

## Chapter 3

### Life vs. Form

I am come that they might have life, and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

Pentecost is an experience, not an organization.

Preacher Clark in a 1974 sermon

#### “Contrary to Us”

All institutions, whether organized for political, religious, or social reasons, are defined by their forms, that is, by the rules that those institutions require of those who belong to it. Some forms provide benefits, such as respectful behavior in a library that some schools require of children, or the good conduct required by laws of a country, such as honest business dealings, or the upright conduct required by certain religions, such as showing mercy and helping the poor. Other institutional forms do harm, such as the forms of cruelty that some Islamic schools teach children; or the immoral forms authorized by evil governments such as Nazism, which turned neighbor against neighbor; or the gruesome forms of some ancient religions, such as human sacrifice and temple prostitution. In all cases, the forms defined the institution, and every institution is sustained by adherence to its forms. If people cease practicing the forms of an institution, that institution will cease to exist.

The law of Moses, being an institution, was also defined by its forms. Observing holy days was a form; offering animal sacrifice was a form; circumcision was a form; even having commandments written down in a document was itself a form. Those forms, being from God, were the most beneficial forms mankind had ever known, and Moses' law was a unique institution in that regard. It was uniquely able to guide fallen man into a lifestyle which pleased God. Paul said if there had ever been a law that could impart life and righteousness, Moses' law would have done it (Gal. 3:21), but it could not.

The reason Paul said that the law was “contrary to us” (Col. 2:14) is that its commandments were holy and we were not (Rom. 7:12, 14), and living according to commandments that were holy was contrary to our sinful nature. That is what made the law of Moses, in Peter's words, “a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” (Acts 15:10). Likewise, when Paul spoke of the enmity between God's Spirit and our fleshly nature (Gal. 5:17), he was talking about the difference between God's nature, which is good, and human nature, which is not good and can do good only by complying with acceptable forms.

#### The Law

Moses' law, though from God, was a physical thing and, therefore, could not enter human hearts and change human nature. The law could only give commandments from the outside of man. But in the appointed time, through His beloved Son, God made a way to put that law where we needed it to be, namely, within us. God gave this precious promise to Israel:

Hebrews 8

8b. The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. . . .

10a. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my laws into their mind and write them on their heart.”

That is not a form; it is life, the abundant, holy life for which Jesus gave himself, that we might have it. Before that eternal life was given on Pentecost morning, the entire human race had no choice but to live in a world of forms.

God gave Moses ceremonial forms that would do men good, forms that would be a light to the nations as long as they were faithfully observed. Moreover, the forms of Moses’ law were designed by God as prophetic “shadows” of the coming Messiah (Col. 2:16–17). Without the Son, those shadows would have been no shadows at all because there would have been no light behind them. The principal function of the law’s forms was to be prophetic symbols to Israel of God’s Son, their Messiah. That is why the Son’s coming fulfilled the law, as he told his disciples, “Do not think that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn’t come to destroy, but to fulfill” (Mt. 5:17). Then, when the resurrected Son of God had finished his work on earth and sat down at the Father’s right hand, his glory was so great that it reduced the glory of the shadow, the law, to absolutely nothing:

2Corinthians 3

- 7a. If the ministry of death by letters engraved on stones [the law] came with glory,
- 8. how shall the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?
- 9. For if the ministry of condemnation be glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness overflow with glory.
- 10. Indeed, that which was once made glorious [the law] has been made not glorious in this regard, on account of the surpassing glory [of Christ].

The authority of Jesus to change God’s covenant with Israel is astonishing. Solomon said that nothing God does can be changed (Eccl. 3:14), but by bringing the law of Moses to an end, Jesus proved that anything God does can be changed if God sends someone to change it. Christ made the holy law of Moses non-holy—an unthinkable accomplishment—and those who continued in the forms of the law after the Spirit was given were actually dishonoring the God who gave them! The author of Hebrews said of Jesus, “This man is worthy of as much greater glory than Moses as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house” (Heb. 3:3). Moses gave Israel holy rites and rules, but Christ makes man himself holy the way God is holy, that is, holy without any rites or rules.

### Using Dead Things

At God’s command, Israel’s priests used dead things in their ministry. Those things were prophetic symbols, but they themselves had no life, and they gave none. The priests used dead flesh and dead blood of dead animals in sacrifices; they washed themselves with dead water; they ate dead food, clothed themselves in dead garments, and observed dead holy days. But now, also at God’s command, our heavenly High Priest, Jesus, ministers eternal life to us, and the eternal life that Jesus gives so far surpasses what forms can do that it stripped even the law’s holy forms of their glory and made them useless. How great is the Son! Just his shadow was the holiest thing the earth had ever known, and yet, after he came, the once holy shadows of the law were made useless, “dead works” (Heb. 6:1; 9:14), worthless as dung in comparison to the life Jesus gives (Phip. 3:5–8).

God’s life makes the law something that we no longer learn about by reading from a dead book. With His life, we *feel* the law of God; we sense what pleases God when we partake of His nature (cf. 2Pet. 1:4). With God’s Spirit in us, we love Him by nature, and we love our neighbors as ourselves,

which the law of Moses could only command people to do (Lev. 19:18; Dt. 6:5). How much better is this covenant, in which we may know within ourselves what is good, and have the strength to do it, instead of searching in a book for the proper form to follow, and have no spiritual strength!

Paul rejoiced that “when we were yet without strength, at the appointed time, Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). Early in his life, he was among the ungodly, though striving to observe every form of the law, he yearned to be delivered from his ungodly nature, and was thrilled when Jesus delivered him:

#### Romans 7

22. With the inner man, I joyfully consent to the law of God,
23. but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and taking me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.
24. Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?
- 25a. I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

#### Romans 8

2. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death!
3. For what the law could not do, in that it was powerless because it was of the flesh, God did, after He sent His Son in the form of sinful flesh to deal with sin.

An institution is a *what*, a dead thing. Israelites like Paul needed a *who* to help them, someone who was alive to God, and before the Spirit was given to men in Acts 2, no one was alive to God except His Son. Before that day, no one but Jesus knew God’s thoughts or felt His feelings, but on that day, everything changed.

#### Alive to God

The message of the gospel is that in order for us to be given true life, a true life had to be given for us, and Jesus did this when he “gave himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God for a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 5:2). “By this,” John said, “we have come to know love, in that he laid down his life for us” so that we might receive the life of God (1Jn. 3:16a).

By the Spirit, God changes our nature so that we can be holy as He is holy (Mt. 5:48) and live holy lives naturally, as He does, without reliance upon forms. That holy nature, purchased for us by the sacrifice of Christ, brings with it the knowledge of God, making us alive to God’s thoughts and feelings. It is utterly free from form because God is. He is the great “I Am” (Ex. 3:14) because He is perfectly free to do as He will in any situation. God does all things, Paul said, “according to the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11), and everything He does is perfect.

We cannot predict what God will do next because He has no habits or style. He will do differently in situations that are virtually identical. For example, in Exodus (17:5–6), when Israel begged for water in the wilderness, God commanded Moses to strike a rock on Mount Sinai, but later, in Numbers (20:7–8), when Israel again begged for water, God commanded Moses to speak to a rock instead. So, we cannot determine God’s will today based on what He did yesterday; His will is new each moment because He is a living God. No institution has the power to reveal God’s will to us, for no form can create within us the knowledge of God. Regardless of the forms we observe, without God’s Spirit we are as dead to Him as forms are (cf. Mt. 8:22). No institution, whether its forms be those of the law that came from God or the forms that men have devised, can ever make us alive to God.

The nature of fallen man prefers form over life because with form, he can continue in his sinful ways while maintaining an appearance of goodness. When Jesus said that those whom he made free would be “free indeed” (Jn. 8:36), he meant that they would be liberated from bondage to the sinful nature that desires form, set free to live the way God lives:

Romans 6

20. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness.

...

22. But being now made free from sin, and being made slaves to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and in the end, eternal life.

### Israel's First Self-Willed Institution: A Kingdom

Paul said that true faith looks to what cannot be seen rather than to what is visible, “for things that are seen are temporal, but things that are not seen are eternal” (2Cor. 4:18). To carnally minded people, God’s kind of government, that is, someone with an invisible anointing, does not seem as dependable as an earthly institution because the flesh trusts more in what it can see than in what it cannot see. When Israel first took possession of Canaan, God’s way of governing Israel was to anoint individuals, such as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson, to deliver the nation whenever it fell into trouble. That way of governing Israel never failed, but many wanted the kind of government other nations had, which to them seemed more dependable. They did not understand that their demand for a king amounted to a demand for something more dependable than God, not just more dependable than the men and women God sent. Their rejection of God’s judges and prophets was, in reality, a rejection of God Himself:

1Samuel 8

6. When they said, “Give us a king to judge us,” the thing was evil in Samuel’s eyes. And Samuel prayed to the LORD.

7. And the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”

It is only of God’s mercy that Israel’s rejection of Him as king was not the end of Israel’s story. What a humble God! He was deeply grieved for His people’s choice, and yet, He still loved and cared for them. In fact, centuries before this event, knowing that His people would one day reject Him and demand an earthly king, God took the time to counsel them, through Moses, on the best way to reject Him so that the nation would not immediately collapse:

Deuteronomy 17

14. When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you and have possessed it and settled in it, then you will say, “I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me.”

15. You must set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose; you will set one from among your brothers as king over you. You may not appoint over you a foreigner, one who is not your brother.

16. He shall not multiply to himself horses, nor return the people to Egypt in order to heap up horses, for the LORD has said to you, “You are never again to return by this way.”

17. Nor shall he multiply wives to himself, so that his heart will not turn aside, and he shall not greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

Time after time in the Old Testament, God showed Himself to be supremely meek, so meek, in fact, that He prefers that we have our way instead of His, except that He loves us and knows the trouble into which our ways will lead us (Prov. 11:19; 14:12). But those who walk in the Spirit think the way God thinks; they prefer that He have His way instead of having their own. That is far better for us, and our wellbeing is God's great desire.

Samuel pleaded with the people not to insist on having an earthly king (1Sam. 8:10–18), but Israel refused to hear him. Samuel warned them that a king would oppress them: “You will cry out in that day because of your king that you have chosen for yourselves,” he protested, “but the LORD will not answer you in that day!”

1Samuel 8

19. But the people refused to give heed to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No! But a king shall be over us,  
20a. so that we may be like all the nations.”

After this meeting with the people, Samuel, heavy-hearted, returned to the LORD and told Him what the people had said. And the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to their voice, and make them a king” (1Sam. 8:22). So, Israel demanded and obtained a kingdom such as other nations had (1Sam. 8:5, 20), an institution that would represent them to the world, instead of being content with an anointed man who represented God to them.

Paul said that the stories written in the Old Testament were written so that New Testament believers could learn from them (Rom. 15:4). Israel's example is a warning that God will allow us to reject Him and to form an institution for ourselves instead, if that is what we want. Early New Testament believers did not heed Israel's example, and they failed to trust the invisible Spirit of God to lead them. God let them have their own way, to choose their own ministers, formulate their own doctrines, and set their own standards of conduct and worship. So it is today. The Father does not force Himself on His children. But at what price do we spurn Him?

#### Israel's Second Self-Willed Institution: Judaism

When the Son of God came, the kingdom which Israel demanded and obtained was long gone, for foreign powers had conquered the nation, with Rome finally imposing its will on the Jews. Unable to keep its kingdom, Israel instead developed a culture, Judaism, which blended the ceremonial forms of Moses' law with forms which God did not give them, forms which they often honored above the ones that came from God (Mt. 15:1–6; Mk. 7:9–13). That was the culture into which the Son of God was sent, and it was the end result of centuries of sinful self-will.

When worshippers are sinful, God detests whatever form of worship they offer Him (cf. Prov. 21:27). The law was intended to guide Israel in righteous living so that they could worship God acceptably and, in God's time, recognize His Son when he came. God bitterly complained when Israel lived immorally and yet, used the ceremonial forms He had given them as a cover for their sin. In doing so, they made the holy ceremonies which God had ordained for their blessing to be a stench in His nostrils:

Isaiah 1

11. What is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? says the LORD. I am glutted with burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fatlings, and I take no pleasure in the blood of bullocks, and young rams, and he-goats.

12. Who has required you to trample my courts when you come to appear before me?
13. Stop bringing worthless offerings! Incense is an abomination to me. New moon, and Sabbaths, and the calling of a convocation, I cannot bear. The sacred Assembly is nothing to me.
14. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hates! They are a burden to me. I have worn myself out bearing them.
15. And when you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood!

God had commanded Israel to perform those sacrifices, burn that incense, observe those holy feasts, honor every Sabbath day and new moon; and have holy convocations in His chosen holy place, the temple. But doing all that disgusted Him because they were ignoring His moral commandments, excusing their immorality because they obeyed the rules concerning ceremonial form. And God hated it.

### The Illusion

Contrary to what one might expect, as the Israelites drifted from God's moral commandments, they became more religious, not less, more devoted to ceremonial forms. But by no means is that a characteristic unique to ancient Israel; it has been the way of fallen man from the beginning. Historically, the greatest wickedness on earth has always been found in cultures devoted to religious form. And seeing that has made some men reject religion altogether.

Ignorant of the life of God and seeing religion as nothing more than ceremonial forms which provide man an illusion of happiness, Karl Marx said, "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is a demand for their true happiness. The call to abandon illusions about their condition is the call to abandon a condition which requires illusions."<sup>1</sup> If we define religion as Marx understood it, that is, as an empty exercise "providing man an illusory happiness," then he was right to view religion as "the opiate of the people".

Ceremonial religion is indeed a placebo for the ungodly; sinners perform rites to relieve their conscience and imagine they are better for it, when nothing has changed. But unknown to Marx, and to most of the world, life in the Spirit is "pure and undefiled religion before God" (Jas. 1:27), and that religion is no illusion at all. It is instead the end of man's illusions and the beginning of true life for him. With his blood, Jesus purchased true happiness for us, and he invites all people to abandon the illusion of happiness provided by ceremonial form so that their feelings of guilt, Marx' "condition which requires illusions," is done away with, and true happiness is found.

### The New Option

The longer an institution stands, the more stable and secure it appears to be. Very old religious institutions exude an aura of sanctity which provides its members with a false sense of security, "the illusory happiness" of which Marx spoke. Each generation faces a greater temptation to go the way of institutions instead of hearing the messengers of God because with each generation, institutions grow older and more revered. Regardless of how long any institution exists, however, and how stable it appears to be, it cannot replace God's representatives because God does not anoint and send institutions; He anoints and sends people.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"*, translated by Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 131.

When the Son came into the world, the elders of Israel were devoted to their Institution and were neglecting, said Jesus, “the weightier matters of the law: justice, and mercy, and faith” (Mt. 23:23). The elders of Israel had become representatives of an institution rather than of God. Just as the Son represented God and *was* God, Israel’s leaders represented and were their Institution, Judaism.

During those centuries, the people of Israel grew accustomed to the Institution. They were taught by the men of the Institution that the Institution was of God, and so, the people supported both it and them, thinking to do God service. Those men maintained their influence over people by convincing them that God wanted them to live within the confines of the Institution’s forms and traditions. When the Son of God was revealed, however, he broke open the gates of the Institution and offered the people an option they had never had, the option of receiving God’s kind of life instead of continuing in a life of forms! For that, men of the Institution hated Jesus.

### New Testament Believers’ Self-Willed Institution: Christianity

As we have seen, even during the days of the apostles, believers were beginning to drift away from life in the Spirit toward institutionalism (cf. 1Cor. 1:10–13), but after the apostles, those who wanted an institution became much bolder, as Paul had predicted:

Acts 20

29. Now, I know this, that after my departure, vicious wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

30. Even from among your own selves shall men rise up, speaking perverse things in order to draw away disciples after themselves.

Jesus foretold that the love of many for the ways of God would grow cold (Mt. 24:12), and the tendency of love for God, when it begins to die, is to turn to ceremonial form in order to make a show of devotion and conceal the death of love. Shakespeare described this tendency well:

When love begins to sicken and decay,  
It useth an enforced ceremony.  
There are no tricks in plain and simple faith;  
But hollow men, like horses hot at hand,  
Make gallant show and promise of their mettle.<sup>2</sup>

Such “hollow men”, taking advantage of believers’ decaying love, succeeded in leading God’s New Testament people into institutionalized religion and away from the life of Christ. The title that those apostate believers claimed for themselves was “Christian”, and the name they gave to their Institution, Christianity, was itself a lie, for it was not of Christ at all. During the first three centuries AD, Rome persecuted both true and apostate believers; it was all the same to pagan Rome. But the Emperor Constantine’s blending of Roman religion with the faith of apostate believers in AD 323, the epochal event I call the Synthesis, relieved believers of fear of persecution—so long as they submitted to Constantine’s new Institution, the Christianized empire.

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<sup>2</sup> Brutus, in “The Tragedy of Julius Caesar”, Act 4, Scene 2.

The apostates who partnered with the Roman Empire were beside themselves with glee at the development,<sup>3</sup> but believers who refused to join them continued to suffer persecution. Indeed, Constantine's Christian ministers, now with the might of Rome at their disposal, became the most zealous persecutors of faithful believers ever seen. Their Roman Church has undeniably prove to be history's most vehement enemy of true servants of God and His Son. At the direction of the Roman Church, laws were passed declaring that any believer not in line with the Institution was a heretic, and because the Church and State were now one and the same, to be a heretic meant also to be an enemy of the State, liable to execution. That definition of heresy was enforced in Christendom for many centuries, and it led to cruel, legal abuse of many a saintly soul.

Once Christianity was instituted by Roman law as the norm for society, it was just a matter of time before the whole world accepted the idea that Christianity represents Christ. The world was naturally inclined to do that because the god of Christianity is one of their own, that is, he is a god of form. The fact that Satan "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9) does not mean that he has persuaded the whole world to be Christian; it means only that he has persuaded the whole world to believe that Constantine's Institution, Christianity, represents Christ. But because the world is thus deceived, Christ's representatives are frowned upon, not just by Christians but also by the world, because they do not represent any earthly Institution but are alive to God. Preacher Clark once told his congregation, "I'm just a sheep in wolf's clothing." In other words, "I know how wrong I sound, but if anyone will look beyond appearances, he will see that God sent me." That is how it is in this world for every messenger sent by God, and when such evil is institutionalized, it is doubly evil.

#### Institutionalized Slander<sup>4</sup>

The mere existence of the Institution, with age lending weight to its claims, condemns true men of God without words. Ministers of the Institution do not even have to mention them by name; they trust in the revered forms they perpetuate to speak for them, for by promoting the Institution, they share in its reputation of righteousness. This is what I call "institutionalized slander", which is when people let the Institution think for them. The Institution itself, by its mere existence, condemns those sent by God (and anyone else who is not of the Institution), thus relieving its members of the burden of seriously considering the message of God's true servants. The persuasive power of Institutionalized slander is enormous, and it has always been the world's most effective weapon against true ministers of Christ.

The Lord taught me some years ago that when a lie becomes the norm, normal people become liars. That is true because when a lie becomes the norm in society, people behave normally, living as though lies are the truth. And when normal people become living lies, God's messengers are condemned because they are the living truth.

Ungodly men who claim to represent Christ hide their lack of ordination from God behind forms, and from their lofty perches within the Institution, with an appearance of fatherly concern, they caution their flocks against going beyond the whitewashed walls of the Institution. They point to the vast multitudes who belong to the Institution, and to the vast multitudes who have belonged to it over the

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<sup>3</sup> In his sycophantic "Oration in Praise of Constantine", Eusebius, the father of Church history, linked in an intimate way the rule of Rome to the rule of God. Eusebius' euphoria over the Emperor Constantine's exaltation of himself to a position equal with the apostles borders on the hysterical, but the record of it is invaluable because it provides us with insight into how giddy many apostate believers of that time were, for the Empire which had for so long abused them now embraced belief in Jesus, with the modifications approved of by the Emperor. Even to this day, Eastern Orthodox Christianity reveres Constantine as *Isapostolos* ("equal of the apostles").

<sup>4</sup> For a complete discussion of this subject, see *Slander: What It Is and How It Works*, at [GoingtoJesus.com](http://GoingtoJesus.com).



millennia, and then ask, “How could so many people be wrong?” But the answer to that is, “Jesus said that just a few would find the way of life (Mt. 7:14); so, how could so many people be right?”

### The Simplicity of Christ

Professional religionists have always known, far better than God’s children have, how to make an impressive show (cf. Lk. 16:8) because form is what sustains them, and so, their attention is given to perfecting and maintaining a good show. The simple forms that God gave to Israel could not compete with the grandiose displays of devotion found in heathen cultures. To those in Israel who wanted to be like other nations, the simple forms of God’s law were an embarrassment, but those who were content with God’s law were examples of humility, for the pride in human nature demanded much more pomp and ceremony than God ordained.

When Judah’s King Ahaz traveled to Damascus to meet with an Assyrian king, he was enamored of an intricately carved altar he saw there, and he sent orders to Uriah the priest in Jerusalem to move God’s plain altar to the side to make room for one like the fancy one he found in Damascus (2Kgs. 16:10–15). The plain altar at God’s temple in Jerusalem could not compete in beauty with that heathen altar. But God does not compete with man; with His law, He was condescending to provide a way for sins to be forgiven. Israel, in the end, failed in her walk with God, not because God’s law was so demanding that they could not keep it; Israel failed because His law was so simple they did not want it.

God didn’t want it, either, but for an entirely different reason, to wit, He was eager for His Son to be revealed and become the sacrifice which would bring us His life, as the prophet said,

Hebrews 10 (Ps. 40:6)

5. When coming into the world, [the Son] said, “Sacrifice and offering have not pleased you, but a body you have prepared for me.
6. In whole burnt offerings and such for sin, you have taken no pleasure.”

When the Son of God brought about this New Covenant, the way of salvation did not become stylish and sophisticated; on the contrary, it became simpler than ever—so simple that even fools need not err if they walk in it (Isa. 35:8). In this covenant, we are judged on the basis of our hearts, that is, what we *want* to do. Jesus explained it:

Matthew 5

21. You have heard that it was said to those of ancient time, “You shall not murder,” and “Whoever commits murder will be liable to the judgment.”
- 22a. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be liable to the Judgment.
- ...
27. You’ve heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.”
28. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be liable to the Judgment.

How much simpler could God make the way of salvation than to require no ceremony, no special form, no social status, no talent, no physical strength or beauty, and no money? All that is required in this New Covenant is faith in God’s Son, Jesus.

The animal and food sacrifices God required of Israel were few and simple, but the very simplicity of those sacrifices challenged the pride of man. How much more, then, does the simplicity of Christ

challenge man's pride! How much easier it was for those under the law to offer dead animals to God than for people in this covenant to offer themselves to God as "living sacrifices"! As an elderly saint whom we called "Uncle Joe" once put it, "It takes more humility to *be* a sacrifice than to make one."

Because God's way in the Old Testament was an embarrassment to some in Israel, they strove "to be like all the nations," and because God's way in the New Testament is an embarrassment to some in the body of Christ, they strive to be like all the *denominations*. They build churches; they declare certain days to be holy; they set their own standards for qualifying for the ministry; they devise their own ceremonial forms; they formulate their own doctrines; and they write all these forms in a book. That is the carnal style of worship which is now an abomination to God, yet loved by men who justify it by saying it is all done to honor Jesus, when the truth is, it all denies him. Every one of the multitude of Christian sects is a repudiation of Christ and the way of the Spirit which he purchased for us with his blood.

Christianity, in its entirety, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, is "the broad way that leads to destruction" (Mt. 7:13), and because so many choose to go that way, claiming to be right, the simple way of Christ is spoken evil of (2Pet. 2:2b). Only the few who choose life over form are satisfied with the unpretentious "strait and narrow way" of Jesus. As Keith Hinnant, a faithful brother, once testified, "If you want to be right with God, you have to want to be right with God more than you want to be right." Choosing God's life over ceremonial forms will never seem right to our fleshly nature because human nature has no status or influence in the kingdom of God; the ways of man are left out altogether. That is why so few will choose life over form and walk in the "strait and narrow way" of Jesus.

#### The Fundamental Difference between the Old and the New Covenants

God lamented through Hosea (4:6), "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge!" This is still the case. God's people do not understand the fundamental difference between the two covenants, and the principal reason they do not understand the difference is that they believe that the Institution, Christianity, represents Christ. Believing that lie, the most destructive lie in history, God's people are robbed of the knowledge of God. Paul would ask those with the Spirit who have joined a Christian church, as he asked his beloved Galatian converts when they turned from worship in life to worship in form, "Having begun in spirit, are you now perfected by flesh?" (Gal. 3:3).

The Israel of the Old Testament was an earthly nation that worshipped in carnal forms and fought its battles with carnal weapons. The New Testament "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) is a spiritual nation that worships spiritually and fights its battles with the weapons of the Spirit (2Cor. 10:4). The ceremonial forms of the Old Testament prepared God's people for the first coming of the Son if they observed them; the Spirit of life in the New Testament prepares God's people for the second coming of the Son if they walk in it. Under the law, men served God by their own will and strength, but in this covenant, men can serve God only by *His* will and strength. As my father once said, "What God requires, requires God." Israel's example proves that ceremonial forms do not require God's strength; even wicked men can perform them in their own strength.

My father explained it this way: Under the law, the old man got everything. His flesh was circumcised; his flesh ate and drank on the feast days; his flesh rested on the Sabbath day; his flesh was clothed for worship; his flesh was sanctified with earthly materials; and so forth. Now, however, in Christ, that old man gets nothing and the new man gets everything. The new man of the heart gets circumcised (Rom. 2:29); the new man feasts on the bread of life and drinks of the Spirit (Jn. 6:56; 1Cor. 12:13b); the new man puts on as a garment Christ himself (Gal. 3:27); the new man is sanctified by the Spirit (1Cor. 6:11). "If any man be in Christ," Paul said, "he is a new creature" (2Cor. 5:17), and that

new creature lives and worships in “a new and living way” (Heb. 10:20), a way which is impossible for the old man.

The forms of the law had a divine purpose, to be sure, but the need for those forms was done away with when the Son came and paid the price for us to receive God’s kind of life. With the purity and power of God’s life within us, we can know Him and do good without the use of any forms—even the forms that God ordained in the law (Eph. 2:15).

Although the ceremonial forms of the law were given by God and had to be performed during the Old Testament, none of the ceremonial forms practiced by Christians came from God. They are all man-made, and they are all “in the flesh”. In the way of Christianity, the old man again gets everything: a baptism of water for his flesh; days set apart for his body to rest; communion meals of carnal bread and wine; religious garments to cover his flesh; and earthly places declared to be holy in order to satisfy his flesh.

Regardless of where the forms came from, whether they be the Old Testament forms given to Moses by God or the forms in Christianity invented by men, to worship in form in this covenant is to miss the whole point of Christ. The Son of God came to give men life, not more symbols of it, and we truly submit to Jesus as our Lord only as we walk in the life he gives. We deny him when we worship in ceremonial form (Tit. 1:16), for by such works we are saying, in substance, that the true Messiah has not yet come and fulfilled the law.

### Nailed to the Cross

In the law of Moses, God went into great detail when He told His people how to worship Him (Ex. 25–31). He gave them commandments concerning the size and shape of the tabernacle, its furnishings, the materials to be used, and how much of each. He mandated how the priests’ garments should be made, the ingredients of the holy anointing oil and the incense to be used in worship, adding that “whoever compounds or whoever puts some of it on a stranger, to smell it, shall be cut off from his people” (Ex. 30:33, 38). When Aaron’s two oldest sons tried to honor God by burning a different kind of incense on His altar, God struck them both dead (Lev. 10:1–2).

God was very serious about how He was worshipped in the Old Testament, and He is even more so now, because He cares for us. How we worship shapes everything about us (Pss. 115:4–8; 135:15–18). Worshipping in God’s life makes us ever more alive to Him (Prov. 4:18; Jn. 16:13), but worshipping in form makes us deader and deader to the things of God; it distorts our understanding of everything that is holy. And God wants us to know Him!

The Son of God, through his agony on the cross, brought the need for ceremonial forms to an end, even the ones that God gave Israel.

#### Ephesians 2

13. In Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near [to God] by the blood of Christ.

14. For he is our peace, who made the two [Jews and Gentiles] one and destroyed the middle wall of partition [the law],

15. having abolished in his flesh the enmity [between Jews and Gentiles], the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that he might create of those two one new man in himself, making peace.

When Jesus’ Jewish body was nailed to the cross, the law of Moses was nailed there with him. It is true that Jesus died for us, but it is equally true that he lived for us. He was circumcised on the eighth

day for us; he kept the law's feasts and Sabbaths for us; he offered the law's sacrifices and observed its dietary laws for us. If we are in him, therefore, we are justified before God, for we are in him who did all those things for us. This is the reason it is so important to be in the body of Christ:

#### Romans 7

4. My brothers, you were made dead to the law through the body of Christ so that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God.

The author of Hebrews says that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant (Heb. 8:6), which must mean that worship in this covenant is more pleasing to God, since it comes to Him through His Son. If this New Covenant were a covenant of form like the Old Covenant, Jesus and the apostles would surely have given us more rules than Israel was given so that we might offer God better worship. But not a single instruction is given in the New Testament books concerning how to carry out a ceremonial form, and the reason there are no such instructions is because in this covenant, there are no ceremonies to keep. On the other hand, we must emphasize the undeniable fact that not one of the many ceremonies practiced by Christians is found in Scripture; they were all devised by men, and to practice those ceremonies honors only the men who devised them, not God.

#### “Taste and See”

The Old Testament ceremonies were like candy wrappers, which have no value except for what they conceal. Once a wrapper is opened and the candy revealed, sensible people discard the wrapper and eat the candy. Likewise, with the Son revealed, wise believers cast aside ceremonies and eat and drink of the Son, as he commanded us to do (Jn. 6:53–58).

#### John 6

53. Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.  
54. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I'll raise him up on the last day.  
55. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”

The Son has been revealed! Eat him up! The Spirit has come! Drink it up!

It is as foolish to continue to worship in ceremony as it is to eat the candy wrapper instead of the candy. But beyond the senselessness of it, as Paul told Titus, to worship in ceremony now that the Son has been revealed is to deny that what he did for us is sufficient (Tit. 1:16). The essential element of Paul's gospel was that faith in Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for salvation. If God commanded Israel not to add one word to the law that Moses had given them (Dt. 4:2; 12:32), how much less does He want us to add anything to the Spirit that His Son has given us (cf. Rev. 22:18–19)?

The wrapper of the law has been opened! The sweet Son of God is no longer hidden! The wrapper is not better than the candy; it has no power to satisfy a hunger and thirst for God and His righteousness. And because the Son is revealed, all men everywhere are now commanded to repent (Acts 17:30) and to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8).

#### Jesus Is Good Enough

If we are wise, we will put our trust in Jesus alone and refuse everything the Institution has to offer—its ceremonies, its doctrines, and its traditions. When Paul told the saints in Colossae that they were

complete in Christ (Col. 2:10), he was telling them that (1) Jesus, all by himself, is enough and (2) only what Jesus had done for their souls was worth anything to God.

Uncle Joe once testified that God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son Isaac (Gen. 22:10–12) because Abraham was making God jealous. He said, “God knew that He was the only one with a Son worthy to be a sacrifice for sin.” It is from that perspective that Paul asked, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?” (1Cor. 10:22). We risk provoking the Lord to jealousy when we add to Christ’s baptism of life the Institution’s baptism with lifeless water, or when we add to the Son’s communion in life the Institution’s communion with lifeless food and drink, or when we add to the Son’s spiritual garments of praise and righteousness the Institution’s carnal ceremonial robes. In this covenant, only God’s Son has authority from God to baptize, to give communion, or to clothe the saints for worship. For men of the Institution to employ such carnal things in worship is for them to usurp the Son’s authority, and for those with the Spirit to join them in that foolishness is treason against Christ.

Under Moses’ law, God sanctified people, but He also sanctified lifeless things such as water, clothing, oil, and incense, etc., to be used in the ceremonies which the law required. But in this covenant, God sanctifies nothing but people. That is why in this covenant there are no holy places on earth, no holy days, no holy garments, and no holy instruments of ministry. That is also why ceremonies are no longer acceptable to God. To be holy, a ceremonial form needs holy things, and in this covenant, God has made no “thing” holy. If Jesus has made you holy by baptizing you with the Spirit, then he has enabled you to offer holy worship to God—the only kind of worship acceptable to God (cf. Jn. 4:23–24)—and you have something to praise Him for!

#### “The Cup of the Lord and the Cup of Demons”

While on earth, the Son told his disciples that he was living on a kind of food they knew nothing about (Jn. 4:32). At a later time, he went further by explaining that he was living by eating of the Father, then declaring that whoever wanted to live forever would have to live by eating him (Jn. 6:56–58). But Jesus did not leave his disciples to wonder about his meaning. Seeing their confusion, he went on to explain that he was not speaking of eating his fleshly body but of consuming the life that was in him: “It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The things that I am telling you, they are spirit, and they are life!” (Jn. 6:63). But Jesus’ effort to explain things of the Spirit to people without the Spirit only made matters worse. His explanation was harder on them than the parable itself. If Jesus had left them puzzled, as was usual, they might have stayed with him longer, but as it was, “many of his disciples went back to former things and walked with him no longer” (Jn. 6:66).

It is at this very point that many followers of Jesus today turn from him and choose the Institution, preferring the wrapper over the candy, that is, preferring form over life. They are offended, as those long-ago disciples were, when they are told the truth. Nevertheless, regardless of how many walk away, the truth is that communion with God is spiritual; it has nothing whatsoever to do with carnal wafers and wine. Communion with God is the knowledge of God with which we are created anew in Christ; it is sharing in His thoughts and feelings, and it is always in spirit, never in the flesh. Ceremonial forms of a meal touted as communion with Divinity have been practiced by religions of the world from ancient times, and a communion meal continues to be observed in Christian churches. But a communion using dead things is a communion unwittingly shared with demons, not with Jesus, and Paul warned God’s children to stay away from such a thing:

21. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

The cup and table of the Lord is fellowship with God's feelings and thoughts, and the cup and table of demons is fellowship with demonic feelings and thoughts. The Institution's communion cup is a mockery of the communion which Christ died for us to enjoy with him.

We worship God acceptably only as we worship in life because the Son ministers only in life. He baptizes us with God's life (1Cor. 12:13); buries us in that life; raises us up with him into more life (Col. 2:12); and with the sharp sword of life, he circumcises our hearts from faith in form (Rom. 2:28–29) and “purges our conscience from dead works to serve a living God” (Heb. 9:14). The Son washes our souls with God's life so that we may stand “blameless in holiness before our God and Father” (1Thess. 3:13). No ceremony can do that for us.

A purged conscience is unafraid to leave off dead works; on the contrary, it rejoices to be free of them. Paul rejoiced in that knowledge, and it motivated him to boldly proclaim, “We are the circumcision who serve God in spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phip. 3:3). Paul enjoyed true communion with Christ, and he ended his second letter to the Corinthian saints with this: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.” (2Cor. 13:14).