

USELESS KINDS OF RELIGION

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

There are two ways by which a man may lose his own soul. What are they?

1. He may lose his soul by living and dying *without any religion* at all. He may live and die like a beast, prayerless, godless, graceless, faithless. This is a sure way to hell. Mind that you do not walk in it.

2. He may lose his soul by taking up *some kind of religion*. He may live and die contenting himself with a false Christianity and resting on a baseless hope. This is the commonest way to hell there is.

What do I mean by useless kinds of religion? I will tell you. The first thing I wish to say is this. *A religion is entirely useless in which Jesus Christ is not the principal object* and does not fill the principal place.

There are only too many baptized men and women who practically know nothing about Christ. Their religion consists in a few vague notions and empty expressions. “They trust they are no worse than others; they keep to their Church; they try to do their duty; they do nobody any harm; they hope God will be merciful to them! They trust the Almighty will pardon their sins and take them to heaven when they die.” This is about the whole of their religion.

But what do these people know practically about Christ? Nothing: nothing at all! What experiential acquaintance have they with His offices and work, His blood, His righteousness, His mediation, His priesthood, His intercession? None: none at all! Ask them about a saving faith—ask them about being born again of the Spirit—ask them about being sanctified in Christ Jesus. What answer will you get? You are a barbarian to them. You have asked them simple Bible questions; but they know no more about them experientially than a Buddhist or a Muslim.

And yet this is the religion of hundreds of thousands of people who are called Christians all over the world.

If you are a man of this kind, I warn you plainly that such Christianity *will never take you to heaven*. It may do very well in the eyes of men; it may pass muster very decently at the [church] meeting, in the place of business, in the House of Commons, or in the streets. But it will never comfort you. It will never satisfy your conscience. *It will never save your soul.*

I warn you plainly that all notions and theories about God being merciful without Christ and excepting through Christ are baseless delusions and empty fancies. Such theories are as purely an idol of man’s invention. They are all of the earth, earthy: they never came down from heaven. The God of heaven has sealed and appointed Christ as the one and only Savior and way of life; and all who would be saved must be content to be saved by Him, or they will never be saved at all. I give you fair warning. *A religion without Christ will never save your soul* (Joh 14:6)!

But I have another thing yet to say. A religion is entirely useless *in which you join anything with Christ* in the matter of saving your soul. You must not only depend on Christ for salvation, but you must depend on Christ only and Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9).

There are multitudes of baptized men and women who profess to honor Christ, but in reality do Him great dishonor. They give Christ a certain place in their system of religion, but not the place which God intended Him to fill. Christ alone is not “all in all” to their souls (Eph 1:23). No: it is either Christ and the Church, or Christ and the Sacraments, or Christ and His ordained ministers, or Christ and their own goodness, or Christ and their own prayers, or Christ and their own sincerity and charity—on which they practically rest their souls.

If you are a Christian of this kind I warn you also plainly that your religion is an offence to God. You are changing God’s plan of salvation into a plan of your own devising. You are, in effect, deposing Christ from His throne by giving the glory due to Him to another. I care not who it is that teaches you your religion and on whose word you build. Whether he be Pope or Cardinal, Archbishop or Bishop, Dean or Archdeacon, Presbyter or Deacon, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Baptist or Independent, Methodist or Plymouth Brother—whosoever adds anything to Christ, teaches you wrong (Gal 1:6-8).

I care not what it is that you add to Christ. Whether it be the necessity of joining the Church of Rome, or of being an Episcopalian, or of becoming a Free Churchman, or of giving up the liturgy, or of being baptized by immersion, whatever you may practically add to Christ in the matter of salvation, you do Christ an injury.

Take heed what you are doing. Beware of giving to Christ’s servants the honour due to none but Christ. Beware of giving the Lord’s ordinances the honour due unto the Lord. Beware of resting the burden of your soul on anything but Christ, and Christ alone. Beware of having a religion which is of no use, and cannot save.

[Christ] left the glory He had from all eternity with the Father and came down into the world to provide salvation. He took our nature upon Him and was born as a man. As a man He did the will of God perfectly (Mat 17:5), which we all had left undone (Rom 3:23). As a man He suffered on the cross the wrath of God which we ought to have suffered (Rom 6:23). He brought in everlasting righteousness for us (Dan 9:24). He redeemed us from the curse of a broken law (Luk 1:68; Rev 5:9). He opened a fountain for all sin and uncleanness. He died for our sins. He rose again for our justification (Rom 4:25)). He ascended to God's right hand, and there sat down, waiting till His enemies should be made his footstool (Luk 20:42-43). And there He sits now, [calling] to all who will come to Him, interceding for all who believe in Him, and managing by God's appointment all that concerns the salvation of souls (Joh 3; Eph 1-2; Rom 3-5).

It is an awful thing to have no religion at all. To have an immortal soul committed to your charge and neglect it—this is dreadful.

But it's no less an awful thing to be content with *a religion than can do you no good*.

Do not let this be your case! □