

# Religion Without the Holy Ghost

by Horatius Bonar

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the Holy Spirit in one's life, rather than just external religiosity, and warns against the consequences of unreal religion.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:3

**Topics:** "The Holy Spirit", "True vs. False Religion"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the critical distinction between true and false believers in his sermon 'Religion Without the Holy Ghost,' using the parable of the ten virgins to illustrate the necessity of the Holy Spirit in one's faith. He warns against externalism in religion, where individuals may appear outwardly righteous but lack the essential inner oil of the Holy Spirit. Bonar stresses that mere profession and religious activities are insufficient without the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, which is vital for genuine faith and relationship with Christ. He calls for self-examination and urges listeners to seek the Holy Spirit directly from Christ, as true religion without the Holy Ghost is ultimately unfulfilling and ineffective.

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## Transcript

"They took no oil with them."--Matthew 25.3

This parable has many sides and aspects. It is prophetic; it is also practical. It suits all ages, but especially the last days. It suits the world, but specially the church of God; "if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear." It is searching and sifting; it is also quickening and comforting. It suits us well in these days of profession and fashionable religion and religiousness.

It divides the church into two classes,--the wise and the foolish wise in God's sight, not man's; foolish in God's sight, not man's. Thus it is not a parable for the heathen, as if they only were foolish; nor for the profligate, as if they only were foolish; nor for the infidels, as if they only were foolish. But for the church. It comes in to the inner circle of Christian profession, and sifts it, divides it. Let it sift us and test us. Better to be weighed and found wanting now than hereafter. Better to be undeceived now than when it is too late. Let us notice,

I. The points of likeness between the two classes. (1.) They get the same name, virgins; (2.) they wear the same dress; (3.) they are on the same errand; (4.) they have both lamps; (5.) they have both vessels; (6.) they both slumber and sleep. They have thus many features in common. Man could not discern the difference, at least for the time. The peril of mere externalism is that which our Lord points out here. No

doubt there must be externalism. Religion must have an outside as well as an inside. The lamp must not only have oil, but it must burn: the external must indicate the internal. And we may say that our Lord intimated the necessity of a thorough consistency and completeness in the outward religious life of a man, so that as a fair external is no excuse for internal unsoundness or incompleteness, so a sound internal is no excuse for an inconsistent life. Our Lord, then, here depicts, (1.) a complete externalism; (2.) a beautiful externalism; (3.) a deceptive externalism; (4.) a prolonged externalism; (5.) an unavailing externalism. Up to a certain point in a man's life, or character, or religion, externalism may avail; but beyond that it gives way; it breaks down; it exhibits its unprofitableness. This externalism may not always be hypocrisy, but it is imitation. It is not the flower in its natural color and growth, but painted, artificial. Let us watch against an artificial life, and an artificial religion. What does it profit now? what will it profit in the day of wrath? The name, the dress, the lamp, the outward show, will all go for nothing in that day of universal discovery and detection.

II. The points of unlikeness. Though in most respects they were all alike, yet there was a difference. It was within; it was imperceptible from without; it could only be discovered when the bridegroom came. Up till then all were completely similar. Only then the want came out in the foolish. There was it seen who were wise, and who were foolish. That day is the day of certain and unerring detection. It is the day of weighing in the balances! It is the separation of the false from the true.

The difference was confined to a single point,--the lack of oil. Some have supposed that the foolish took oil in their lamps, but not in their vessels. It appears, however, that they did neither. The lamps were not required to be lighted till the bridegroom came; and so the oil was not poured in, nor the wick inserted till then. For it was at midnight that the cry was made, and then all the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps, that is, supplied them with the wick and oil, and lighted them. Then it was that the foolish discovered (1) their need of oil; (2) their lack of it. Then they went to the wise to beg for a supply; then they (being wisely refused) went to buy, and returned too late. There was "oil in the dwelling of the wise " (Proverbs 21:20), but the foolish were without it.

The oil is the Holy Spirit. To oil He is likened throughout all Scripture, though in some places to fire, and to water, and to wind or air. There is the oil of consecration (Exodus 30:25); of daily food (1 Kings 17:12); of fragrance (Esther 2:12); of joy (Psalm 47, Isaiah 61:3); of healing (Luke 10:34); of light (Zechariah 4:12). The Holy Spirit is all these. But it is as the light-giving oil that He is specially spoken of here; and the lack of Him as such makes the difference between the foolish and the wise. "Having not the Spirit" (Jude 19).

Thus a man may be very like a Christian, and yet not be one. He may come very near the kingdom, and yet not enter in. He may have all the outward features of a Christian, and yet be lacking in the main one. He may have the complete dress of the saint, and yet not be one. He may have a good life, a sound creed, a strict profession; he may be one who says and does many things excellent; he may be a subscriber to all the religious societies in the land, a member of all their committees, or a speaker at all their meetings, and supporter of all their plans; he may profess to be looking for Christ's coming, and going forth to meet the bridegroom, yet not necessarily a Christian! He may lack the oil, the Holy Spirit.

A religion without the Holy Ghost profiteth nothing. There is the religion of the intellect, of the sense, of the fancy, of the flesh, of the creed, of the liturgy, of the catechism, of nature, of poetry, of sentiment, of mysticism, of humanity. But what are these without the Spirit? Christianity without Christ, what would that be? Worship without God, what would that be? So religion without the Holy Spirit, what would that be?

Yet is there not much of this among us? Is there not much of dry formalism, lifeless doctrine, sapless routine? I do not call it hypocrisy; I simply call it unreal religion.

And what can unreal religion do for a man? Will it not prove irksome and vain? Will it make him happy and free, or liberal, or zealous, or holy? No. It can do none of these things. It is bondage, and darkness, and weariness.

Yet here is the Holy Spirit in the hands of Christ for you. Go to them that sell, and buy for your selves. Not to men, or churches, or creeds, or ministers, but to Christ. Go to Him. He is exalted to give it; and He will. Apply to Him ere it be too late.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/horatius-bonar/religion-without-the-holy-ghost/>

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