

## **CHRISTIANITY VS. CHURCHIANITY.**

We are living in an age of shams and counterfeits. Satan seems to have abandoned the hope of crushing out the Christian Church by a process of undisguised hostility, and now seeks to destroy her efficiency by stealthily draining off her vitality, and robbing her of every supernatural element. He "transforms himself into an angel of light," and often assumes to be the special friend and guardian of the Church. Craftily he infuses his deadly virus and inculcates his plausible philosophy, until the moral perception is obscured, the conscience is distorted, and policy runs nearly the whole ecclesiastical machinery. Thus a popularized religion – which costs nothing and is worth nothing – is readily accepted, while the old religion of the cross is utterly discarded. The consequence is, that there is religion enough, and Churchianity enough, but a great famine for real Christianity. We meet with thousands all over the land who, if catechised in regard to their spiritual condition, reply with much self-assurance that they are members of such a Church. They assume that the Church is an ark of safety; and, once ensconced within her enclosures, all further anxiety ends. Let us try to unmask this dreadful delusion of the devil.

There is a difference, we may premise, between the real and the nominal Church of Christ. The former is composed of all true Christians. Its boundaries are therefore invisible, as no man can tell exactly where to draw the lines. The latter is composed of those who assume the Christian name and practice the ordinances of God's house. It is commonly called the visible Church, because its boundary lines are known. The epithet may apply to a single local society of a given denomination, or to the aggregate of local societies of all denominations. We use the term, in this paper, to designate the outward or visible Church.

1. Christ and the Church are not identical. There may be ten thousand Churches, but there is only one Christ. Nor can all those Churches supply the place of our one, blessed, all-sufficient Saviour. A man may be saved without the Church, but he cannot be saved without Christ. A man may be in the Church and not be saved; but he cannot [R533 : page 8] be in Christ without salvation. Sinners sometimes become members of the Church; but only saints are members of Christ. A person may live in the Church for years, with the old heart of carnality and selfishness; but "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

The requirements of the Church are often wrong and ruinous; but the claims of Christ are always reasonable and right. The Church may become a sink of pollution; but Christ is ever the perfection of purity. The Church may be rent with divisions; but Jesus Christ is not divided. The Church may become terribly entangled in mysticism and error; but Christ is always the embodiment of light and truth. The Church may change her name and her nature; but Christ is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." The Church may be a crutch to walk with, but she is a poor Christ to trust in for salvation and eternal life.

2. Christian worship and Church worship are not identical. Vast multitudes cling to some Church establishment as a drowning man would cling to a life-boat. They bow obsequiously to her priestly and official mandates, and imagine that the blind servility which they tender to the Church will be accounted acceptable service offered to Christ. The simplicity of the Gospel is lost in the imposing forms and glittering accompaniments of modern churchism. Splendid church edifices attract the eye. Splendid music charms the ear. Splendid prayers are addressed to the CONGREGATION. Splendid sermons please the fancy, and leave deluded sinners to slumber on. Church rivalry has achieved a

glorious success, if success consists in gorgeous temples, tall steeples, loud-sounding bells, thundering organs, ostentatious dressing, theatrical singing, pointless praying, rhetorical preaching, careless hearing, and unscriptural practicing!

Much of the current worship is done by proxy. Lazy religionists surrender their sacred rights to others. They take it for granted that the preacher is on the right track, and readily swallow whatever may be doled out from the pulpit, without using their own brains in searching for the hidden treasures of truth. Thus religious ideas are transmitted from generation to generation, until tradition exerts a more powerful influence than the Bible in molding the sentiments of men. There comes to be a fashionable faith, as well as a fashionable dress. To embrace a certain stereotyped circle of doctrinal views entitles a man to the claim of "orthodoxy"; but let him not venture one step out of the beaten track, if he would not be denounced as a deluded heretic! But few have the moral courage to question the decisions of the Church, much less to discard what she has labeled as "orthodox." The verdict of a few leading denominations has thus grown up into a threatening tyranny; and the multitude cannot think of stemming the mighty tide. So they bow down in their narrow enslavement and worship this curiously-fashioned but pious-looking idol – the Church! Since all idolatry is an abomination to God, we have no more right to worship a church than we have to worship a golden calf! We rob the Lord of his rightful honor, and ourselves of the highest bliss of Christianity, by looking to the Church too much, and "looking unto Jesus" too little. What can be done to deal a staggering blow to this cruel church-worship of the day, and at the same time give us more exalted and ravishing views of Jesus Christ? There is a grand failure to carry out the ultimate design, when the appliances of the Gospel result only in the production of Churchianity. Our perception, our prayers, our

faith, and our adoration must overleap the narrow precincts of the outward Church, and rise up to the eternal throne! "Worship God!"

3. Christian fellowship and Church fellowship are not identical. The followers of Christ are called upon to "love one another with a pure heart fervently." Indeed, this is one of the Scriptural tests of discipleship. "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." All Christians constitute one family, and love is the golden tie designed to bind their hearts together around the common cross. But love is a tender plant that needs to be reared with a hand. Hence the many exhortations of Scripture to "consider one another" – to "be kindly affectioned one to another" – to esteem others better than ourselves – to "bear one another's burdens" – to exercise a forgiving spirit – to "let brotherly love continue" – to "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace." All such injunctions point out the danger of alienated feelings and poisoned affections, and show the importance of making a special effort to promote Christian unity and love. How disastrous are the results of not regarding these Gospel precepts!

– A. A. Phelps.

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