

d display. Material things may be purchased by material things, for the one is divisible by the other, and there is no incongruity of nature between them; but you might as well think to weigh the air with scales as to procure spiritual blessings by a material price paid for them. It therefore showed a gross misconception of things unseen, that Simon offered money to the Apostles in exchange for the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

But the same false estimate of true religion and of the means of securing it, with some slight variations, was made by the Pharisees of the Saviour's time who thought heaven was to be scaled by long prayers. Something external still. A price to be paid for spiritual things; but in their case it was only words, something less valuable than even Simon's money. If nothing more than fair words and a pious speech were needed to gain an entrance into heaven, many would be found there who are very likely to be excluded. "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my father which is in heaven." Trusting in the outward acts of Christianity, or thinking to be heard for one's much speaking, shows almost as erroneous a conception of true religion as that of the Calmuck, who has his prayers engraved on a plate, and thinks that by turning the wheel, every rotation of the plate is a prayer offered to God. It is the same estimate of religion's offices, and the means of procuring them, that has led to the institution of beads in the Romish Church, for keeping account of the number of times the devotees of that form of Christianity repeat certain prayers. They evidently think to be heard for their much speaking, and have the notion they are making themselves acceptable to heaven by these external means. But the Lord, in His message to the Jews, through the mouth of Isaiah, hath taught us to believe that mere formal petitions and incense, in which there is no reality, no presence of mind and heart of the offerer, instead of being acceptable to Him, and a price fit for procuring spiritual blessing from

Him, are, rather, hateful in His eyes. There is no magic in Christianity. Its mission is to improve, sanctify and ennoble the character, by working from within outwardly rather than by miraculous power to transform men at a stroke into saints. It is to be feared there is in many minds a lurking superstitious trust in the supernatural agencies of our most holy faith. Somehow they expect to be made Christians by a magical process, to which they themselves are not to be a party. Vain expectation! You will have to wait long before you will be Christians on any such conditions. True, we are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves: it is the gift of God. But be assured that while the worthiness of Jesus is to be the ground of your acceptance before God, not your own character and life; yet without a character and life becoming the Gospel, you shall never see heaven. The want of a spiritual nature, a life hid with Christ in God, will as certainly shut you out from the kingdom of God, as if your admission into that kingdom were dependent upon your good works, rather than upon your faith in the Saviour. In short, your faith must be *in* your works—that is, your life must be pervaded by your faith, and correspond to your faith, in order to showing itself to be true faith. Let me, then, bid you beware of leaning on a faith that is not attested by a holy life, and a character devoted to God: your trust in any such faith shall prove to you only a delusion and a snare. Any religion that does not reform the character and beautify the life is very much of a piece with Simon's conception of Christianity—an external spell, to be enjoyed by any one having the means of procuring it, irrespective of his moral and religious character.

No religiousness will stand the test that is not personal and real. No faith, or pretence of faith, is of any avail that does not leave its impress on the soul. Simon is said to have believed; but his faith could not be of the genuine kind, because it afterwards left him in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. His pretence of faith deceived the Apostles; but