

The Religion of God

All the Most High requires of men is just to believe in what He has done, what He teaches, and what He promises; to obey the law of faith; to take care of the poor of His flock, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world. This is pure and undefiled religion. But, alas! Where is it to be found? Religion being the divine remedy for sin, it is evident that when the sin of the world is taken away, religion will be abolished. So long as sin exists in the earth, so long will there be separation between God and men; for it is sin, and that only, which interrupts man's fellowship with God and His angels, as it obtained before the fall. — Elpis Israel, p. 165.

THE word "religion" as understood and practised by the world which calls itself "christian", and the religion which emanates from God, are two entirely different concepts. The former is the product of the flesh; the latter is of divine origin. At times, in the befuddled minds of theologians, the two become somewhat mixed. Such a mixture will always prove disastrous. Either what is believed and taught is the Truth, or it is error. Mixing the two cannot produce Truth, only confusion and a religious philosophy which is powerless to save men and women from their sins.

As Brother Thomas makes clear, the religious world "is utterly destitute of the spirit which belongs to God's religion; because it is ignorant of the gospel..." (p. 164).

If popular christianity desired to come to a sound knowledge of the Truth, it would be necessary for them to "renounce the traditions of 'the fathers' and 'mothers' of the apostasy" (p. 165). This is something they will never do. There are three basic reasons for maintaining their present position.

[1] They are not prepared to seek the Truth at the cost of casting aside their present philosophies; [2] To obey the Truth would require them to repudiate their present organisations and reconstitute themselves in harmony with the requirements of Scripture; [3] In bowing to either of the foregoing requirements, they would unavoidably pay too high a price: financially, politically, socially, influentially. Consequently, followers of the "fathers" and "mothers" of popular christianity — especially those who hold the power of leadership — have little genuine interest in pursuing a search for truth. They have too much to lose, and too little understanding of what they are really losing.

Prove All Things

With such an unchanging attitude, says Brother Thomas, "they make of none effect the word of the living God". He is alluding to the Lord's comment in Mk. 7:13. The words "none effect" (Gr. *akuroo*) express what happens when the *power* of the word is removed, for it signifies "to deprive of authority". Thus, asserts Brother Thomas, by ignoring the

authority of the Word, they fail "to 'search the Scriptures' according to the divine command, 'proving all things and holding fast that which is good'." The Greek word rendered "search" (Jn. 5:39) is in the second person, *imperative*. The Lord was stressing that his comment was no casual command, but a strong exhortation. It is a matter of the utmost urgency that all who hear his words should strive diligently and expeditiously to know and understand the Truth. After all, eternal salvation depends upon discovering and obeying the Truth; not part of it, or a substitute for it.

Christendom does not operate upon the principle: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good... knowing what is acceptable unto the Lord" (1Thes. 5:21; Eph. 5:10). Were they to do so, their power and influence would be gone and their systems of religion would collapse. Hence, as Brother Thomas states, they do not understand "the obedience of faith, which is the sole criterion of love to God".

Is it not necessary that those who claim to hold the Truth should consistently remember that "the *sole* criterion of love of God" is "the obedience of faith"? Obedience of faith means upholding the righteousness of God above all other considerations.

Why should we stress this vital issue at this point? Because there is increasing evidence that within the brotherhood this essential element of faithfulness is being eroded through the growth of humanistic philosophies. There is increasing emphasis upon human relationships whilst a decreasing degree of importance is being given to the God-man covenant which is sealed in the act of baptism.

The First and Greatest Commandment

Human philosophy, in any form, represents a great danger to the continuing survival of the Truth in its purity.

The Scriptures, from beginning to end, teach clearly that man's first and greatest obligation is to serve Yahweh and to do that which is pleasing to *Him*, whether flesh is satisfied with this arrangement or not. The *first* and greatest commandment is that men should "love Yahweh thy Elohim with *ALL* thy heart, and with *ALL* thy soul, and with *ALL* thy mind". "All" or "the whole" is the precise meaning of the Greek word in Christ's quotation from Deut. 6:5.

Since the fulfilment of this commandment requires the "*all*" of true worshippers, it leaves room for nothing else. Strictly accepting this, what should be understood in regard to implementing the *second* greatest commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"? There is only one obvious answer: the second commandment must be fulfilled on the basis of fulfilling the first. If the first is not fulfilled as the *first* priority, it is impossible to fulfil the second in a way that will please Yahweh.

This understanding of the two greatest commandments clearly shows the folly of substituting Christ's teachings with humanistic philosophies. If human considerations are placed *first*, it can only be at the expense of total allegiance to the first and greatest commandment, thereby giving Yahweh second place: a demotion He will not accept.

What of the Brotherhood?

The words which follow (p. 165) appear at the head of this article. They show that the basis for faithful religion is very clear and easily understood. Brother Thomas' words are simple, straight-forward and uncomplicated. The theologians of christendom would find his intelligible teaching impossible to implement, without destroying the religious systems their forebears have created.

But what of the brotherhood? Are

these clear-cut priorities as distinctly understood and executed as in earlier generations? There are plain indications that in some ecclesias today there is a reluctance to speak forth these fundamental principles, as in the past. Why is the Truth not spelt out in clear, vigorous terms, such as are found in *Elpis Israel*? Some appear to be more fearful of offending men than God. Is this due to rising pressures for a more liberalised interpretation and application of the Truth? Are we facing a repetition of ecclesial conditions which existed in the days of Noah? Concerning that period Brother Thomas has written: "A spirit of liberalism had arisen among the sons and daughters of Seth, the result of an expiring faith" (p. 118). Is history repeating itself in these "last days" as Christ foretold (Mat. 24:37-39; Lk. 17:26-30).

Where is the fervent zeal, the single-minded attitude of preaching the Truth "without fear or favor" which characterised Christadelphian platform work in the past? Current trends in this regard do not augur well for the future of the community. Rather, they point toward a decrease in standards of understanding and exposition of the Word, together with a willingness to compromise on standards and policies upon which many ecclesias have stood firm in the past.

It is vital for ecclesias to return to the robust, forthright, uncompromising standards of exposition and teaching, such as are found in the pages of *Elpis Israel*. If this is not done, marital, moral, social and doctrinal pressures will continue to drain the strength from ecclesias and weaken the spiritual stability of meetings.

Religion — More Than A Formality

"Religion", says Brother Thomas, is "the divine remedy for sin". In these present times, do ecclesias understand — as in the past — that the purpose of

religion is to provide the means whereby we might find forgiveness of sins? Is it appreciated that this requires a daily application of the mind to absorb the Spirit-Word, in harmony with regular communings with the Father in seeking His guidance, direction and blessing? And what of the world's view of the Atonement, that "Christ has done it all for us", and therefore "religion" for believers, is little more than a formality? Should we not be aware, and fearful, that a form of this false doctrine is being accepted in ecclesias today, to make life in the Truth easier and less demanding?

Brother Thomas reminds his readers: "the wages of sin is death". "So long as sin exists in the earth, so long will there be separation between God and men; for it is sin, and that only, which interrupts man's fellowship with God". Isaiah pronounces the inevitable verdict which will be directed against faithless worshippers: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2).

Sin is the destroyer of mankind. To avoid a sentence of eternal death, believers must serve God "in spirit and in truth" with a disposition that will result in God granting them forgiveness. It is essential to daily worship the great God of heaven in a way that is acceptable to Him.

Paul warned the Corinthians of the ever-present danger of failure to honor and walk in the ways of the Truth: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye have stood; by which also ye are being saved, if ye hold fast what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain" (1Cor. 15:1-2; lit. Gr.). The final words indicate that there would be some who *would* "believe in

vain", the Truth not permitting it to sufficiently transform their lives to the point where the Christ-like character would be evident in them.

No More Curse

The human race will pass through "7,000 years of probation" which will end with "none of the Serpent's seed alive. They will have been utterly destroyed; for only 'the meek shall inherit the earth, and delight themselves with abundance of peace'." In drawing this chapter to a conclusion, Brother Thomas presents an overall concept of the time when "the tabernacle of God" will be "with men" and "He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them as their God. And He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be NO MORE DEATH".

The readers should now be aware that "religion begins in the third chapter of Genesis, and finds the record of its end in the last two chapters of Revelation". God began the work of reconciling the human race to Himself promptly after the fall, and will continue that work ceaselessly until it is brought to the glorious fruition He desires. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death... that God may be all in all" (1Cor. 15:26-28).

Seven thousand years of loving labor and sacrifice by the Creator will eventually be brought to perfect completion when the One Eternal Spirit is manifested and glorified in a perfected, immortalised population.

Summary

Brother Thomas brings this fifth chapter to a close with a fifteen-point summary. Hereunder are brief comments on each of the points, with an accompanying thoughtful examination of the Scriptural references that may prove helpful as the reader studies them.

[1] True religion comes only from God. Sin has created a gulf between

God and man, which can be bridged only by the means God has provided. All who desire to find eternal salvation must find true religion, and obey it (Psa. 119:97-104; 145:18).

[2] Mankind requires to be purified from all defilement which is produced through sin, whether mental, moral, or physical (Heb. 9:14; 10:19-22; Eph. 5:26; Phil. 3:20-21).

[3] The light of divine truth makes a person aware of his sinful state and sin prone nature (Jn. 17:17; 1Cor. 1:18; 2:14).

[4] Faith and hope, based upon sound knowledge of the Scriptures, provide the means of spiritual birth and renewal. There is no other means whereby mankind may be reconciled to God (Acts 8:12; 1Pet. 3:21; Eph. 5:8-11).

[5] The carnal mind can never be rehabilitated because it cannot be changed;

[6] Faith comes into existence through an enlightened intellect; but is of little value unless it is manifested in a way of life (Gen. 22:1-19; Rom. 4:9-22; Heb. 11:6).

[7] The purpose of the Truth is to cause men and women to think and act in harmony with God's will; to eventually become perfect reflections of Yahweh (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:1-4).

[8] Man-made religion is of the flesh. True religion comes only from God (Prov. 3:5-6; Jer. 10:23; Psa. 119:1-6).

[9] Belief is of no value unless it leads to obedience. It is this combination that results in an individual becoming, even though imperfectly, the Word made flesh (Ecc. 12:13; Eph. 4:1, 17; Heb. 5:9).

[10] It is necessary to change from the thinking and ways of the flesh before the Abrahamic disposition can be developed (Jn. 17:21; Rom. 12:1-5; 2Pet. 1:4).

[11] Living the Truth requires self-

less dedication and personal sacrifice (Jas. 1:27; 1Jn. 3:18).

[12] The O.T. types, though instructive, must not obscure the substance, which is Christ (Gal. 4:9; Col. 2:16-17).

[13] As Sovereign Lord over His creation, Yahweh alone has the right to determine the principles of religion

(Heb. 7:18-19; 9:26-28; 10:4; Rom. 8:1-3; 6:6).

[14] A covering is necessary for sin (Mat. 22:11; Gal. 3:27; Rev. 16:15).

[15] Knowledge must bring repentance, then obedience. Faith is necessary in regard to the present and the future (2Pet. 1:1-3, 8; Jn. 17:3; Acts 3:19; Heb. 11:1-3). — *John Ullman.*

COMMUNICATIONS

COMMENTS FROM READERS WORLDWIDE IN DISCUSSION WITH THE EDITOR.

The Redeemed and the Onlookers.

"An interesting point was made to us a while ago about Isaiah 63. In v. 1, it states: 'Who is this that cometh...?' In Mat. 21 these words are taken up in the context of Jesus entering Jerusalem. In v. 9 the people with Jesus cried: 'Blessed is he *that cometh* in the name of the Lord'. But in the next verse the people who were in the city ask: 'Who is this?' So the question in Isa. 63:1 is taken apart and quoted by two different parties. The people with Jesus, corresponding to the redeemed when Jesus will march from Bozrah, knew who he was. But the people in Jerusalem, corresponding to the Jews in Jerusalem when Christ returns, did not know who he was." — *Nigel Bernard (Wales).*

Isaiah 63 depicts a conqueror unknown to both Israel and the world, but whose identity will be recognised in the victory over flesh politically that will follow his mighty works. Ultimately, he will be associated with "children who will not lie" (v. 8). But what a wonderful expression occurs in v. 9. Yahweh is therefore not indifferent to the sufferings of His people, and has a purpose in trial and discipline. As Christ felt the sufferings

of his people (Acts 9:4), so we are called upon to manifest the lovingkindness and mercy of the Father in our experiences with each other. What a wonderful moment when we are able to share these experiences in immortality and glory, associated with all those who have come through the valley of the shadow of death, to the great glory and joy of redemption. — *Ed.*

Logos in Kenya.

"It has been our pleasure to receive the monthly periodical, Logos, as a gift for the last twelve months. We have found the magazines a great help and assistance in our walk towards the kingdom, and have been sufficiently impressed with the policy of Logos to desire to continue to receive the magazine. The subscription fee is very modest, but we can't afford it, as some of us are the refugees as a result of recent political storms in Kenya and tribal land clash victims. We would like to be transferred to the permanent list to receive Logos free of cost" — *Martin Chemiati (East Africa Kenya).*

The letter contains ten names of readers in Lurambi Ecclesia, Kitale in