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"Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me"

Author(s): Orson F. Whitney

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Abstract: This article affirms the nature and worship of God.

"Thou Shalt Have no Other Gods Before Me"*

By Elder Orson F. Whitney, of the Council of the Twelve

THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD.

Joseph Smith's first great service to humanity was in bringing back the lost knowledge of the true and living God. What do we mean by that? Who and what is the true and living God? He is the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Adam, of Enoch, of Noah, of the Patriarchs and Prophets and Apostles of old. He is the God described by Moses in the first chapter of Genesis, thus: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them." This is equivalent to saying that God is in the form of man, and that we have a Mother as well as a Father in heaven, in whose image or likeness we are, male and female.

ANCIENT IDOLS.

The world had need of this instruction, for they were worshipping all sorts of deities at that time. They had forgotten the God of their fathers, the God of Adam and of Abraham, and were bowing down to idols. In the days of Moses, fifteen centuries before Christ, there were three great centers of religious thought and philosophy. One was among the Phoenicians or Canaanites. They worshiped the sun and the moon, ascribing to them the powers of creation—worshiped them with licentious rites suggestive of creation. This was the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth, against which the children of Israel were especially warned. Down in Egypt they adored beasts and reptiles, such as the crocodile, the bull, the goat, and the beetle. The gods were supposed to be enshrined in such bodies, and if a goat died, it was buried with costliest ceremonies, amidst the mourning of a nation. Away off among the Hindus the seasons were deified—spring, summer, autumn, winter. These were thought to be the divine sources of life. The passions of the human heart—love, hate, fear, anger, revenge, and so forth—were also revered as deities. Then came Moses, a man who had seen the true and living God, had conversed with him face to face, and had received from him the Decalogue or Ten Commandments unto Israel. The first of those commandments reads: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" Is it any wonder that this commandment was given, and given first, under such conditions?

THE FATHER'S "EXPRESS IMAGE."

The world of Joseph Smith's time did not worship the sun and moon, nor the beasts, nor the seasons, nor the passions. Never-

*A sermon delivered at the April Conference, 1920.

theless, they had turned away from the true God; they ignored or misinterpreted what Moses had taught, that man is in the image of God, and therefore, inferentially, logically, that God is in the image of man. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the Scriptures declare to be "the express image" of his Father's person, came down from heaven and walked as a man upon the earth, plainly showing what kind of a being God is. Moreover, when Philip, his disciple, said to him: "Lord, show us the Father," Jesus replied: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." But this teaching was lost upon the modern Christian world.

THE CHRISTIAN DEITY.

What kind of a God was Christendom worshiping when Joseph Smith and "Mormonism" came forth? Let Christian theology tell. Therein it was written, and it stands to this day, that God is a being without body, parts, or passions. The Church of England *Articles of Religion* so declare. The Presbyterian *Confession of Faith* so affirms. And this was the popular concept of Deity throughout the Christian world at the opening of the Nineteenth Century. In line with that tenet and teaching, the English poet Pope, who figured in the Eighteenth Century, represents God as a spirit or "soul" that

Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glow in the stars and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent.

A very admirable description of what might be termed a spiritual emanation from God, that universally diffused essence that proceeds forth from the Divine Presence, and is the power that enlightens in greater or less degree every man that cometh into the world. It is indeed the light of the sun, moon and stars; the light also of the human understanding; in it we live, move, and have our being, for it is the principle of life throughout creation. But that is not the God who made man in his own image. That is not the Father, represented by the Son, in whom "dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily." It is not even the personage of the Holy Ghost.

DIVINITY AND ITS EMANATION.

There are Three that bear rule in the heavens, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three distinct personalities, but the Father and the Son, according to Joseph Smith, are personages of tabernacle, having bodies "as tangible as man's," while the Holy Ghost "is a personage of spirit." From this Eternal Godhead proceeds a spiritual power or essence, omnipresent and immanent in all things; and this is what the poet was describing when he portrayed God as a "soul" that "warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze, glows in the stars and blossoms in the trees," etc. This is what the Christian sects were worshiping—not Divinity, but an emanation from Divinity. They

had turned from the truth "unto fables," as did the ancients; and it devolved upon Joseph Smith to shatter the false doctrine of a bodiless, passionless Deity, and bring back the precious knowledge that had been lost.

JOSEPH'S VISION.

We are all familiar with the story—how a boy of fourteen years went into the forest and prayed; how he wrestled with Satan, and was delivered; how he saw a light above his head brighter than the noonday sun, and in the midst of it two glorious beings in the form of man, One of whom, pointing to the Other, said: This is my beloved Son, hear him." From that hour, there was one person, at least, upon this planet who knew what kind of a being God is. It was a virtual reassertion of the first commandment in the Decalogue, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*"

WHAT CONSTITUTES IDOLATRY?

To worship anything that God has made, is to practice idolatry. It matters not what it is. If we turn from the Creator to the creature; if we forget the Giver and adore the gift; if we forsake God and worship an emanation from God, we are idolaters, just as much as if we worshiped the sun and moon, or bowed down to goats and crocodiles. The man who loves money and makes it his main object—makes it an end instead of a means—is an idol-worshiper. Wealth is a blessing from God, and so is the gift to acquire it; and if men, when they become rich, use their riches in the way God designed, he approves of them and blesses them more abundantly. But the man who adores his possessions, and forgets that they were given for a good, a wise, an unselfish and an altruistic purpose, is an idolater, akin to those ancient peoples, who in their spiritual blindness worshiped things that God had made and given, instead of the Maker and Giver.

THE FINAL DISPENSATION.

Joseph Smith's next great service to the race was in opening this gospel dispensation—the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times. What does that mean? To dispense is to distribute or deal out in portions, as when the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is dispensed to a religious congregation. In a larger sense, it signifies the opening of the heavens and the sending forth of the gospel and the powers of the Priesthood, as a boon and blessing to mankind. The term "dispensation" also defines the period during which these saving and exalting principles, thus sent forth, continue operative in pristine power and purity. There have been many dispensations of the gospel, though men know little concerning them. The gospel of Christ is more than "the power of God unto salvation;" it is the power of God unto exaltation, and was instituted as such before this earth rolled into exist-

ence, before Adam fell, and consequently before man had need of redemption and salvation. It is the way of eternal progress, the path to perfection, and has been upon earth in a series of dispensations reaching like a mighty chain from the days of Adam down to the present time. The great difference between this dispensation and all others is, that this is the last and the greatest, virtually all dispensations rolled into one. God has decreed to bring together all things that are Christ's, both on earth and in heaven, and the first part of the divine program is the gathering of scattered Israel and the building up of Zion, preparatory to the coming of the King of kings, the ushering in of the Millennial Reign, the sanctifying of the earth, and its eventual glorification, when it will be converted into a celestial sphere, an abode of the righteous forever.

NOT AN ACCIDENT.

It was no accident, no chance happening—Joseph Smith's going into the grove that spring morning, one hundred years ago. It was an event predestined, heaven-inspired. I once thought that any good boy who prayed in faith could see just what Joseph saw. But I have put away that childish notion. I have learned that all boys are not Joseph Smiths. God hears and answers the prayers of the humblest of his children; but he answers them as seemeth him best, and not always in the same way. He gives according to the capacity of the one who receives.

PROPHET AND SEER.

It was no ordinary man that went into the woods that morning to pray. It was a Prophet, a Seer. Joseph Smith was not made a prophet by the people who held up their hands for him on the sixth of April, 1830, when this Church was organized. He was already a prophet, chosen, as Abraham had been, before he was born; ordained, like Jeremiah, before he was formed in the flesh. The people merely “sustained” him in that position, manifesting by the uplifted hand that they were willing to follow him as their leader, and to accept of his ministrations in that capacity. He was already a prophet, already a seer; God had made him such in advance. But all men are not Joseph Smiths. He was a man like unto Moses. He was the rarest human being that has walked this earth in the past two thousand years. And why did he go into the grove that morning and pray for wisdom and light? It was because the time had come. *The Hour* had struck, and *The Man* was there—the man whom God had provided.

THE WORLD'S SATURDAY NIGHT.

We are living in the Saturday night of the world's history. Earth has labored six days, and will rest upon the seventh, her period of sanctification. This is the significance of “Mormonism,” of Joseph Smith, and of the work that he inaugurated—the lifting of the Ensign for

Israel's gathering upon this the land of Joseph, the land of Zion, to build the New Jerusalem, and prepare the way for the coming of the Lord in his glory. Earth has labored six days but they are not days of twenty-four hours each. Joseph taught that there is a great planet named Kolob, nearest the Celestial Throne, and that it revolves once in a thousand years. That is a day with God. It was such a day that Adam was warned of when told: "The day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die; for Adam, after eating of the forbidden fruit, lived to the age of nine hundred and thirty years. It was such a day that Peter had in mind when he wrote: "A day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." According to our Prophet's teachings, God gave to this planet, Mother Earth, seven thousand years as the period of "its temporal existence;" and four thousand years, or four of those great days, had passed before Christ was crucified, while nearly two thousand years, or two more days, have gone by since. Consequently, we stand at the present moment in the Saturday Evening of Time, near the close of the sixth day, at the week's end of human history. Morning will break upon the Millennium, the thousand years of peace, the Sabbath of the World.

HOUSE-CLEANING IN PROGRESS.

Marvel not, therefore, that all things are in commotion. War, famine, pestilence, earthquake, tempest and tidal wave—these are among the predicted signs of the Savior's second coming. Earth must be freed from oppression and cleansed from all iniquity. It is God's House, and he is coming to live in it, and to make of it a glorified mansion. House-cleaning is in progress, and Saturday's work must be done and out of the way before the Lord of the Sabbath appears.

Memory

O memory, sweet memory,
 Let me recall the scenes I love of days gone by;
 Do not forget the friends I've met,
 Nor those now gone to other homes beyond the sky;
 And kind acts done by every one,—
 O write them all with trenchant pen, nor let them die,—
 Lest I forget.

O memory, be kind to me,
 I do not ask thee to erase all sorrow's care;
 I realize that most we prize
 The joy that's gained through sorrow's tears or deep despair;
 But memory, kind memory,
 Eradicate all thoughts of sin or shame I bear,—
 Lest I forget.

Harold R. Harrison.

Kemmerer, Wyoming.