

## “Personal Religion”

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**THE Christian religion is a personal religion. It is a religion which deals with individuals.** Though men are associated together in the church, this association does not change the nature of Christianity, or of their relation to God. The voice of God speaks not less personally to each component member of the church, and the “power of God to salvation” is no less truly sent “to everyone who believes.”

**The idea that God deals with corporations, or with a church, or a denomination, as such, and not directly with the individuals who compose them, is a most mischievous one, and has been productive of very great harm.** It has caused individuals to look to their church, or their denomination, rather than to the one true Source of spiritual life. Men have been led to think of Christianity as a matter of church relationship, rather than of connection with the living Vine; to look at God through an opaque theological body which eclipses the light of heaven, rather than “with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord,” to become thereby “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). They have come to think of the power and glory of God as coming to them diffused through the atmosphere of the church, rather than as coming into their souls direct from the eternal throne.

This is not the object of the church; this is not the purpose for which God has established it on the earth. The church exists for the purpose of spreading abroad the knowledge of the power of God and salvation, of manifesting to the world the body of Christ, through whom He works as its spiritual Head; not of manifesting to the world its own power, and regulating the supply of the grace of God. **Although connection with the church is proper and a source of great benefit to the individual when the church is not in a fallen state, his relation to God and to the Gospel is the same as though he were living alone upon an island in the midst of the sea.** He has no freer access to the grace of God in the one case than in the other; the “power of God to salvation” would have to be sought by the same means in the one case as in the other.

It is very natural for an individual to associate and compare himself with others, and to look for some advantage to himself through the mere fact of his connection with the world around him; but that which holds true in temporal things must not be carelessly accepted as true in things spiritual. Spiritual blessings are not gained in that way. **There is no spiritual advantage to be gained in looking to others.** Perhaps you are as good as they are, and satisfy your conscience with the reflection that you will fare as well as they in the day of final reckoning; but that will never save you from perdition. It

matters not how others stand, **your own standing is independent of all others.** If another stands he cannot hold you up; and if he falls, his fall does not affect the footing on which you stand. "To his own master he stands or falls." **We follow Christ as individuals, not as companies;** and when we began to say, like Peter, "Lord, what about this man?" His answer is, "What is that to you? You follow Me" (John 21:21, 22).

Christ did not die to save a world. He did not die to save a church, or a denomination. But He did die to save you. And **your relation to Him through His work of salvation is the same as if there were no other person in the world besides yourself, or as if you alone of all earth's inhabitants were destined to obtain salvation. And therefore His pardon and love are for you; His power is for you; His wisdom is for you; His deliverance from sin is for you; the Christian experience, with all that it contains, as revealed in the word of God, is for you, irrespective of every other person, church, or organization in the world.** And you will get them by your own individual seeking.

Notice how this idea of the personality of the Christian life is set forth in the one hundred and sixteenth psalm. By giving emphasis to the personal pronouns as they occur, the force of the psalmist's testimony will be more clearly seen:—

"I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live. The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!" Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. Return to your rest, O my soul, For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord In the land of the living. I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted." I said in my haste, "All men are liars." What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people. Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints. O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord Now in the presence of all His people, In the courts of the Lord's house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!" (Psalms 116:1–19 NKJV)

This is a true Christian experience. **It mattered not to the psalmist at such a time what the church in general was doing or receiving, or how the Lord was dealing**

**with this one or that one around him; he rejoiced because God had heard his voice and his supplications.** The pains of hell had gotten hold upon him, and he needed a personal deliverance, and this was what he found. He had been in bondage, but now could say, "You have loosed my bonds" (v 16). It is not enough for the soul bound with the chains of sin and Satan to sit in contemplation of the goodness and mercy of God, and realize that He has loosed the bonds of others. That would only make his own bondage the more grievous. **Nothing but a personal experience in "the liberty by which Christ has made us free" can bring heavenly joy and comfort to any of the fallen children of men.**

Can you join with the psalmist in these utterances of gladness and praise to God? Has God heard your voice and your supplications? Has He loosed your bonds? If not, then no matter what He may be doing for the church with which you are connected, you are living altogether outside of the blessed privileges that God offers to you through the Gospel. Seek Him for yourself; believe Him for yourself; and He will clothe you with His salvation.

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