

A “Head-Only” Religion

Dub McClish

The other day I asked a lady where she went to church. She told me and then explained, “I am not a ‘practicing _____.’” Then, pointing to her head, she continued, “I’m a _____, up here.” The more I mused on this lady’s comment, the more I thought how typical she is of most people in our nation who claim any religious affiliation anymore. So many have only a “religion of the head,” that is, they have been taught to think like their parents on religious matters, but in practice they are not at all religious. Anyone who preaches very long is going to run into some brethren like this, too. They can argue a fairly good case for the Lord and the church; they are insulted if left out of the new church directory. They want it known that they are members of the church of Christ, but when it comes to practicing the religion of Christ, they grade out at 0-. They are always “too busy” to cook a dish for a bereaved family or to visit someone who is discouraged or sick. They can’t be depended upon to attend Bible classes and worship faithfully or give of their money consistently or generously. Moreover, they may be able to out-cuss, out-drink, out-lie and otherwise outdo their “irreligious” neighbors in worldliness and sin. All the while, mind you, answering hesitantly when anyone asks what church they are a member of, they answer, “church of Christ”.

What does the Lord think of such religious profession? To the Jews of His day who had a “head only” religion, Jesus said, “This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mat. 15:8). On another occasion He said of the Jewish leaders, “but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not” (Mat. 23:3). Paul addressed the subject of “head-only” religion when he wrote, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart...” (Rom. 2:28–29). The people Paul addressed considered themselves good Jews simply because they had been born Jews. However, they had taken so much pride in being born Jews they had not bothered to practice the Law.

Perhaps the clearest statement the Lord makes on this subject is at the close of the Sermon on the Mount: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven (Mat. 7:21). A “head-only” religion is vain.”

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, June 10, 1982, of which I was editor.]

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