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SERMON BY REV. R. CALVIN DOBSON

Continued from page 5

in between us and the One Whom we should put first, that this command lifts up its word of conmdemnation; and only then.

William Blake was wrong then when he said, "There are three powers in man of conversing with Paradise—Poetry, Painting, Music." He overlooked the greatest of all, the Spirit.

But Michael Angelo was more nearly correct, when in old age he made this confession:—

"Now hath my life across a stormy sea,
Like a frail bark, reached that wide port, where all
Are bidden, 'ere the final reckoning fall
Of good and evil for eternity.
Now know I well how that fond phantasy
Which made my soul the worshipper and thrall
Of earthly art is vain; how criminal
Is that which all men seek unwillingly.
Those amorous thoughts which were so lightly dressed,
What are they when the double death is nigh?
The one I know for sure, the other dread.
Painting nor sculpture now can lull to rest
My soul, that turns to His great love on high,
Whose arms to clasp us on the cross were spread."

2. Then, of course, there is the peril of Priestism, that has always been a stumbling block to many. It was true in Paul's day, when some were worshipping Paul and some Appollos. And Paul revealed to them the folly of their idolatry. It is always idolatrous to put anyone between oneself and God.

And when we speak of Priestism, we think of this blight that has rested upon priest-ridden Spain, and the Phillipines and Mexico. There the people have had a false view of God, because they thought that it was necessary to reach Him through the priesthood. This peril has become one of the most prolific sources of evil. It is a clear violation of this second commandment. God says in the first commandment, "I am your God; worship Me." And in the second He says, "Come directly to Me, and let no supposed necessary help intervene between you and Me." There is to be direct communication between the soul and God.

3. The same danger is seen with regard to Ritual and forms in the church. A certain amount of form in service, with ornate and aesthetic surroundings, is helpful to the worshipper. But it is so easy for us to lift them into a place where they are hurtful rather than helpful that it is well for us to bear in mind their peril also, lest they come between us and God; and we worship the form, and the form becomes the end rather than the means to the end. Ritualism is fine, but it begins and ends in the senses.

A minister said a while ago that it was just as important to salvation to be baptized as to believe in Christ; and he added that the creed had not been repeated in the proper sense unless the reciters bowed their heads at the proper place in the recitation; but God says "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, but worship Me in spirit and in truth." Another person said that she could not enjoy the services of the church unless a certain man preached. For in her thought the minister represented God among men. He does if Godly, but no more than does the worshiper in the pew if he is Godly. There was given with the law in the ancient time a certain amount of ritual with a holy place and a holy of holies, with a curtain veiling the holy place where only the priest was allowed to enter; but that was done away in Christ, and the middle wall of partion was torn away once and for all when He bowed His head on Calvary; and since then the way to God has been direct: and "Whosoever will may come."

There is a growing tendency in the church today to observe times and ceremonies. Services are including more of form than they once had. And one needs to be reminded of the danger that lies in this way. There is danger of observance and formalism taking the heart out of religion. We have made far too much of the Crucifix, as a symbol of our faith. And while some tell us that as they look upon it they do not think of it as of Christ; yet we are in danger of making the symbol of His death expressive of our faith in a once crucified, yet in a living and reigning Saviour: "It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again," in Whom we believe; unto life; and it is Christ and not the cross that saves men and women.

Some are in danger of observing Lent as a time for general house cleaning. And it is well that we should so use it. But there seem to be some who are so impressed with the value of that season that they serve the devil 325 days of the year and try to make up to God in the 40 days that are left.

There is danger of making the ordinances of the church such as the Lord's Supper something more than a simple memorial service. It is not and never intended to be a mysterious rite or sacrament by the observance of which the believer is enabled in some mystical way to come nearer to God. It is a means of grace, and of helpfulness to the one who will come in the simplicity of it all, and thus remember Jesus.

So also with the formalism of the service, the observance of Easter and of Christmas. Well may they be valuable means of deepening the devotion of the believer; but alas for us if we degrade them by exalting them into a kind of idol; by observing them, and not observing Christ, of whom they speak.

4. Then we remember how much is said today about worshiping God through nature. It is strange that the people of the Old Testament did not discover the beauties of nature, and forsake any and all other means of approaching God. They did admire nature and her handiwork. Read the Psalmist's descriptions of her beauty; but he always got back to God; without allowing nature to keep him from God. Let no one undervalue the ministry of nature but no one has ever been heard of reaching God through nature alone. You might as well talk about becoming acquainted with a person by admiring the livery he travels in. You cannot use a flower or a tree or a landscape or the golf links, or any of God's handiworks as a substitute for God Himself, and expect the soul to grow Godlike.

And when God said "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above or that is in the earth beneath", lest the image and likeness of these things stand betewen Him and His children, it is not to be supposed for one moment that He would sanction the thing itself instead of the image of it becoming an obstacle in men's way of coming to Him and having direct communication with Him. And yet that is what a great many nature-worshipers do today.

5. Then there are those who allow human nature to become a sort of idol that keeps them from God. Some are so engrossed in humanitarism, of serving humanity for humanity's sake that they have no time nor place for God. To make service in behalf of humanity without spiritualizing it by a real worship of God, as ones chief aim and end is to put the cart before the horse; and to put humanity on the throne and give God second place. It is to keep the second great commandment without observing the first. But he who serves humanity because he wants to lift humanity to God Whom he "loves with all his heart and soul and strength and mind," is really serving and worshipping God.

Now all of this leads us to the central truth of this commandment which was also taught by the Master Himself. And that is that access to God is personal, direct, individual, spiritual. God has given us helps and aids, but we do not depend on them, and we are not to make too much of them. We must never allow them to [illegible] between us and our God. Art and forms and symbols and helpers and persons have their place if rightly used, but we are not to be dependent on them. For anyone who places nature or art or ritual or ordinance or times or seasons or priest or friend or sacrament or sacrifice between himself and His God is depriving himself of true worship. To the woman of Samaria at the well Jesus said, "Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem do men worship the Father;" for these are not essential; "But he that worshipeth the Father must worship in spirit and in truth."

And that is the kind of worship that Jehovah prescribes in this second commandment. And he that worships God on this wise, will keep this table of the law unsullied, and unbroken.

We have our aids; but we must not worship them, nor allow them to keep us from God. Our friends

Continued on page 10

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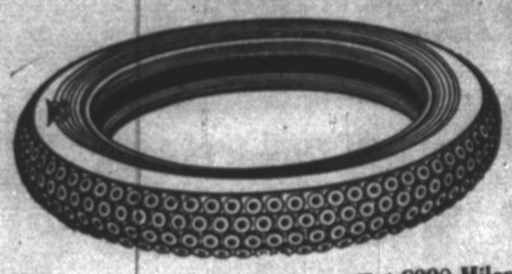

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