

"WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS." NO. 2.

"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him."
– John 4:23.

AT the first advent our Lord said of some of the unbelieving professors of religion of the scribes and Pharisees: "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." The majority of those addressed, it seems, were outwardly very pious, and fasted and prayed much, and for a pretense made long prayers in the streets; but theirs was not true and acceptable worship; and therefore, they were not prepared to be introduced at Pentecost to the begetting of the spirit and thus to become worshipers in spirit and in truth. And our Lord in the above words shows one important hindrance to their proper attitude of heart, and hence to their acceptance as worshipers; namely, false doctrines – human tradition and commandments as instead of the pure teachings of God's Word. And it is but reasonable to suppose that similarly all down through this Gospel age many, very many, have been hindered from proper development as true worshipers of God, worshipers in spirit, worshipers in every act and word and deed of life, by the same baneful influences; namely, false doctrines, human creeds and traditions accepted and held to as instead of the Word of God, the true bread which comes down from heaven.

Many think lightly of faith, and hold that it matters little what a man may believe; that his life and conduct are the only things of importance in the divine sight. But in our Lord's testimony here considered (and it is corroborated by Christian experience) a man's faith concerning God and his plan is very important indeed, and has a wonderful influence upon his life, conduct and character. The Christian who under the delusions of the great adversary has accepted the human traditions (presented by nearly all the theological schools of

"Christendom"), that God is a tyrant, who uses his omnipotent power in the creation of angels and men with the foreknowledge that the great mass of them (all except a little flock) will be by his providence preserved in indescribable torments and anguish throughout all eternity; – such Christians, thus blindfolded by false doctrines, attempt in vain to worship such a God with their whole heart; for their fears hinder perfect love and full devotion. They would find every element of their moral nature in antagonism to such a plan of damnation; and although they might bow the knee in fear and submission, they would find it impossible to bow down their hearts in full acquiescence, unless their hearts were grossly depraved as to justice and love and mercy.

It may be safely said, however, that all who become children of God and whose hearts are honest are delivered to some extent from bondage to this false [R2079 : page 305] doctrine, and are enabled through truths received to counteract the baneful effect of this error to such an extent as to permit them through certain great truths to see God's love and in a general way at least to hope and trust that God will commit no injustice upon any of his creatures, and that somehow, somewhere and at sometime all men will have a full chance to be reconciled to God through Christ. Thus with many of God's saints, we believe, the spirit of error hindering worship is overcome by the spirit of truth in general and true worship made possible. Yet many never fully escape the *fear* "taught by the precepts of men" (Isa. 29:13), and to the very last are hindered thereby from the attainment of "perfect love" and from the rendering of the highest degree of worship in spirit and in truth.

And what is true of this false doctrine is true to some extent of all false doctrines. Every error hides some truth; every misunderstanding of the character of God or of the fundamental features of his plan of salvation is so much to hinder men from becoming to the fullest extent possible worshipers of God in spirit and in truth. It is to this end that God's people are exhorted to search the Scriptures to "know the truth," to "know God," because, as our Lord declares, the object of the giving

of the truth is to produce *sanctification* of heart and life, and hence whatever beclouds or hinders the truth hinders sanctification of heart. No one can possess the spirit of the truth without having considerable of the letter of the truth upon fundamental principles.

WORSHIPING FELLOW MESSENGERS.

God's people are to love and esteem each other, and that in proportion as they recognize in each other the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ, the spirit of holiness and devotion to truth and righteousness; as the Apostle says, the faithful should be esteemed "very highly for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:13); but while there may be danger that some will fail to render "honor to whom honor is due" (Rom. 13:7), there is undoubtedly danger also that some might render too much honor to human instruments, whom God is pleased to use in connection with the service of the truth. It is proper therefore that we call attention here, as we have done heretofore, to the danger of man-worship. This matter is very forcibly brought to our attention in Revelation 22:9. John the Revelator, who, representing the living saints all down through the Gospel age, is caused to see unfolding the various features of the divine plan, in conclusion falls down to worship the angel who showed him those things. So there has been and is a tendency on the part of many to give more than love, respect and honor to the servants of God who from time to time have been used as special servants of God in bringing to the attention of the Church things new and old, or to the particular brother or sister who was the means of conversion or other spiritual benefit. There was this disposition in the early Church, some exalting one Apostle and some another as their chief and master, and naming themselves as his disciples, saying, "I am of Paul;" or "I am of Apollos;" or "I am of Peter," etc. The Apostle Paul assures them that this disposition indicates a measure of carnality, and he inquires, who then are Paul, Apollos and Peter, but merely the servants or channels through whom God has been pleased to send you the blessings of the truth. "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." He indicates thus that they should

recognize, not the channels through whom the blessings came, but the Lord, the Author of their blessings, and loyally bear no other name than his who died for and redeemed them.

Likewise, when the Church began to get rid of the gross darkness of the dark ages under the help and instruction of the reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others, they naturally and properly had great respect for those whom God had honored as the instruments in the work of reformation. But again the tendency to "worship" the messengers, the human agents, instead of the divine Author was manifested, and to-day there are hundreds of thousands who call themselves by the name of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Campbell and others, and who give more respect to their teachings and writings than to the Word of God, and this with corresponding injury to themselves.

Likewise, to-day, in the light of present truth, shining more clearly than ever before, no doubt there is need to be on guard against this carnal tendency which has had so deleterious an influence in the past.

When John fell down to worship the angel who had shown him the wonders of the divine plan, the angel's refusal to accept homage should be a lesson to all ministers (servants – messengers) of God. He said, **[R2080 : page 305]** "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant [not thy Lord and Master], and [fellow-servant] of thy brethren the prophets, and [fellow-servant] of [all] them which keep the sayings of this book. Worship God [the source from which come all these blessings and all this light]." All servants of God are fellow-servants regardless of the time or extent of their service.

The Apostle calls attention to this man-worshiping tendency in his epistle to the Colossians (2:18,19), saying, "Let no man *beguile* you of your reward, in a *voluntary* humility and worshiping of angels [messengers]." The intimation is that this temptation will come insidiously, craftily, and not by brazen demands for reverence. Such is the reverence accorded in general **[R2080 : page 306]** to the ministry of the nominal churches. Many ministers who seem very meek, and

who would not think of demanding reverence or worship, nevertheless accept of their flocks the *voluntary* title, Reverend, and encourage it, and feel offended if reverence or worship of this sort is not rendered. The effect has been and still is to injure the household of faith, to give an over-confidence in the judgment and word of the minister in spiritual things, so that many neglect to prove their faith by God's Word, and to trust implicitly to its authority.

And there is danger amongst those who do not use the title, Reverend. It should always be remembered (as pointed out in our issue of Nov. 15, '95) that *control* resides in the congregation and not in *self*-appointed leaders, whether they seek to serve a dozen or thousands. The churches of Christ should recognize the leading of their Head, and know their leaders to be of his choice (See Heb. 13:7,17,24, *Diaglott*), but they should beware of any disposed to usurp the rights of the congregation or to ignore those rights by taking the place of leaders without the *specific* request of the congregation; *beguiling* the company into supposing that the leader alone is competent to judge and decide for the congregation as to the Lord's choice, and thus failing to hold the Head (Christ) as the only real teacher, who is able and willing to guide all the meek in judgment, because they are his Church – "his body."

Nor is this *beguiling* of the attention of the flock, away from the only Shepherd, to a fellow sheep always the fault of the "leaders:" there seems to be a general tendency on the part of all who have the true, humble, sheep nature to follow one another. It is a lesson, therefore, for all to learn, – that each sheep recognize as leaders only such as are found in full accord with the voice and spirit of the Chief Shepherd (Christ), and the under-shepherds (the Apostles), and that each sheep see to it that he eats only "clean provender" and drinks only "pure water" as directed by the Shepherd. (See Ezek. 34:17-19.) This implies the exercise of the individual conscience of each member of Christ's flock on matters of doctrine and practice, and tends to keep each one in sympathy and fellowship with the Shepherd, who knoweth each

sheep and "calleth his own sheep by name." The same intimate relationship of the individual Christian with the Lord is illustrated in the figure of Christ the Head and the Church as members of his body. – 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:15,16.

As we have been to some extent, by the grace of God, used in the ministry of the gospel, it may not be out of place to say here what we have frequently said in private, and previously in these columns, – namely, that while we appreciate the love, sympathy, confidence and fellowship of fellow-servants and of the entire household of faith, we want no homage, no reverence, for ourselves or our writings; nor do we wish to be called Reverend or Rabbi. Nor do we wish that any should be called by our name. The name of him who died for all – the name Christian – is quite sufficient to designate the spiritual sons of God, the true brethren of Christ; and whatsoever is more than this cometh of evil, of carnality, and tends toward more of the same.

Nor would we have our writings revered or regarded as infallible, or on a par with the holy Scriptures. The most we claim or have ever claimed for our teachings is, that they are *what we believe to be harmonious interpretations of the divine Word*, in harmony with the spirit of the truth. And we still urge, as in the past, that each reader study the subjects we present in the light of the Scriptures, proving all things by the Scriptures, accepting what they see to be thus approved, and rejecting all else. It is to this end, to enable the student to trace the subject in the divinely inspired Record, that we so freely intersperse both quotations and citations of the Scriptures upon which to build.
