



True Religion

by Desmond Ford

*Christ alone brings us acceptance with God.
Placing our trust anywhere else
invites into our lives painful stress.*

Religion, as with all other good things, is a two-sided coin. There are only two religions in the world, and only one of them is pleasing to God.

The popular religion of the world says, "Be good and God will love you." This religion is human-centered, works-centered, subjective, and vain.

Bible Religion

In contrast, the good news religion of the Bible is that Christ came into the world to save sinners. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Lk 15:2).

He loves and accepts us even while we are sinners. It is this acceptance that changes us. God "justifieth the ungodly" (Rom 4:5 KJV). The glory of the New Testament religion is that we are saved on the basis of what Christ has done, not by what we do; by what *he* has felt, not by what *we* feel. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone.

The righteousness by which we are justified is 100 percent, but it is imputed rather than imparted. The righteousness of sanctification is imparted by the Holy Spirit, but it is never 100 percent in this life. When Christ returns and glorification of our whole being takes place, then we will have 100 percent righteousness within as well as without.

A believer looks for comfort only to the imputed righteousness of Christ. When a believer accepts what Christ did for him on the cross, he has the verdict of the last judgment already—and for as long as he believes.

The believer has no need to be anxious about what God thinks of him but only what God thinks of Christ, his Substitute. The believer is not expected to make his peace with God, for Christ has already done that and Christ is his Peace.

The Role of Law

Law remains as a standard, but should never be used as a method of righteousness. Christ is the end of the law as regards righteousness (Rom 10:4). Paul says he had to die to law as a method before he could live to Christ (Rom 7:4; Gal 2:19).

According to Holy Writ, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his [God's] sight by observing the law" (Rom 3:20).

We no longer look to the law as means of achieving acceptance with God. God's law ever remains as a reflection of God's own character and as a standard of righteousness. Yet, it is impossible for those who have failed once *in anything* to use the law as a method of obtaining acceptance

with God.

Problem of Sin

Sin is our problem as a burden upon us, as a law over us, and a disease within us. Sin is our creditor, our tyrant, and our traitor. The *guilt* of sin, the *power* of sin, the *presence* of sin can only be dealt with by Jesus Christ and his gospel.

God removes the guilt of sin the moment we believe. The power of sin is simultaneously crushed in principle as we behold God's great love for the sinner. Sin's presence no longer reigns in us, though our sinful nature remains. (Therefore we dare not depend upon our sanctification for acceptance with God.)

We are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6 KJV), "complete in him" (Col 2:10 KJV), without "condemnation" (Rom 8:1), made to "sit with him [Christ] in the heavenly places" (Eph 2:6 RSV).

Summary of True Religion

In summary, the only true religion asserts with Scripture: "by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph 2:8-9). If, however, we forget this religion of the Bible, and trust anything in ourselves for acceptance and for peace, we are inviting stress. ❖