

CORRECTING WRONG IDEAS OF RELIGION.

"Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? Mark 7:5.

I read this passage of Scripture when I was a small boy in Sunday School. I thought surely Jesus and His disciples had been eating with their hands dirty. My mother had been after me so many times for this offense that I could not regard it lighty. I knew that Jesus was always right, but I could not understand why He would eat without washing His hands. I was not as stubborn as the old lady of Scotland, but I found it hard to understand.

A Scotch lady who was very strict in keeping the sabbath and very intolerent with all who disagreed with her was told that Christ and His disciples husked grain on the sabbath. "Yes, and I never did think any more of Him for it either," she answered stubbornly.

But Jesus and His disciples were not accused of personal uncleanness. It was only a ceremony they had neglected. It was a ceremony without any reason or any Scriptural authority. It was only a tradition of the elders that backed it. The scribes and pharisees would not eat food till they had baptized their hands to the wrist. This wasing was not for personal cleanliness, but was performed on all occasions. I expect if the truth were bluntly told it was done more to show off their own righteousness to men than for any other reason. That

is the reason they were so angry at the omission. Jesus' simple act of eating without it put their hypocrisy to shame. He was robbing them of one of the dearest possessions of an empty religion, the chance to show off.

Jesus said this was honoring God with their lips when their heart was far from Him. That their heart was far from Him He gave the most positive proof in the next few verses. He called attention to one of the glaring instances in which they had set aside the most solemn command of God for a greedy and selfish end. Moses had laid a solemn duty on every son to care for his father and mother when they were old and helpless. In many of the heathen lands of that day old and feeble people were cruelly left to shift for themselves. Moses had solemnly commanded his people to follow a more merciful way. He had pronounced a fearful curse on any son who turned his father and mother away from his door. But the pharisees had so changed Moses command that a man could turn his father and mother away if he dedicated the cost of their care to the upkeep of the temple.

It was greed that caused the pharisees to order this change in Moses law. Larger offerings for the temple meant larger salaries for them. As a cloak for their greed they probably claimed that the temple was more sacred and holy than man. If either one had to lack it should be the poor father and mother. The very premise of such reasoning is false. There is nothing in this world more sacred than a man or woman. Jesus Christ valued the poorest man

or woman that walked the streets of Jerusalem more than He did the great temple with all its gold and precious stones. This great truth is the only base for a sound religion.

A sound religious faith is the greatest asset of any people. True religion has fostered everything good that enlightened human society possesses. The great science of medicine and healing had its birth in a great religious awakening. All the great arts, poetry, music, sculpture, and painting had their birth in a great religious movement. Human liberty was born in a religious revival. Public education had its birth in a religious movement and was fostered solely by religious forces long before the state ever thought of such a thing. You cannot name a single blessing of enlightened human society that was not cradled in its infancy by a sound religion. A sound religious faith gave us all the kindness, mercy, and human affection that we know. Every tenet of justice, honesty and fair play sprang from religious teaching.

Religion has a greater power for good or evil than any force ever turned on this world. All the powers of art, science, education, and materials are like a broken reed before a great storm when compared to the power religion wields over the spirits of men. A sound religious awakening can do more to transform human lives in a few months than education can in a century. A sound religious faith is the only force that has ever proved its power to permanently build virtue in human lives. A sound religious

faith gives wings to every faculty of the body, mind and spirit of man. A revival of sound religion can add more to the security, prosperity, and happiness of a people than any agency ever tried.

But an unsound religion can undo everything that sound religion has done or can do. As a sound religion is the greatest force ever known for building human lives an unsound faith is the greatest for destroying them. There is no evil known to human life that a false religion cannot breed and foster. True religion gave us human liberty, but a false religion can forge the strongest fetters and shackles ever put on men. It is always the tool of the tyrant and the oppressor. It is always the first weapon that a man seizes who wants to ride in triumph over his fellow men. It is the weapon that Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler are using to enslave the masses of Europe and Asia. A sound religion gives wings to every human faculty, but a dead and decaying religion is the most powerful agency known for keeping men in ignorance and darkness.

A rotten religion can be the most powerful instrument of cruelty and torture ever unleashed among men. A sound religion is the greatest builder of good will ever known. But a rotten one can be the cause of more strife and hatred than anything ever tried. And it can be the most intolerant and brutal of any force known.

The question is often asked seriously, since an unsound religion can be so dangerous, and since men

are so confused as to what sound religion is, Why not do away with all religion and set men free? That is what Voltaire proposed to do. It is doubtful if there has ever been a name more hated than his. But Voltaire was not a wicked man in his personal life. His morals, his justice, his mercy, and his goodwill to all men put the lives of many christians to shame. He had seen more unsound religion than he had sound. He had lived in an unhappy age when true religion had decayed and died. He had seen religion prostituted to every purpose of greed and power. He came to the conclusion that it would be better if men had no religion. But before he died he was confronted with the positive proof that it cannot be done. Men can no more live without religion than they can live without water. A man's body is nearly all water and his spirit is nearly all religious fire. If the supply of either one is cut off he quickly dies. As soon as you quench the fires of a sound religion on the altars of a man's soul the fires of an unsound one are kindled.

This brings us to one of the most baffling questions that ever confronted enlightened human society. What to do with an unsound religious faith. It has existed in every age. What has been man's method of dealing with false religions, and what was Christ's? For ages even good men thought that every unsound faith should be checked by force if necessary. The religious persecutions of early Christianity and the dark ages is generally laid on the heathen and usurped authority of priest and pope. But

practically every order that had the power did the persecuting. Not all the people that were persecuted were good and not all that engaged in it were wholly bad. Most of those who engaged in persecution thought they were stamping out an unsound faith, some of them were unsound. But whether sound or unsound the more a religion was persecuted the stronger it grew generally speaking. After rivers of innocent blood had been shed in a vain effort to stamp out error in religion most enlightened men gave it up. Untill the communist and the facist started it again since the world was we thought religious persecution was a relic of the dark ages.

After trying in vain for a thousand years to stamp out religious error by force men turned to logic and reasoning. They tried to cursh all religious error with strong arguements. This was certainly more merciful than the sword and stake, but sometimes it reached a stage where it was almost as bitter. Every religious movement that did not fit into the orthodox patern to every beam and batten was assailed with a storm of pamphlets, essays, and sermons. Many of the christian ministers of the last half century spent far more time preaching against error than they did preaching the truth. It was during this age of bitter religious controversy that Christian Scheince, Mormonism, and Russelism rose and flourished. How the church stormed at and cursed these movements. But instead of stopping them they grew stronger.

While the christian ministry was so busy with these movements outside a new danger arose in the church. Many people in the church, some of them ignorant preachers, began preaching strange new faiths. Divine healing, the Second blessing, the Unknown tongue, and wild rantings of the Holyrollers began to disturb the peace and quiet of the church life. To the educated preachers these movements were only form of wild noisey emotionalism. It should have been a warning to them. If they had rightly understood these movements they would have known that they were only the undercurrents of men's hunger for a sound religious faith. Instead of meeting the living needs of these men the christian ministry assailed them with all the bitter rancor and sharp sarcasm they had used against the forces outside the church. Their tongues and pens had been sharpened by the controversy with these forces, and they turned their weapons upon these poor deluded men. But instead of correcting their errors they drove them out of the church.

What was Jesus' method of dealing with error in religion? His greatest weapon against unsound religion was the genuine article. Instead of persecuting men or deriding thier errors He gave them something better. Too often the church has been unable to do this. We can point out to men their own weakness and folly, but when they turn to us hungrily and ask for a better way we do not know any. Like Menken, we can show men their folly but we cannot show

them the way of life. Jesus quenched false religious fire by kindling the fires of true faith on men's hearts. The greatest antidote to an unsound religious belief is a sound one. The only way to correct false religion is to give men the true one. A great revival of sound religion will overthrow any false religion ever set up. Sam Jones said he never wasted any time arguing against infidelity. He just preached righteousness to men and infidelity had to hide. That was surely Jesus' method of dealing with wrong religious faiths. We are not lacking today in cold arguments to support a sound religious faith. What we lack is leaders who can kindle the fires of a true faith on the altars of men's hearts.