

Formality

By J.C. Ryle

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”—2 Timothy 3:5.

“He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God”—Romans 2:28-29.

The texts which head this page deserve serious attention at any time. But they deserve especial notice in this age of the church and world. Never since the Lord Jesus Christ left the earth was there so much formality and false profession as there is in the present day. Now, if ever, we ought to examine ourselves, and search our religion, that we may know of what sort it is. Let us try to find out whether our Christianity is a thing of form or a thing of heart.

I know no better way of unfolding the subject than by turning to a plain passage of the Word of God. Let us hear what St. Paul says about it. He lays down the following great principles in his epistle to the Romans: “He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:28-29). Three most instructive lessons appear to me to stand out on the face of that passage. Let us see what they are.

1. We learn first, that formal religion is not religion, and a formal Christian is not a Christian in God’s sight.

2. We learn secondly, that the heart is the seat of true religion and that the true Christian is the Christian in heart.

3. We learn thirdly, that true religion must never expect to be popular. It will not have the “praise of man, but of God.” Let us thoroughly consider these great principles. Two hundred years have passed away since a mighty Puritan divine said, “Formality, formality, formality is the great sin of England at this day, under which the land groans. There is more light than there was, but less life; more shadow, but less substance; more profession, but less sanctification” (Thomas Hall, on 2 Tim. 3:5, 1658.) What would this good man have said if he had lived in our times?

1. We learn first, that *formal religion is not religion, and a formal Christian is not a Christian in God’s sight.*

What do I mean when I speak of formal religion? This is a point that must be made clear. Thousands, I suspect, know nothing about it. Without a distinct understanding of this point my whole address will be useless. My first step shall be to paint, describe, and define.

When a man is a Christian in name only, and not in reality—in outward things only, and not in his inward feelings; in profession only, and not in practice; when his Christianity in short is a mere matter of form or fashion or custom, without any influence on his heart or life—in such a case as this the man has what I call a “formal religion.” He possesses indeed the form or husk or skin of religion, but he does not possess its substance or its *power*.

Look for example at those thousands of people whose whole religion seems to consist in keeping religious ceremonies and ordinances. They attend regularly on public worship. They go regularly to the Lord’s table. But they never get any further. They know nothing of experimental Christianity. They are not familiar with the Scriptures and take no delight in reading them. They do not separate themselves from the ways of the world. They draw no distinction between godliness and ungodliness in their friendships or matrimonial alliances. They care little or nothing about the distinctive doctrines of the gospel. They appear utterly indifferent as to what they hear preached. You may be in their company for weeks, and from anything you may hear or see on a weekday you might suppose they were infidels or deists. What can be said about these people? They are undoubtedly Christians by profession; and yet there is neither heart nor life in their Christianity. There is but one thing to be said about them—they are formal Christians. Their religion is a *form*.

Look in another direction at those hundreds of people whose whole religion seems to consist in talk and high profession. They know the theory of the gospel intellectually, and profess to delight in evangelical doctrine. They can say much about the “soundness” of their own views, and the “darkness” of all who disagree with them, but they never get any further! When you examine their inner lives, you find that they know nothing of practical godliness. They are neither truthful, nor charitable, nor humble, nor honest, nor kind-tempered, nor gentle, nor unselfish, nor honorable. What shall we say of these people? They are Christians, no doubt, in name, and yet

there is neither substance nor fruit in their Christianity. There is but one thing to be said—they are formal Christians. Their religion is an empty *form*.

Nothing is *so common as a form* religion. It is one of the great family diseases of the whole race of mankind. It is born with us, grows with us, and is never completely cast out of us till we die. It meets us in church and it meets us in chapel. It meets us among rich and it meets us among poor. It meets us among learned people and it meets us among unlearned. It meets us among Romanists and it meets us among Protestants. It meets us among high churchmen and it meets us among low churchmen. It meets us among evangelicals and it meets us among ritualists. Go where we will and join what church we may, we are never beyond the risk of its infection. We shall find it among Quakers and Plymouth Brethren as well as at Rome. The man, who thinks that, at any rate there is no formal religion in his own camp, is a very blind and ignorant person. If you love life, beware of formality.

Nothing is so *dangerous* to a man's own soul. Familiarity with the form of religion, while we neglect its reality, has a fearfully deadening effect on the conscience. It brings up by degrees a thick crust of insensibility over the whole inner man. None seem to become so desperately hard as those who are continually repeating holy words and handling holy things, while their hearts are running after sin and the world. Landlords who only go to church formally, to set an example to their tenants; masters who have family prayers formally, to keep up a good appearance in their households; unconverted clergymen who are every week reading prayers and lessons of Scripture in which they feel no real interest; unconverted singers who sing the most spiritual hymns every Sunday merely because they have good voices, while their affections are entirely on things below—all are in awful danger. They are gradually hardening their hearts and searing their consciences. If you love your own soul, beware of formality.

Nothing, finally, is *so foolish*, senseless, and unreasonable. Can a formal Christian really suppose that the mere outward Christianity he professes will comfort him in the day of sickness and the hour of death? That is impossible. A painted fire cannot warm, a painted banquet cannot satisfy hunger, and a formal religion cannot bring peace to the soul. Can he suppose that God does not see the heartlessness and deadness of his Christianity? Though he may deceive neighbors, acquaintances, fellow worshippers, and ministers with a form of godliness, does he think that he can deceive God? The very idea is absurd. "He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" (Ps. 94:9). He knows the very secrets of the heart. He will "judge the secrets of men" (Rom. 2:16) at the last day. He who said to each angel of the seven churches, "I know thy works" (Rev. 2:2), is not changed. He who said to the man without the wedding garment, "Friend, how camest thou in hither?" (Mt. 22:12) will not be deceived by a little cloak of outward religion. If you would not be put to shame at the last day, once more I say, beware of formality.

2. I pass on to the second thing which I proposed to consider. *The heart is the seat of true religion, and the true Christian is the Christian in heart.*

The heart is the real test of a man's character. It is not what he says or what he does by which the man may always be known. He may say and do things that are right from false and unworthy motives, while his heart is altogether wrong. The heart is the man. "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7).

The heart is the right test of a man's religion. It is not enough that a man holds a correct creed of doctrine and maintains a proper outward form of godliness. What is his heart? That is the grand question. This is what God looks at. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). This is what St. Paul lays down distinctly as the standard measure of the soul: "He is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart" (Rom. 2:29). Who can doubt that his mighty sentence was written for Christians as well as for Jews? He is a Christian, the apostle would have us know, which is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart.

The heart is the place where saving religion must begin. It is naturally irreligious and must be renewed by the Holy Ghost. "A new heart will I give you." It is naturally hard and must be made tender and broken. "I will take away the stony heart, . . . and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). It is naturally closed and shut against God and must be opened. The Lord opened the heart of Lydia (Acts 16:14).

The heart is the seat of true saving faith. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10). A man may believe that Jesus is the Christ, as the devils do, and yet remain in his sins. He may believe that he is a sinner and that Christ is the only Savior and feel occasional lazy wishes that he were a better man. But no one

ever lays hold on Christ and receives pardon and peace until he believes with the heart. It is heart-faith that justifies.

The heart is the spring of true holiness and steady continuance in well-doing. True Christians are holy because their hearts are interested. They obey from the heart. They do the will of God from the heart. Weak, feeble, and imperfect as all their doings are, they please God because they are done from a loving heart. He who commended the widow's mite more than all the offerings of the wealthy Jews regards quality far more than quantity. What He likes to see is a thing done from "An honest and good heart" (Luke 8:15). There is no real holiness without a right heart.

The things I am saying may sound strange. Perhaps they run counter to all the notions of some into whose hands this booklet may fall. Perhaps you have thought that if a man's religion is correct outwardly, he must be one with whom God is well pleased. You are completely mistaken. You are rejecting the whole tenor of Bible teaching. Outward correctness without a right heart is neither more nor less than Pharisaism. The outward things of Christianity—baptism, the Lord's Supper, church membership, almsgiving, and the like—will never take any man's soul to heaven unless his heart is right. There must be inward things as well as outward, and it is on the inward things that God's eyes are chiefly fixed.

Hear how St. Paul teaches us about this matter in three most striking texts: "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith that worketh by love." "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature" (Gal. 5:6; 6:15). "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing but the keeping of the commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19). Did the apostle only mean in these texts that circumcision was no longer needed under the gospel? Was that all? No indeed! I believe he meant much more. He meant that true religion did not consist of forms, and that its essence was something far greater than being circumcised or not being circumcised. He meant that under Christ Jesus everything depended on being born again, on having true saving faith, on being holy in life and conduct. He meant that these are the things we ought to look at chiefly and not at outward forms. "Am I a new creature? Do I really believe on Christ? Am I a holy man?" These are the grand questions that we must seek to answer.

When the heart is wrong, all is wrong in God's sight. Many right things may be done. The forms and ordinances which God Himself has appointed may seem to be honored. But so long as the heart is at fault, God is not pleased. He will have man's whole heart or nothing.

The ark was the most sacred thing in the Jewish tabernacle. On it was the mercy seat. Within it were the tables of the law, written by God's own finger. The high priest alone was allowed to go into the place where it was kept, within the veil, and that only once every year. The presence of the ark with the camp was thought to bring a special blessing. And yet this very ark could do the Israelites no more good than any common wooden box, when they trusted to it like an idol, with their hearts full of wickedness. They brought it into the camp on a special occasion, saying, "Let us fetch the ark,...that it may save us out of the hand of our enemies" (1 Sam. 4:3). When it came in the camp, they showed it all reverence and honor. They "shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." But it was all in vain. They were smitten before the Philistines, and the ark itself was taken. And why was this? It was because their religion was mere form. They honored the ark, but did not give the God of the ark their hearts. There were some kings of Judah and Israel who did many things that were right in God's sight, and yet were never written in the list of godly and righteous men. Rehoboam began well and "for three years he walked in the way of David and Solomon" (2 Chron. 11:17). But afterwards "he did evil, because he prepared not his *heart* to seek the LORD" (2 Chron. 12:14). Abijah, according to the book of Chronicles, said many things that were right, and fought successfully against Jeroboam. Nevertheless the general verdict is against him. We read that "his *heart* was not perfect with the LORD his God" (1 Kings 15:3). Amaziah, we are expressly told, "did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect *heart*" (2 Chron. 25:2). Jehu, king of Israel, was raised up by God's command to put down idolatry. He was a man of special zeal in doing God's work. But unhappily it is written of him: He "took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his *heart*: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam which made Israel to sin" (2 Kings 10:31). In short, one general remark applies to all these kings. They were all wrong inwardly. They were rotten at heart.

There are places of worship this very day where all the outward things of religion are done to perfection. The building is beautiful. The service is beautiful. The singing is beautiful. The forms of devotion are beautiful. There is everything to gratify the senses. Eye and ear and natural sentimentality are all pleased, but all this time God is

not pleased. One thing is lacking, and the want of that one thing spoils all. What is that one thing? It is heart! God sees under all this fair, outward show the form of religion put in the place of the substance, and when He sees that, He is displeased. He sees nothing with an eye of favor in the building, the service, the minister, or the people, if He does not see converted, renewed, broken, penitent hearts. Bowed heads, bended knees, loud amens, crossed hands, faces turned to the east—all, all are nothing in God's sight without right hearts.

When the heart is right God can look over many things that are defective. There may be faults in judgment, and infirmities in practice. There may be many deviations from the best course in the outward things of religion. But if the heart is sound in the main, God is not extreme to mark that which is amiss. He is merciful and gracious, and will pardon much that is imperfect when He sees a true heart and a single eye.

Jehoshaphat and Asa were kings of Judah who were defective in many things. Jehoshaphat was a timid, irresolute man who did not know how to say "No," and joined affinity with Ahab, the wickedest king that ever reigned over Israel. Asa was an unstable man who at one time trusted in the king of Syria more than in God, and at another time was wroth with God's prophet for rebuking him (2 Chron. 16:10). Yet both of them had one great redeeming point in their characters. With all their faults they had right *hearts*.

There are many assemblies of Christian worshippers on earth this very day in which there is literally nothing to attract the natural man. They meet in miserable dirty chapels, or in wretched upper-rooms and cellars. They sing unmusically. They hear feeble prayers and more feeble sermons. And yet the Holy Ghost is often in the midst of them! Sinners are often converted in these places and the kingdom of God prospers far more than in any Roman Catholic cathedral or than in many gorgeous Protestant churches. How is this? How can it be explained? The cause is simply this—that in these humble assemblies heart-religion is taught and held. Heart-work is aimed at. Heart-work is honored. And the consequence is that God is pleased and grants His blessing.

I leave this part of my subject. I ask men to weigh well the things that I have been saying. I believe that they will bear examination and are all true. Resolve this day, whatever church you belong to, to be a Christian in *heart*. Whether Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Baptist or Independent, be not content with a mere form of godliness without the power. Settle it down firmly in your mind that formal religion is not saving religion and that heart-religion is the only religion that leads to heaven.

I give only one word of caution. Do not suppose, because formal religion will not save, that forms of religion are of no use at all. Beware of any such senseless extreme. The misuse of a thing is no argument against the right use of it. The blind idolatry of forms which prevails in some quarters is no reason why you should throw all forms aside. The ark, when made an idol by Israel and put in the place of God, was unable to save them from the Philistines. And yet the same ark, when irreverently and profanely handled, brought death on Uzzah; and when honored and revered, brought a blessing on the house of Obed-edom. The words of Bishop Hall are strong but true: "He that hath but a form is a hypocrite; but he that hath not a form is an Atheist." Forms cannot save us, but they are not therefore to be despised. A lantern is not a man's home, and yet it is a help to a man if he travels towards his home on a dark night. Use the forms of Christianity diligently, and you will find them a blessing. Only remember, in all your use of forms, the great principle, is that the first thing in religion is the state of the heart.

3. I come now to the last thing which I proposed to consider. I said *that true religion must never expect to be popular. It will not have the praise of man, but of God.*

I dare not turn away from this part of my subject, however painful it may be. Anxious as I am to commend heart-religion to everyone who reads this, I will not try to conceal what heart-religion entails. I will not gain a recruit for my Master's army under false presences. I will not promise anything which the Scripture does not warrant. The words of Paul are clear and unmistakable. Heart-religion is a religion "whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:29).

God's truth and scriptural Christianity are never really popular. They never have been. They never will be as long as the world stands. No one can calmly consider what human nature is, as described in the Bible, and reasonably expect anything else. As long as man is what man is, the majority of mankind will always like a religion of form far better than a religion of heart.

Formal religion exactly suits an unenlightened conscience. Some religion a man will have. Atheism and downright infidelity, as a general rule, are never very popular. But a man must have a religion which does not

require much, trouble his heart much, interfere with his sins much. Formal Christianity satisfies him. It seems the very thing that he wants.

Formal religion gratifies the secret self-righteousness of man. We are all of us more or less Pharisees. We all naturally cling to the idea that the way to be saved is to do so many things, go through so many religious observances, and at last we shall get to heaven. Formalism meets us here. It seems to show us a way by which we can make our own peace with God.

Formal religion pleases the natural indolence of man. It attaches an excessive importance to that which is the easiest part of Christianity—the shell and the form. Man likes this. He hates trouble in religion. He wants something which will not meddle with his conscience and inner life. Only leave conscience alone and, like Herod, he will “do many things.” Formalism seems to open a wider gate and a more easy way to heaven (Mark 6:20). Facts speak louder than assertions.

Facts are stubborn things. Look over the history of religion in every age of the world and observe what has always been popular. Look at the history of Israel from the beginning of Exodus to the end of the Acts of the Apostles, and see what has always found favor. Formalism was one main sin against which the Old Testament prophets were continually protesting. Formalism was the great plague which had overspread the Jews when our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world. Look at the history of the church of Christ after the days of the apostles. How soon formalism ate out the life and vitality of the primitive Christians! Look at the Middle Ages, as they are called. Formalism so completely covered the face of Christendom that the gospel lay as one dead. Look, lastly, at the history of Protestant churches in the last three centuries. How few are the places where religion is a living thing! How many are the countries where Protestantism is nothing more than a form! We cannot avoid taking notice of these things. They speak with a voice of thunder. They all show that formal religion is a popular thing. It has the praise of man.

But why should we look at facts in history? Why should we not look at facts under our own eyes and by our own doors? Can anyone deny that a mere outward religion, a religion of downright formality, is the religion which is popular at the present day? It is not for nothing that John says of certain false teachers, “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them” (1 John 4:5). Only say your prayers, go to church with tolerable regularity, and receive the sacrament occasionally, and the vast majority will set you down as an excellent Christian. “What more would you have?” they say: “If this is not Christianity, what is?” To require more of anyone is thought bigotry, illiberality, fanaticism, and enthusiasm! To insinuate a doubt whether such a man as this will go to heaven is called the height of uncharitableness! When these things are so, it is vain to deny that formal religion is popular. It is popular. It always was popular. It always will be popular till Christ comes again. It always has had and always will have “the praise of men.”

Turn now to the religion of the heart and you will hear a very different report. As a general rule it has never had the good word of mankind. It has entailed on its professors laughter, mockery, ridicule, scorn, contempt, enmity, hatred, slander, persecution, imprisonment, and even death. Its lovers have been faithful and ardent—but they have always been few. It has never had, comparatively, “the praise of man.”

Heart-religion is too *humbling* to be popular. It leaves natural man no room to boast. It tells him that he is a guilty, lost, hell-deserving sinner, and that he must flee to Christ for salvation. It tells him that he is dead, and must be made alive again and be born of the Spirit. The pride of man rebels against such tidings as these. He hates to be told that his case is so bad.

Heart-religion is too *holy* to be popular. It will not leave natural man alone. It interferes with his worldliness and his sins. It requires of him things that he loathes and abominates—conversion, faith, repentance, spiritual-mindedness, Bible reading, prayer. It bids him give up many things that he loves and clings to, and cannot make up his mind to lay aside. It would be strange indeed if he liked it. It crosses his path as a killjoy and a marplot, and it is absurd to expect that he will be pleased.

Was heart-religion popular in Old Testament times? We find David complaining: “They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards” (Psa. 69:12). We find the prophets persecuted and ill-treated because they preached against sin, and required men to give their hearts to God. Elijah, Micaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, are all cases in point. To formalism and ceremonialism the Jews never seem to have made objection. What they did dislike was serving God with their hearts.

Was heart-religion popular in New Testament times? The whole history of our Lord Jesus Christ's ministry and the lives of His apostles are a sufficient answer. The scribes and Pharisees would have willingly received a Messiah who encouraged formalism, and a gospel which exalted ceremonialism. But they could not tolerate a religion of which the first principles were humiliation and sanctification of heart.

Has heart-religion ever been popular in the professing church of Christ during the last eighteen centuries? Never hardly, except in the early centuries when the primitive church had not left her first love. Soon, very soon, the men who protested against formalism and sacramentalism were fiercely denounced as "troublers of Israel." Long before the Reformation, things came to this pass—that anyone who cried up heart-holiness and cried down formality was treated as a common enemy. He was either silenced, excommunicated, imprisoned, or put to death like John Huss. In the time of the Reformation itself, the work of Luther and his companions was carried on under an incessant storm of calumny and slander. And what was the cause? It was because they protested against formalism, ceremonialism, monkery, and priestcraft, and taught the necessity of heart-religion.

Has heart-religion ever been popular in our own land in days gone by? Never, excepting for a little season. It was not popular in the days of Queen Mary, when Latimer and his brother martyrs were burned. It was not popular in the days of the Stuarts, when to be a Puritan was worse for a man than to get drunk or swear. It was not popular in the middle of the eighteenth century, when Wesley and Whitefield were shut out of the established church. The cause of our martyred Reformers, of the early Puritans and of the Methodists, was essentially one and the same. They were all hated because they preached the uselessness of formalism, and the impossibility of salvation without repentance, faith, regeneration, spiritual-mindedness, and holiness of heart.

Is heart-religion popular at this very day? I answer sorrowfully that I do not believe it is. Look at the followers of it among the laity. They are always comparatively few in number. They stand alone in their respective congregations and parishes. They have to put up with many hard things, hard words, hard imputations, hard treatment, laughter, ridicule, slander, and petty persecution. This is not popularity! Look at the teachers of heart-religion in the pulpit. They are loved and liked, no doubt, by the few hearers who agree with them. They are sometimes admired for their talents and eloquence by the many who do not agree with them. They are even called "popular preachers" because of the crowds who listen to their preaching. But none know so well as the faithful teachers of heart-religion that few really like them. Few really help them. Few sympathize with them. Few stand by them in any time of need. They find, like their divine Master, that they must work almost alone. I write these things with sorrow, but I believe they are true. Real heart-religion today, no less than in days gone by, has not "the praise of man."

But after all, it signifies little what man thinks and what man praises. He that judgeth us is the Lord. Man will not judge us at the last day. Man will not sit on the great white throne, examine our religion, and pronounce our eternal sentence. Those only whom God commends will be commended at the bar of Christ. Here lies the value and glory of heart-religion. It may not have the praise of man, but it has "the praise of God."

God approves and honors heart-religion in the life that now is. He looks down from heaven, and reads the hearts of all the children of men. Wherever He sees heart-repentance for sin, heart-faith in Christ, heart-holiness of life, heart-love to His Son, His law, His will, and His Word—wherever God sees these things He is well pleased. He writes a book of remembrance for that man, however poor and unlearned he may be. He gives His angels special charge over him. He maintains in him the work of grace and gives him daily supplies of peace, hope, and strength. He regards him as a member of His own dear Son, as one who is witnessing for the truth as His Son did. Weak as the man's heart may seem to himself, it is the living sacrifice which God loves, and the heart which He has solemnly declared He will not despise. Such praise is worth more than the praise of man!

God will proclaim His approval of heart-religion before the assembled world at the last day. He will command His angels to gather together His saints, from every part of the globe, into one glorious company. He will raise the dead and change the living and place them at the right hand of His beloved Son's throne. Then all that have served Christ with the heart shall hear Him say: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: you were faithful over few things, and I will make you rulers over many things; enter into the joy of your Lord. Ye confessed Me before men, and I will confess you before my Father and His holy angels. Ye are they who continued with Me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed unto Me" (Matt. 25:21-34; Luke 12:8; 22:28-29). These words will be addressed to none but those who have given Christ their hearts! They will not be addressed to the formalist, the

hypocrite, the wicked, and the ungodly. *They* will, indeed, stand by and see the fruits of heart-religion, but they will not eat of them. We shall never know the full value of heart-religion until the last day. Then and only then we shall fully understand how much better it is to have the praise of God than the praise of man.

If you take up heart-religion, I cannot promise you the praise of man. Pardon, peace, hope, guidance, comfort, consolation, grace according to your need, strength according to your day, joy which the world can neither give nor take away—all this I can boldly promise to the man who comes to Christ and serves Him with his heart. But I cannot promise him that his religion will be popular with man. I would rather warn him to expect mockery and ridicule, slander and unkindness, opposition and persecution. There is a cross belonging to heart-religion and we must be content to carry it. “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom.” “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecutions (Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12). But if the world hates you, God will love you. If the world forsakes you, Christ has promised that He will never forsake and never fail. Whatever you may lose by heart-religion, be sure that the praise of God will make up for all. And now I close with three plain words of application. I want it to strike and stick to the conscience of everyone into whose hands it falls. May God make it a blessing to many a soul both in time and eternity!

(1) In the first place, Is your religion a matter of form and not of heart? Answer this question honestly and as in the sight of God. If it is, *consider solemnly the immense danger in which you stand.*

You have got nothing to comfort your soul in the day of trial, nothing to give you hope on your deathbed, nothing to save you at the last day. Formal religion never took any man to heaven. Like base metal, it will not stand the fire. Continuing in your present state you are in imminent peril of being lost forever.

I earnestly beseech you this day to know your danger, to open your eyes and repent. Churchman or dissenter, high church or low church, if you have only a name to live, and a form of godliness without the power, awake and repent. Awake, above all, if you are an evangelical formalist. “There is no devil,” said the quaint old Puritans, “like a white devil.” There is no formalism so dangerous as evangelical formalism.

I can only warn you. I do so with all affection. God alone can apply the warning to your soul. Oh, that you would see the folly as well as the danger of a heartless Christianity! It was sound advice which a dying man in Suffolk once gave to his son: “Son,” he said, “whatever religion you have, never be content with wearing a cloak.”

(2) In the second place, if your heart condemns you and you wish to know what to do, *consider seriously the only course that you can safely take.*

Apply to the Lord Jesus Christ without delay and spread before Him the state of your soul. Confess before Him your formality in time past and ask Him to forgive it. Seek from Him the promised grace of the Holy Ghost and entreat Him to quicken and renew your inward man.

The Lord Jesus is appointed and commissioned to be the Physician of man’s soul. There is not a case too hard for Him. There is no condition of soul that He cannot cure. There is no devil He cannot cast out. Seared and hardened as the heart of a formalist may be, there is balm in Gilead which can heal him, and a Physician who is mighty to save. Go and call on the Lord Jesus Christ this very day. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Luke 11:9).

(3) In the last place, if your heart condemns you not, and you have real well-grounded confidence towards God, *consider seriously the many responsibilities of your position.*

Praise Him daily who hath called you out of darkness into light and made you to differ. Praise Him daily and ask Him never to forsake the work of His own hands.

Watch with a jealous watchfulness every part of your inward man. Formality is ever ready to come in upon us, like the Egyptian plague of frogs, which went even into the king’s chamber. Watch, and be on your guard. Watch over your Bible reading, your praying, your temper and your tongue, your family life and your Sunday religion. There is nothing so good and spiritual that we may not fall into formal habits with it. There is none so spiritual but that, he may have a heavy fall. Watch, therefore, and be on your guard.

Look forward, finally, and hope for the coming of the Lord. Your best things are yet to come. The second coming of Christ will soon be here. The time of temptation will soon be past and gone. The judgment and reward of the saints shall soon make amends for all. Rest in the hope of that day. Work, watch, and look forward. One thing, at any rate, that day will make abundantly clear: It will show that there was never an hour in our lives in which we gave our hearts too thoroughly to Christ.