

A BLOW FOR PUSEYISM

NO. 653

A SERMON
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 BY C. H. SPURGEON
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing:
 the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”
 John 6:63*

OUR Lord had plainly told His hearers that He was the bread of life, and that except they ate His flesh and drank His blood there was no life in them. His hearers understood this in a sensual manner, and they very naturally put the question, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Now the Savior had never intended to be understood in a carnal manner. It was far enough from His design to inculcate the carnal eating of His body, and therefore He at once told them that His words were not understood, and delivered Himself of a great general principle, as truly applicable to our day as to His own.

In effect He taught them just this, “It is not the eating My flesh in a carnal way, even if you could do it, which would be of any service to you, for that would be only feeding the flesh, which profits nothing. A spiritual feeding can alone quicken and bless you. It is this which you cannot understand, and therefore you hear My words as if they were as dead and fleshly as yourselves, whereas My teaching bears no gross and sensuous meaning, for the words which I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”

If I mistake not, this verse contains a great principle which needs in these days to be proclaimed as on the housetops. It is, the medicine which would cure the diseases of this present time if men were divinely led to receive it. The text is very deep, like all the teaching of our Savior recorded by John, the words are extremely simple, but the mystery is most profound. May the Holy Ghost lead us all not only to comprehend its teaching, but to feel its power.

What is meant by “*the flesh*” here? The word “flesh” in Scripture has eleven or twelve different modifications of its one abiding meaning. In this passage it means that which is outward and sensuous, and appeals to the eye, or the ear, or to other powers of man’s bodily nature. There was much of this in the Jewish faith, but whenever the worshippers rested in it and did not reach to its spiritual teaching, it profited them nothing.

Paul uses the same term when speaking to the Judaizing Galatians, he asks them, “Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” which we understand to mean, having begun by God’s Holy Spirit with a spiritual love to God, a spiritual faith in Jesus, and a spiritual life within, do you mean now to be made perfect by external ordinances, resting and abiding in them as though they had a power to bless. External ceremonial religion is well and aptly set forth here as “flesh.”

What is the meaning of the term “*spirit*” here? If the Holy Spirit had been intended in the judgment of our translators, they would have placed a capital S. It cannot, however, refer to the Holy Spirit, because the explanatory key sentence is this, “The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit.” Now words cannot be the Holy Spirit as we all know. The word “spirit” stands here in contrast with the term “flesh.”

Flesh is external religion, the carnal part of it, that which the eye sees and the ear hears. Spirit is the inward part of religion, that which the soul understands, receives, believes, and feeds upon. This it is, this spiritual element in religion which quickens it and makes it a living thing, while the mere external, the flesh, except as the Spirit quickens it profits nothing.

This spiritual religion is consistent with the spiritual nature which God the Holy Ghost gives to us, and as Christ's teachings are themselves living and spiritual, they are the proper food of spiritual men. The Jews commonly thought that religion lay in ceremonial observances, in eating certain meats or abstinence from them, in washings of the hands before meat, in divers baptisms, in goings up to the temple to pray, and such like outward performances. Jesus tells them to their faces that this flesh religion profits nothing—it is dead, unquickened, and unquickening.

What then is the life of godliness? What is the vitality and essence of acceptable worship? His answer virtually is, "It is not your outward observances, but your inward emotions, desires, believings, and adorings, which are living worship." Then He adds in effect, "My words are not concerning outward observances, but are of a spiritual character. I come not to you with 'touch not, taste not, handle not,' or with 'wash, vow, stand, sit, kneel.' My words deal with inner life and spirit, and are addressed to your spiritual natures. The words which I speak unto you are spirit and life."

I. Our first point will be THE UNPROFITABLE FLESH—the external observances of religion in themselves utterly unprofitable.

To begin with the greatest monstrosity of this kind in the present day, *the real and corporeal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in what is superstitiously called the Blessed Sacrament*. I should scarcely mention this if it were a doctrine merely of the Church of Rome, but when I read the newspapers and other productions of the High Church party, I find that transubstantiation with all its fullness of absurdity is extensively preached and believed in the Church of England. And there are hundreds of clergy who speak of the Lord's table as an "altar," and of the supper as the celebration of a sacrifice, while the symbols are spoken of as though they were to be revered even as the Lord Himself. It is laid down as a doctrine, that every time the bread is broken by these priests, the very body of Jesus Christ is actually received by the persons participating.

That this is monstrously absurd, methinks every intelligent person knows, but it has been said that the more absurd it is, the more room there is for faith, and hence some have even been thankful for having its absurdity proved, for then they have argued, "It will be the more meritorious for us to believe it."

To such persons we would briefly say, if Jesus Christ's body be really received into your mouth, broken with your teeth, and made to enter into your stomach, then, in the first place, you are guilty of a gross act of cannibalism and nothing better, inasmuch as you eat human flesh. And in the next place, you cannot derive any virtue therefrom, for Jesus Christ tells you at once, "It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing."

If you did actually eat the very body of Christ, it would affect your digestive and secretive organs, and through them your flesh, just as other bread, or if you like it better, other flesh would do, but how could this affect your heart and soul. Does grace operate through the stomach and save us through our bowels? Prove this, and you will make converts of us.

But do not men receive the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's supper? Yes, spiritual men do, in a real and spiritual sense, but not in a carnal sort—not so as to crush it with their teeth, or taste it with their palate, or digest it by the gastric juices. But they receive the Lord Jesus, as incarnate and crucified, into their spirits, as they believe in Him, love Him, and are comforted by thoughts of Him.

"But how is that a real reception of Him?" cries one. Alas, this question reveals at once the world's thoughts. You think the carnal alone real and that the spiritual is unreal. If you can touch and taste you think it real, but if you can only meditate and love, you dream it to be unreal. How impossible it is for the carnal mind to enter into spiritual things!

Yet, harken once again, I receive the body and blood of Christ when my soul believes in His incarnation, when my heart relies upon the merit of His death, when the bread and wine so refresh my memory that thoughts of Jesus Christ and His agonies melt me to penitence, cheer me to confidence, and purify me from sin.

It is not my body which receives Jesus, but my spirit. I believe in Him, casting myself alone upon Him. Trusting Him, I feel joy and peace, love and zeal, hatred of sin and love of holiness, and so as to my spiritual nature I am fed upon Him. My spiritual nature feeds upon truth, love, grace, promise, pardon, covenant, atonement, acceptance, all of which I find, and much more, in the person of the Lord Jesus.

Up to the extent in which my spirit has communion with the Lord Jesus, the ordinance of breaking of bread is living and acceptable, because the spiritual element quickens it. But to the extent in which I merely receive the bread and wine, and my spirit is not exercised about Jesus Christ—to that extent it profits me nothing—it is a mere external ceremony and nothing more. The bread is only bread, the wine is merely wine, the eating is simply eating bread and no more. The whole outward ceremony is what it seems to be and not a jot more, but the unseen fellowship of hearts with Jesus, this is the quickening element, and this alone.

The same principle applies in the case of *baptism*. According to God's Word, Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12, baptism sets forth our union with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection. Is there anything in the water in which the person is immersed? Nothing whatever. Is there conveyed by the water, or in the water, any spiritual gift or grace? Not in any way, except so far as this—if the water reminds the spiritual nature in the man of the death of Christ, so that his spirit enjoys communion with Christ in His death.

If the water forcibly portrays to him the Savior's burial, so that his spirit feels itself to be buried to the world, if rising out of the water reminds the man of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, so that he, in spirit rises from a dead world into a newness of life, then there is life in the baptism—the spirit quickens it—but the mere water, the carnal part of the ordinance, in itself, profits nothing. The putting away of the filth of the flesh is nought, but the answer of a good conscience toward God is the vitality of baptism. It is only vital up to the extent in which the spirit exercises itself.

This tells strongly against the baptism of infants. We do not enter on this subject from love of controversy, but the question is fairly involved in the subject. If the baptized person, infant or adult, enters in spirit into the meaning and teaching of baptism he is truly baptized. But, inasmuch, as in our firm conviction a babe does not enter in spirit into the subject at all, it has only received the unprofitable baptism of the flesh, since the spirit which quickens was absent.

Whether you be infants or adults, if your renewed spirit enters into the form, it quickens the form, and makes it live. But if you come to it without spiritual life, and without exercising spiritual emotions, the water, the fleshly part of the ordinance, profits you nothing. It is only so far as your spirit has fellowship with Jesus Christ in it, both in the act and in after meditation upon it, that baptism becomes of the slightest possible profit to you.

We put the two ordinances together and say to you, you will find in these just as much as your spirit shall get from them, and not an atom more. Only so far as the symbol aids thought and emotion can it be of service. The outward does not profit a little, it profits nothing whatever.

Take next *the doctrine of the apostolic succession*. There are certain persons still out of Bedlam who say of all ministers but those of their own sect, no matter how much the Lord may have honored them in the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints, that they are intruders and not true ministers of Jesus Christ. Their clerics are the legitimate successors of the apostles and they only.

For the moment we will allow the historical question—we will suppose that up to Judas or some other apostle, they can trace a line through Popes of Rome, or Archbishops of Canterbury. We will suppose that a little stream comes trickling down to them through the dunghill of the dark ages, having its original rise in the apostolic era.

Well, what now? Hear you this word, "The flesh profiteth nothing." The mere fleshly connection between bishop and bishop, established by successive layings on of hands and anointings, is utterly valueless. The great question is concerning the spiritual succession. Do we see in you the same spirit

that was in the apostles? Open your mouths, and let us hear the same simple, unadorned Gospel which the apostles proclaimed.

Let us hear you say with Paul, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years, I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." Let us hear from your lips the doctrines of grace, and faithful warnings against looking for salvation by our own works. Let us perceive that you are free from the beggarly elements of ceremonialism, and are not to be judged in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath (Colossians 2:16).

Is there as little pomp about you as about the tentmaker of old? Whence come these silk chasubles, albs of fine linen, stoles of watered silk, maniples, copes, and garments covered with gold and silver and embroidery? The apostolic fishermen surely did not fish for souls in such fine raiment! Show us apostolic simplicity, faith, and truthfulness! We care not a fig either way for your fleshly succession. We demand that you prove your spiritual one.

It was a tolerably impudent thing for a bishop once to say, in reference to John Williams and other missionaries in the South Sea Islands, "They act as pioneers, they prepare the way for a more regular force. The missionary in due time is followed by the Churchman, who erects the converts into an orderly edifice, having for its foundation the lively stones of an apostolic priesthood, qualified to offer the oblation of a spiritual sacrifice."

Now, my Lord Bishop, you shall yourself decide which is the more apostolic, yourself at home at ease, in enjoyment and luxury, or John Williams, traveling from island to island, with his life in his hand, casting down idols by the power of the Gospel, and transforming savages into Christian men! You live in state and he dies a martyr. You boast and he toils. You talk of your own priesthood and he of Jesus Christ. You are filled with zeal for a sect and he with love for souls. Surely if wit remains beneath your miter, you yourself can judge which of the two is the more apostolical.

If the apostle Paul himself came to find out his successor, where would he look for him, in the missionary doing apostolic work, or in the bishop talking about what he will do after the other has laid the foundation and stained it with his blood? When we see the divine calling of our honored pastors denied, and hear the impudent claims of a tribe of hireling priests, we can only cry, "To what an extent pretense may run!" Let them boast the fleshly succession, but let us seek spiritual union with the apostle's Lord.

The Puseyites of our Savior's day said, "We have Abraham for our father," just as these say, "We are the successors of the apostles." And we meet our modern Pharisees with the same rebuke with which the Baptist met their ancient types, "They which are of faith, these are children of Abraham," and successors of the apostles too.

Let us remain content with spiritually following Jesus and doing His work, and let the sons of the bondwoman boast a worthless fleshly succession if they will, "It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing."

These things more concern other people than ourselves, therefore let us come a little nearer home. Much is said nowadays about *an ornate form of worship*. The excellence of melodious music is much extolled. The swell of the organ, it is said, begets a hallowed frame of mind. But how far is the effect sensuous and how far spiritual?

Is it not to be feared that an anthem in a service is often no more a spiritual exercise than a glee at a concert. Music has charms, and he who cannot feel them is to be pitied. But then, acceptable heart-worship is quite another thing. No arrangement of notes and chords can ever do the work of God the Holy Spirit. Unless music can aid in making sinners penitent, in leading souls to Jesus Christ, or uplifting saints in holy joy to the throne of God, we must hold that in vital godliness it profits nothing.

Architecture, with its arched roofs and noble pillars, and dim religious light, is supposed to impart a reverence and awe which befit the solemn engagements of the Sabbath, and draw the mind towards the invisible God. Well, if combinations of stone can sanctify the spirit of man, it is a pity that the Gospel did not prescribe architecture as the remedy for the ruin of the fall.

If gorgeous buildings make men love God, and long-drawn aisles renovate men's spiritual nature, build, all you builders both day and night. If bricks and mortar can lead us to heaven, alas for the confusion which stopped the works at Babel. If there be such a connection between spires and spiritual things as to make human hearts beat in unison with the will of God, then build high and loftily, and lavish your gold and silver. But if all that you produce is sensuous, and nothing more, then turn you to living stones, and seek to build up a spiritual house with spiritual means.

We are told, nowadays, that the *pompous array of ministering priests, the beauty of symbology*, the painting of windows, the smoke of incense, and so on, tend to draw people into the place of worship, and that when there, they aid in elevating their minds.

What says Scripture about it all? This thing was tried among the Jews, and Christ's remark when He comes to sum up the long trial is, "It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing." The real inward spirit of man is not blessed by sounds which charm the ear but appeal not to the understanding, nor by colors which delight the eye but gladden not the affections of man.

To gratify taste is well enough for the carnal, but it profits nothing in the sight of God. It may be as well to be artistic as to be plain, but it is of no matter either way, if tested by the Word. In the balances of the sanctuary these matters are lighter than vanity.

We must make precisely the same remark concerning *eloquence*. Here we deal more closely with our own brethren, who in this thing look to the flesh as others do. Many persons have come to think that oratorical ability is essential in the minister. It is not enough, some think, to preach the truth with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, we must also preach it in the wisdom of words with excellency of speech. The trappings of oratory, and the drapery of eloquence, are thought to be profitable.

Ah! dear friends, one half of the emotions excited in our places of worship are of no more value than those excited at the theatre. The mere ring of words is no more than a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. "The flesh profiteth nothing." So far as the truth itself moves our inmost souls, preaching is of real service.

But if that which you hear only commends itself to you because of the sweet voice that speaks it, or the telling tones in which it is delivered, your hearing is a carnal exercise, and profits you nothing. It is only when your spirit grasp the truths, when your heart embraces Christ, when your soul beholds God by the eye of faith, that you derive benefit.

We may bring this principle to bear on the revivals over which we have watched with much hope, but with more anxiety. In many revivals there has been too much aim at getting up an excitement, a carnal enthusiasm. Excited persons pray one after the other, excited persons speak, and the stamp and motion of the hand, and the tear trickling from the eye—all these are supposed to be of great service. I grant you that excitement may sometimes be used by God to stir the spirit of man, but unless, my dear hearers, your religion is based on something more than animal excitement it is based upon a lie.

Your *spirit* must come to know its ruin before God and be humbled. Your spirit must come to take hold of Jesus Christ and believe in Him. Your spirit must undergo the divine change which only God the Holy Spirit can work, or else that excitement shall be nothing more than the blowing up of a bubble, which shall burst and leave not a vestige behind.

Take care of any religion which merely tickles your fancy, excites your passions, or stirs your blood. True grace penetrates the very core of our nature, it changes the heart, subdues the will, renews the passions, and makes us new creatures in Christ Jesus.

To come yet closer to ourselves, in the matter of prayer and the ordinances of God's house, I am afraid we too often forget this great rule, that it is the spirit that quickens, and that the flesh profits nothing. We pray, I suppose, as a matter of habit, every morning and evening, but how often we spend our few minutes, and we rise from our knees satisfied, and if anybody should ask, "Have you been praying?" we should say, "Yes," whereas it has been the flesh prayer, the dead form without the life of the heart. In reality there has been no prayer at all. It has been the flesh, which profits nothing.

It is only that prayer in which the spirit talks with God that is real prayer at all. The carnal man is quite satisfied if he can get through a certain string of expressions, but the spiritual man is not content with this. Luther used to complain very much of distractions in prayer, and some said they could not understand it. "No," Luther might have said, "I dare say you cannot, for, being unspiritual, you do not understand spiritual difficulties."

Bernard complained much of the wandering of his thoughts in prayer, and when someone said he thought Bernard must be a very great sinner to let his thoughts wander so, Bernard said, "I will give you a trial. I will give you a horse, if you can say the Lord's Prayer and think of nothing else." So the man began, "Our Father which art in heaven," when he stopped short, and turning around said, "But you must give me the bridle to get him home with."

So hard is it to keep the mind upon the object of devotion. While the sinner's words are going up to God, he thinks that he is praying, whereas he has not prayed at all, unless his heart has talked with God.

Why, brethren, some of the best prayers that have ever been prayed had not a single word to express them with—they were heart prayers, and went up to heaven in all their naked unclothed glory, like disembodied spirits, and God accepted them. Many a prayer that has had the choicest words to garnish it has been nothing but a dead prayer wrapped up in ceremonies, and only fit to be cast into the grave forever.

So with public worship. You would feel unhappy if you had spent the whole Sunday without going to a place of worship, but you are quite at ease if you come here and leave your hearts at home. When we are singing, you sing with us, and when we are praying, you cover your eyes too, and when we are preaching, some of you think of what I am talking about, and some do not. But when you get through the appointed hour, you feel quite easy. But oh! remember that the mere carnal act of being here profits nothing.

Oh! dear friends, do shake off the idea that going up to a place of worship, or opening a Bible, or reading family prayer, or kneeling down, can, as mere acts, save your souls. I do not speak against them as to their profit in some respects, but as to salvation and the real vital work, which is acceptable before God, the mere form profits nothing. It is only as your spirit prays, as your spirit seeks, as your spirit worships, as your spirit listens to God's Word, that there is any quickening power in it whatsoever.

Once more. There are certain persons who take considerable delight in having seen, as they think, visions and other manifestations of Christ with their eyes, and having heard certain texts mysteriously spoken in their ears. Now I am not going to deny that you may have seen these visions and heard these sounds. I do not think you did, but whether you did or not, is no matter, they profit you nothing. That which merely comes to this eye is nothing, it must come to the soul's eye of faith. That which comes to this ear is nothing, unless it gets into the heart's ear, unless your soul hears it.

If I were to see all the devils in hell, I should not think myself damned because of that, and if you have seen all the angels in heaven, you must not think you are saved because of that. It is not what a man sees with eyes, or hears with ears, it is what the spirit receives which saves the soul. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

II. The text mentions the QUICKENING SPIRIT.

That which puts life into our religion is its being received and acted out by a spiritual nature. For, first of all, *it is the spiritual nature which quickens the man*. The man who has not received by the work of God the Holy Spirit a spiritual nature, is described by Paul as being dead in trespasses and sins. The Spirit finds men carnal, and breathes into them a new and better nature, and then they themselves become what they never were before, quickened, spiritual men. This spirit of theirs is a quickening spirit, *for it quickens all the ordinances*.

A carnal man is baptized, but it is the fleshly baptism which profits nothing. A spiritual man comes to baptism, and he is baptized, and he quickens the baptism. It becomes a real living baptism to him, for he has fellowship with Jesus Christ in it.

A carnal man comes to the Lord's supper, and he eats and drinks, what? "Damnation unto himself, not discerning the Lord's body." A spiritual man comes there, and he eats and drinks, and what then? Why it becomes a living ordinance to him, the bread sets forth to him the body of Christ, and the wine sets forth the blood, and in spirit he feeds upon his incarnate Savior. The possession of a spiritual nature, and the exercise of that spiritual nature in the ordinances, quickens them.

So it is with *prayer*, the mere act of speaking one form of words is of no more profit than the repeating of any other. The Lord's Prayer, said backwards, is quite as acceptable to God as the Lord's Prayer said forwards unless the spirit enters into it. You might as well repeat the multiplication table as repeat the prayer of the day as far as God is concerned, unless your spirit prays.

But when the spirit is engaged in repentance, in faith, in joy, in love, then the prayer is quickened. So with all the actions of man's life. If I give bread to the hungry, if I visit the sick, if I contribute towards a good object—that is all nothing, unless my heart is in the deed. But if I feed the poor because I love Jesus, if I seek to glorify God in my deeds of charity and holiness, they become living actions. Apart from all that they profit nothing to me before God. The spiritual part of my nature must quicken my whole life and make it real life, or else it will be a dead carnal existence before the Lord.

The spiritual nature *has for its author the divine Father*. The sixty-fifth verse of the chapter in which our text is found tells us that no man can come unto Christ except it be given him of the Father. To be spiritual is a gift of God the Father. He has begotten us again into a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The new life *is the actual operation of the Holy Spirit*—no man becomes spiritual except the Holy Spirit enters into him. Deity comes into contact with humanity and quickens the spiritual man.

The mark by which this spirituality is discovered is faith. "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Every man who rests upon Christ for salvation has the proof of his being spiritual. Modes of speech, or dress, or worship, are not the marks of the spiritual, but simple spiritual faith in the Lord Jesus.

True religion has always been spiritual, but mere professors have ever been content with the outward form alone. Among the Jews when symbols were abundant, the mass either stuck fast in the types and could get no farther, or else they went clean away to idolatry. In these latter times, the Lord has taken away almost all that is ceremonial in our religion. Two simple forms alone remain, and now there is another grand trial to see whether men can live in a spiritual religion, and that trial has come to prove just this, that none can do so but those who are born of God.

The most of mankind cannot get on with a religion in which there is nothing to see, nothing to please the ear, or to gratify their taste. It is only the spiritual man who is so overwhelmed with the glories of God that he does not need the glories of man, so overcome with the splendor of Christ that he does not want the splendor of the mass, so taken up with the magnificence of the great High Priest that he does not care for gorgeously appareled priests.

Blessed is that man who sees though his eye be blind, who hears though his ear be deaf, who tastes though his appetite fail, who lives though his heart and flesh fail. Blessed is he who sees Him who is invisible, and has revealed unto him what eye has not seen, and what ear has not heard.

This will not suit many of you, a religion of thinking and believing is too hard for you. Repenting, believing, trusting—these things men will not do. They will kneel down any quantity of times, they will even, if told by a priest, lick the floor with their tongues, or they will walk with peas in their shoes, or whip their backs, but when it comes to believing, hoping, trusting, fearing, and so on, men are so little inclined to mental operations, especially under the dictation of a higher authority, that they will not have anything to do with them.

"What!" they say, "a religion in which there is nothing for me to see! What! an unseen altar?" Yes, an unseen altar. "Am I not to see the sacrifice?" No. "Never to see it? Then I do not understand it. What! a God, but no symbols! No crucifixes! No crosses! What! no holy wafer, no sacred place, nothing sacred."

No, nothing visible to be revered, nothing whatever but the unseen God. “What! not even my place of worship, is not that to be holy?” No, if you be a Christian, all places must alike be sacred to you. “Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, shall men worship the Father, but those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

You must be yourself a temple, and God must dwell in you. You must be yourself a priest, and everywhere you must offer spiritual sacrifice. “The spirit quickeneth, but the flesh profiteth nothing.”

III. The Savior tells us in the closing sentence THAT HIS WORDS ARE SPIRIT AND LIFE.

Beloved, never was there a more true sentence spoken. Listen to other teachers, and you get precepts concerning washing, eating, bowing, etc., which are fleshly. But hear Jesus and His words, all aim at the heart. Listen to the Puseyite and hear his word, “You should take care to attend Matins, and early celebrations, in our holy and beautiful church. You should decorate the altar, get a surpliced choir, have processions, and put on the holy garments.”

Now, you see at once that these are not spiritual things, these are not life. Ritual performances are very pretty spectacles for silly young ladies, and sillier men to gaze upon, but there is no shadow of spirit or life in them. The High Church ritual does not look like a divine thing. On the contrary, if I stand among the throng, and gaze at all its prettiness, it looks amazingly like a nursery game or a stage play.

Want of taste, say you. Not so, I reply, my eyes admire your glittering colors, and the splendor of your services is taking to me, as a man. I enjoy the swell of your organ, and I can even put up with the smell of your incense (if you buy it good), but my *spirit* does not care for these fooleries. It turns away sickened and cries, “There is nothing here for me. There is no more nourishment for the spirit in all this than there is food for man in a swine’s trough.”

The words of Jesus Christ are throughout unceremonial and unformal—they are spirit and they are life, and we turn to them with all the greater zeal after having seen enough of your childish things. On my Lord’s words I fix my hope in the battle now waging with ceremonialism, and I wish that all ministers of Christ would scorn to use any other weapons.

I know the talk is that we ought to vie with the false churches in the beauty of our services, but this is a temptation of the devil. If the simple preaching of the cross will not attract the people, let them stay away. Let the Lord’s servants abjure the sword and shield of Saul, and go forth with the Gospel sling and stone. Our weapons are the words of Jesus—these are spirit and these are life.

Architecture, apparel, music, liturgies, these are neither spirit nor life. Let those rest on them who will, we can do without them, by God’s help. Our sires, in the Puritanic age, fought and won the battles of Christ without these things. In later days, Whitefield stirred his age with nothing but the Word of God. Rowlands and Christmas Evans roused the men of Wales with no attraction but the cross.

My dear brethren in Christ, ministers of the Gospel who are now present, let me conjure you, stand to the Gospel. Set your backs against the tendency of the times to depart from the simplicity of Jesus Christ. If men will not come to hear us because we preach the Gospel, draw them by no other attractions.

I rejoice in the vast crowd so constantly assembled here, because my enemies themselves are witnesses that there is nothing in me to which the honor can be ascribed. An uplifted Savior draws all men to Him still.

Dear friends, pray that the great and blessed Spirit, who first gives spiritual life, may continue to feed, and nourish, and perfect that life in you, until you shall come to that heaven where all is spiritual, where they need no candle, nor light of the sun. Where no temple is found, because the Lord God and the Lamb is the temple thereof. Where spiritual life shall be developed into its purest form. Where, in spiritual bodies, you shall see the spiritual God, and reign before His throne, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 6:26 TO END

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.