

Appendix 2: Spurgeon on Power

Spurgeon, it goes without saying, made full use of the common expressions of Christendom, the institutional. Although I have written against this Christendom-speak,¹ in this Appendix I let most of Spurgeon's terms stand uncorrected since, as I have argued in the body of this work, Christendom, the institutional, is a major contemporary contributor to the practice I am critically addressing – outward show and talk, but no inward spiritual power or experience – and has been so this past 1700 years. Or, to put it another way, Christendom has encouraged outward show and chat at the expense of power; it has made a massive contribution to the replacement of reality with veneer. Indeed, the institutional cannot do anything other than produce the outward; it cannot produce inward power. The fact is, Christendom is absolute master of show and performance. And, as such, it is a disaster, conforming millions into a state of deception and delusion. If it is objected that countless men and women have savingly benefitted by the institutional, I respond by stating the obvious: God blesses despite – not because of – our practice. But God's blessing or otherwise does not warrant any disobedience to his plain word.

In 1889, Spurgeon, preaching 2 Timothy 3:5 in a sermon entitled 'The Form of Godliness Without the Power',² declared:

They had a form of godliness. What is a form of godliness? It is, first of all, attention to the ordinances of professed Christianity... Every baptised person and every communicant at the Lord's table should be godly and gracious. But neither baptism nor the Lord's supper will secure this. Where there is not the life of God in the soul,

¹ See my *Public*, for instance.

² C.H.Spurgeon sermon number 2088.

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neither holiness or godliness follow upon the ordinances. And thus we may have around us baptised worldlings and men who go from the table of the Lord to drink the cup of devils. It is sad that it should be so. Such persons are guilty of presumption, falsehood, sacrilege and blasphemy. Ah me, we sit beside such every time we meet!³

The form of godliness involves attendance with the assemblies of God's people. Those who have professed Christ are accustomed to come together at certain times for worship and, in their assemblies, they join in common prayer and common praise. They listen to the testimony of God by his servants whom he calls to preach his word with power. They also associate together in church fellowship for purposes of mutual help and discipline...⁴

Christ's people are called sheep for one reason – they love to go in flocks. Dogs do very well separately but sheep do best in company. The sheep of Christ love to be together in the same pasture and to follow in a flock the footsteps of the good Shepherd. Those who constantly associate in worship, unite in church fellowship and work together for sacred purposes have the form of godliness and a very useful and proper form it is. Alas, it is of no value without the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some go further than public worship. They use a great deal of religious talk. They freely speak of the things of God in Christian company. They can defend the doctrines of Scripture, they can plead for its precepts and they can narrate the experience of a believer. They are fondest of talking of what is doing in the church – the tattle of the streets of Jerusalem is very pleasant to them. They flavour their speech with godly phrases when they are in company that will relish it. I do not censure them – on the contrary, I wish there were more of holy talk among professors. I wish we could revive the old habit: 'They that feared the Lord spoke often one to another'.

Holy conversation causes the heart to glow and gives to us a foretaste of the fellowship of the glorified. But there may

³ Original 'every sabbath'. See my *Sabbath Questions; Sabbath Notes & Extracts; The Essential Sabbath*

⁴ I am not so sure that this is common today.

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be a savour of professed Christianity⁵ about a man's conversation and yet it may be a borrowed flavour – like hot sauces used to disguise the staleness of ancient meat. That professed Christianity which comes from the lips outward but does not well up from the deep fountains of the heart is not that living water which will spring up unto eternal life. Tongue godliness is an abomination if the heart is destitute of divine grace.

More than this – some have a form of godliness upheld and published by religious activity. It is possible to be intensely active in the outside work of the church and yet to know nothing of spiritual power. One may be an excellent Sunday-school teacher after a fashion and yet have need to be taught what it is to be born again. One may be an eloquent preacher, or a diligent officer in the church of God and yet know nothing of the mysterious power of the Spirit of truth upon the heart. It is well to be like Martha in service. But one thing is needful – to sit at the Master's feet and learn as Mary did.⁶

When we have done all the work our position requires of us, we may only have displayed the form of godliness. Unless we hearken to our Lord and from his presence derive power, we shall be as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Brethren, I speak to myself and to each one of you in solemn earnestness. If much speaking, generous giving and constant occupation could win heaven, we might easily make sure of it. But more than these are needed. I speak to each one of you. And if I singled out anyone more than another to be the pointed object of my address, it would be the best among us – the one who is doing most for his Master and who, in his inmost soul, is thinking: 'That warning does not apply to me'.

My active and energetic brother, remember the word: 'Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall'. If any of you dislike this searching sermon, your dislike proves how

⁵ Original 'religion'. This note applies throughout Spurgeon's sermon.

⁶ This, as so often, is hard on Martha. I recall a special preaching gathering where the world-famous preacher commended Mary at the expense of Martha, when all the while we all knew that within a few minutes we would be sitting down to a sumptuous tea – provided, no doubt, by the labours of several 'wretched' Marthas.

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much you need it. He that is not willing to search himself should stand self-incriminated by that unwillingness to look at his affairs. If you are right, you will not object to be weighed in the balances. If you are, indeed, pure gold, you may still feel anxiety at the sight of the furnace but you will not be driven to anger at the prospect of the fire. Your prayer will always be: 'Search me, O God and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting'.

I need not enlarge further. You all know what a form of godliness is and most of us who are here present hold fast that form – may we never dishonour it! I trust we are anxious to make that form accurate according to Scripture so that our form of godliness may be that into which the earliest saints were delivered. Let us be Christians of a high type, cast in our Lord's own mould. But do not become sticklers for the form and neglect the inner life – that will never do. Shall we fight about a man's clothes and allow the man, himself, to die?

But now, as these people had not the power of godliness, how did they come to hold the form of it? This needs several answers. Some come by the form of godliness in an hereditary way. Their ancestors were always godly people and they almost naturally take up with the profession of their fathers. This is common and where it is honest, it is most commendable. It is a great mercy when, instead of the fathers, shall be the children. And we may hopefully anticipate that our children will follow us in the things of God, if by example, instruction and prayer, we have sought it before the Lord.

We are unhappy if we do not see our children walking in God's truth. Yet the idea of birthright membership is an evil one and is as perilous as it is unscriptural. If children are taken into the church simply because of their earthly parentage, surely this is not consistent with that description of the sons of God which is found in the inspired Scripture – 'Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God'. Not generation, but REGENERATION, makes the Christian. You are not Christians because you can trace a line of fleshly descent throughout twenty generations of children of God.

You must, yourselves, be born again. For except a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Many,

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no doubt, lay hold naturally on the form of godliness because of family ties – this is poor work... grace does not run in the blood. If you have no better foundation for your professed Christianity than your earthly parentage, you are in a wretched case.

Others have accepted the form of godliness by the force of authority and influence.⁷ They were, as lads, put apprentice to godly men. As girls, they were under the guidance of pious teachers. And as they grew up, they came under the influence of persons of superior intelligence and character who were on the Lord's side. This accounts for their form of godliness. Many persons are the creatures of their surroundings – professed Christianity or lack of it⁸ is with them the result of circumstances. Such persons were led to make a profession of faith in Christ because others did so and friends encouraged them to do the same.

The deep searching of heart, which they ought to have exhibited, was slurred over and they were found among the people of God without having to knock for entrance at the wicket gate.⁹ I do not wish anyone to condemn himself because he was guided to the Saviour by godly friends – far from it. But, nevertheless, there is danger lest we fail to have personal repentance and personal faith and are content to lean upon the opinions of others.

I have seen the form of godliness taken up on account of friendships. Many a time courtship and marriage have led to a formal religiousness, but a lacking heart. The future husband is induced to make a profession of Christianity¹⁰ for the sake of gaining one who was a sincere Christian and

⁷ Happily, I think this pressure is much less today than once it was in the UK. I recall trying to steer a conversation onto the spiritual when my wife and I met two wallers (men mending a stone wall) just outside a village in the Yorkshire Dales. I pointed to the large Congregational chapel close by, remarking on the number of people who must have attended at one time. One of the wallers, slowly straightening his back, replied to the effect that they had to, didn't they? Otherwise they would lose their job on the farm or in the woodyard or whatever. I could not deny the truth of it. End of conversation!

⁸ Original 'irreligion'.

⁹ Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

¹⁰ Original 'religion'.

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would not have broken her Lord's command (not) to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. Godliness should never be put on in order that we may put a wedding ring upon the finger – this is a sad abuse of profession of Christ.¹¹

Other kinds of friendship, also, have led men and women to profess a faith they never had and to unite themselves outwardly or nominally with the church,¹² while in spirit and in truth they were never truly a part of it. I put these things to you that there may be a great searching of heart among us all and that we may candidly consider how we have come by our form of godliness. Certain persons assume the form of godliness from a natural religious disposition. Do not suppose that all unconverted people are without professed Christianity. Much religiousness is found in the heathen...

I mean, then, that to some the form of godliness commends itself because they have a natural leaning that way. They could not be happy unless they were attending where God is worshipped, or unless they were reckoned among the believers in Christ. They must play at professed Christianity even if they do not make it their life business. Let me remind you of the questionable value of that which springs out of fallen human nature. Assuredly it brings no one into the spiritual kingdom, for 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh'. Only 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'. 'You must be born again'. Beware of everything which springs up in the field without the sowing of the husbandman, for it will turn out to be a weed. O Sirs, the day will come when God will try us as with fire and that which comes of unregenerate nature will not stand the test but will be utterly consumed!

I do not doubt that, in these silken days, many have a form of godliness because of the respect it brings them. Time was when to be a Christian was to be reviled, if not to be imprisoned and, perhaps, burned at the stake. Hypocrites were fewer in those days for a profession cost too much. Yet, strange to say, there were some who played the Judas even in those times. Today professed Christianity walks

¹¹ Original 'religious profession'.

¹² Original 'unite themselves visibly with the church'.

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forth in her velvet slippers.¹³ And in certain classes and ranks, if men did not make some profession of Christianity,¹⁴ they would be looked upon with suspicion and therefore men will take the name of Christian upon them and wear professed Christianity as a part of full dress. The cross is at this day worn as a necklace. The cross as the instrument of our Saviour's shame and death is forgotten, and instead thereof, it is made the badge of honour, a jewel wherewith ungodly men may adorn themselves. Is this indicative of the deceitfulness of the age? Beware of seeking respect by a hypocritical godliness. Honour gained by a heartless profession is, in God's sight, the greatest disgrace. The actor may strut in his mimic royalty, but he must take off his crown and robes when the play is over. And what will he then be?

From the days of Iscariot until now, some have taken up the form of godliness to gain thereby. To make gain of godliness is to imitate the son of perdition. This is a perilous road and yet many risk their souls for the lucre which they find therein. Apparent zeal for God may really be zeal for gold...

Some love Christ because they carry his money bag for him. Beware of that kind of godliness which makes a man hesitate until he sees whether a duty will pay or not and then makes him eager because he sees it will answer his purpose.

Once more – I do not doubt that a form of godliness has come to many because it brings them ease of conscience and they are able, like the Pharisee, to thank God that they are not as other men are. Have they not been to church?... They can now go about their daily business without those stings of conscience which would come of neglecting the requirements of professed Christianity. These people profess to have been converted and they are numbered with believers. But, alas, they are not of them.

Of all people these are the hardest to reach and the least likely to be saved. They hide behind the defence¹⁵ of a nominal professed Christianity. They are out of reach of the shot and shell of gospel rebukes. They fly among the

¹³ Echoes of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

¹⁴ Original 'religion'.

¹⁵ Original 'the earthworks'.

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sinners and they have taken up their quarters among the saints. Sad is that man's plight who wears the name of life but has never been quickened by the Holy Spirit. Thus, I have very feebly tried to show what these men had and why they had it.

Let us now remember what they did not have. They had 'the form' of godliness. But they were denied 'the power'. What is that power? God himself is the power of godliness, The Holy Spirit is the life and force of it. Godliness is the power which brings a man to God and binds him to him. Godliness is that which creates repentance towards God and faith in him. Godliness is the result of a great change of heart in reference to God and his character. Godliness looks towards God and mourns its distance from him. Godliness hastens to draw near and rests not till it is at home with God.

Godliness makes a man like God. Godliness leads a man to love God and to serve God. It brings the fear of God before his eyes and the love of God into his heart. Godliness leads to consecration, to [progressive] sanctification, to concentration. The godly man seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and expects other things to be added to him. Godliness makes a man commune with God and gives him a partnership with God in his glorious designs. And so it prepares him to dwell with God forever.

Many who have the form of godliness are strangers to this power and so are in professed Christianity worldly, in prayer mechanical, in public one thing and in private another. True godliness lies in spiritual power and they who are without this are dead while they live...

Look at the church of the present day... 'Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof'. It is the sin of the age – the sin which is ruining the churches of our land...

May you be made of true metal! It were better for you that you had never been born than that you should make Christ dishonourable among the sons of men by leading them to conclude that professed Christianity is all a piece of acting.

The folly of this is illustrated by the fact that there is no value in such a dead form. The form of godliness without the power is not worth the trouble it takes to put it together and keep it together. Imitation jewels are pretty and brilliant. But if you take them to the jeweller he will give you nothing for them. There is a professed Christianity

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which is all paste gems – a godliness which glitters but is not gold. And in that day when you will want to realise something from it, you will be wretchedly disappointed...

There must be vitality and substantiality – or else the form is utterly worthless. And worse than worthless, for it may flatter you into deadly self-conceit...

Peter called hypocrites ‘wells without water’...

My next is a word of discrimination. Those to whom my text has nothing to say will be the first to take it home to themselves. When I discharge my heart with a faithful sermon, certain trembling souls whom I would gladly comfort are sure to think that I mean them. A poor woman, in deep distress, comes to me, crying: ‘Sir, I have no feeling’. Dear heart, she has ten times too much feeling. Another moans out: ‘I am sure I am a hypocrite’. I never met with a hypocrite who thought himself one. And I never shall.

‘Oh’, said another: ‘I feel condemned’. He that feels himself condemned may hope for pardon. If you are afraid of yourselves I am not afraid of you. If you tremble at God’s word, you have one of the surest marks of God’s elect. Those who fear that they are mistaken are seldom mistaken. If you search yourselves and allow the word of God to search you, it is well with you. The bankrupt trader fears to have his books examined. The sound man even pays an accountant to overhaul his affairs. Use discrimination and neither acquit nor condemn yourself without reason.

If the Spirit of God leads you to weep in secret for sin and to pray in secret for divine grace; if he leads you to seek after holiness; if he leads you to trust alone in Jesus, then you know the power of godliness and you have never denied it. You who cry: ‘Oh, that I felt more of the power of the Holy Spirit, for I know that he could comfort and sanctify me and make me live the life of heaven on earth!’, you are not aimed at either by the text or the sermon. For you have not denied the power. No, no, this text does not belong to you but to quite another class of people.

Let me give you a word of admonition. Learn from the text that there is something in godliness worth having. The ‘form’ of godliness is not all – there is a blessed ‘power’. The Holy Spirit is that power and he can work in you to will and to do of God’s good pleasure. Come to Jesus

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Christ, dear souls. Do not come to the minister, nor to the church, in the first place. But come to Jesus. Come and lay yourselves at his feet and say: 'Lord, I will not be comforted unless you comfort me'. Come and take everything at first hand from your crucified Lord. Then shall you know the power of godliness.

Beware of second-hand professed Christianity, it is never worth the carrying home. Get your godliness direct from heaven by the personal dealing of your own soul with your Saviour. Profess only what you possess and rest only in that which has been given you from above. Your heavenly life, as yet, may be very feeble but the grain of mustard seed will grow. You may be the least in Israel but that is better than being the greatest in Babylon.

Four years earlier, Spurgeon, preaching on Hebrews 9:13-14, in a sermon entitled 'The Purging of the Conscience',¹⁶ declared:

Without going into what the world calls actual sin, you and I may come into contact with spiritual death; no, we carry death about us, from which we daily cry to be delivered! For instance, in prayer. Our prayer, in its form and fashion, may be right enough, but if it lacks earnestness and importunity, it will be a dead work. A sermon may be orthodox and correct, but if it is devoid of that holy passion, that divine inspiration without which sermons are but mere pomp – it is a dead work! An alms given to the poor is good as a work of humanity, but it will be only a dead work if a desire to be seen of men is found at the bottom of it. Like the almsgiving of the Pharisee, it will be a mockery of God! Without a spiritual motive, the best work is dead! I confess that I never appear before you without a fear that my preaching may be a dead work among you. It must be so, as it comes from myself – its life must depend upon the spiritual power with which the Lord clothes it.

Do you not think that very much of common Christian profession¹⁷ is dead, or very near to it? You stand and sing, but your hearts do not sing! You bow your heads in prayer, but you are not praying! You read the Scripture, but it is not

¹⁶ C.H.Spurgeon sermon number 1846.

¹⁷ Original 'conversation'.

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inspired to you, so as to breathe its own life into you! Even our meditations and thoughts about God's work may be mere intellectual exercises and so may be devoid of that power which, alone, can make them living works, fit for the service of the living God. Beloved friends, we need the precious blood of Christ to purge our consciences from this death and its working – and to lift us into holy and heavenly life! God is not the God of the dead, but of the living! God accepts not the dead sacrifice, but the living sacrifice. Even of old... the victim must be brought alive to the horns of the altar, or God could not receive it. We must not bring our dead faith or our dead words as an offering to God! Our prayers without emotion; our praises without gratitude; our testimonies without sincerity; our gifts without love – all these will be dead and, consequently, unacceptable. We must present a living sacrifice to the living God, or we cannot hope to be accepted – and for this reason we greatly need the blood of Christ to purge our conscience from dead works.

Do you not, sometimes, fear concerning your services that they have been altogether dead? When we are lukewarm, we hold the golden cup to our God, but he receives it not when our service is dead and chill. Indeed, he says of us when we are lukewarm: 'I will spue you out of my mouth'. The Lord cannot endure a worship which is half dead! All worship must be presented at blood heat – the warmth of life must be there. Do you not fear that even when, as a whole, it is alive, large parts of our service may be dead? Even in the living body of our prayers, may there not be a dead bone? Even in the living body of our praise, may there not be mortification in parts? God help us! What poor creatures we are! Is there one good thing about us? Are we not imperfect in our best works? Are not the sins of our holy things glaring before our consciences this day? Unless we are purged of this, by the blood of Christ, who offered up himself without spot to God, how can we serve this living God and be as priests and kings unto him?

In his *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden*, Spurgeon, quoting Thomas Manton: 'A corpse may be lavishly adorned – but there is no life within!', commented:

Adornments are out of place in the chamber of death – they do but make the scene the more ghastly!

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We have heard of a dead prince who was placed upon a throne, dressed in imperial purple, crowned and sceptered! How pitiful the spectacle! The courtiers pressed to so wretched a travesty, must have loathed the pageantry!

So is it when a man's religion is a dead profession – its ostentatious zeal and ceremonious display are the grim trappings which make the death appear more manifest!...

It is not possible to supply the lack of the divine life. There is an essential difference between a dead child at its best – and a living child at its worst – and it needs no Solomon to see it!

Unless the Spirit of God... gives life, sustains life, and perfects life – none of us can ever dwell with the living God. This is the point to look to – the vestments and trappings are a secondary business.

'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing!' (John 6:63).