of people to that belief. Religion is not something you do, it is what you are, therefore, it is not an objective device engaged in one or two hours a week and then left for another way of life but rather is a subjective disposition, mood, or regard that includes all of ones actions, the totality of ones thinking.

Conclusion

1. The reason God is a jealous God is because he knows what is in the interest of humanity.
2. God knows that man becomes like the God he serves and therefore if our worship is not live and vibrant, a spiritual tie, a meaningful bond, then one becomes cold, indifferent, and hardened in his own selfish ways.
3. God's moral law does not change. It is written upon the tablet of eternity -- justice and truth endure and will live forever.
4. The great prophet Isaiah was assuring all men that retribution for sin will be laid upon the sinner. Forgiveness will not come to one who engages his mouth and prostrates his person but who does not involve his heart and soul in becoming more like the God he serves.