

False Worship.

Leviticus 10: 1-11.

C. H. Mackintosh.

In meditating upon the ordinances of the Mosaic ritual, one thing in particular strikes the mind, viz., the remarkably jealous way in which God fenced Himself round from the approach of man, as such. It is salutary for the soul to ponder this. We are in great danger of admitting into our minds an element of unholy familiarity when thinking of God, which the devil may use in a very pernicious way and to a very evil end.

It is a fundamental principle of truth, that in proportion as God is exalted and revered in our thoughts, will our walk through life be shaped in accordance with what He loves and enjoins; in other words, there is a strong moral link between our estimate of God and our moral conduct. If our thoughts of God are *low*, low will be our standard of Christian walk; if high, the result will be accordingly. Thus, when Israel, at the foot of mount Horeb, "changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass," the Lord's words were, "Thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have *corrupted themselves*." Mark those words, "corrupted themselves." They could not do otherwise, when they let down their thoughts of the dignity and majesty of God so low as to imagine, for a moment, that He was "like an ox that eateth grass."

Similar is the teaching of Romans 1. There the apostle shows us that the reason of all the abominations of the Gentile nations must be sought for in the fact, that "when they knew God, they glorified Him not *as God*," thus they too "corrupted themselves." This is a principle possessing vast practical influence. If we attempt to lower God, we must necessarily lower ourselves; and herein we are furnished with a key by which to interpret all religion. There is an inseparable link between the character of the god of any religion and the character of the votaries thereof, and Jehovah was constantly reminding His people of the fact, that *their* conduct was to be the consequence of what *He* was. "I am the Lord thy God, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt; therefore," etc., "be ye holy, for I am holy." And exactly similar is the Spirit's word to us: "He that hath this hope in him purifieth *himself*, even as *He is pure*."

This principle, I conceive, carries us far above all merely systematic views of truth; it is not at all a question of mere doctrine. No; it brings us at once into the deep recesses of the soul, there to ponder, as beneath the piercing, jealous eye of the *Thrice Holy One*, the estimate which we, as individuals, are daily and hourly forming of *Him*. I feel that we cannot with impunity refuse to give our minds seriously to this important point of truth; it will be found to contain much of the secret of our low walk and lamentable deadness. God is not exalted in our thoughts; *He* has not the supreme place in our affections; self, the world, our family, our daily employments, have, as regards the most of us, thrust down our gracious God from the throne of our affections, and robbed the One who died to save us of the blood-purchased homage of our hearts. This being the case, can we expect to flourish? Ah! no; the husbandman who gives his time and thoughts to something else during the spring time, shall look in vain for a golden harvest; he shall "reap the whirlwind," as many are now doing.

The opening verses of this chapter furnish a truly terrifying illustration of the inflexible justice and burning jealousy of God; they sound in our ears as with a voice of thunder: "I am a jealous God." Nadab and Abihu, as it were but yesterday, stood before the Lord, — clothed in their garments of glory

and beauty, washed in the blood, brought near unto God, made His priests, had passed through all the solemn ceremonies of inauguration into their priestly office. Yes, all this occurred but as yesterday, and today they are wasted by the fire of Jehovah, and are seen to fall from their high elevation — a spectacle to men and angels of the fact, that the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility, and the greater, too, the judgment if that responsibility be not fully met.

What, we may ask, was their sin? Was it murder? Did they stain the curtains of the tabernacle with human blood? Or was it some other abominable sin, from which the moral sense shrinks? No; it was a sin with which the blessed God is grieved by multitudes of professors at this moment — it was *false worship!* "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not." "*Strange fire.*" Here was their sin. Here we see men apparently engaged in making preparation for the worship of God; there is the fire, the incense, the censer, and the priest; and, mark, they were not false and spurious priests, but true sons of Aaron, members of the really separated priestly house, clothed in the divinely appointed priestly robes; yet, notwithstanding, *struck dead*, and by whom? by Him whom we call our God and Father! How awfully solemn! Yes, and the fact receives increased solemnity in our view, when we remember that the fire which consumed these false worshippers came from off the "mercy-seat." It was not from Mount Sinai's top this fire came, but out "from before the Lord," who was dwelling "between the cherubim above the mercy-seat." God will not be trifled with. Even from the throne of grace will the fire come forth, to lay prostrate those who come before it in any other way than the divinely appointed way. "They died before the Lord!" Dreadful announcement! "Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15: 4).

Let us inquire, then, what the "strange fire" was which brought down such terrific judgment upon those priests; and, in order the more clearly to ascertain this, it is only needful that we turn our attention for a moment to *true* worship and the elements which composed it, in the sixteenth chapter of this book. We find the elements of true worship laid before us in the following words: "And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not" (Lev. 16: 13). Here we see that the elements composing true worship were two, viz., *pure fire* and *pure incense*. It must be *living fire* fresh from the altar of God, where it was perpetually fed by the sacrifice of God's own appointment. The doctrine of this is very apparent. On God's altar is seen, day and night, a fire blazing, expressing, in the view of faith, the inflexible holiness of the Divine nature feeding upon the sacrifice of Christ.

Again, the incense must be *pure*, for "ye shall offer no *strange* incense" (Ex. 30: 7); *i.e.*, it must be such as that God can delight therein, and of His own appointment, not that which is according to our own thoughts, for it was only *pure* incense that could offer a proper material for food to the pure living fire from off the altar. Thus, our worship, to be pure, must possess these two qualities: *Christ* must constitute the material of it, and *the Spirit* alone must kindle the flame. This is true worship. When our souls are really happy in the contemplation of Christ and His precious atonement, led into that contemplation by the Holy Ghost, *then alone* we are able to worship "in spirit and in truth." "While I was musing, the fire kindled." While our souls muse on Jesus, our censer sends up its cloud of acceptable incense over the mercy-seat. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Now, false worship is the very reverse of all this. What is it? It is composed of a variety of

elements, fleshly thoughts, animal feelings, worked upon by external things, an imposing ceremonial, sensuous rituals, dim religious light, fine music, pomp and circumstance. These are the elements of false worship, and are opposed to the simple worship of the inner sanctuary, "the live coal, and the pure incense." And in looking at Christendom at this moment, do we not see numerous altars smoking with this impure fire and impure incense? Do we not see the most unholy materials consumed upon many a censer, and the smoke thereof going up as an insult rather than a sweet savour to God? Truly we do, and it is needful for us to look well to the condition of our hearts, lest we be carried away into the self-same evil, for we may rest assured that no one who thus trifles with God will escape with impunity

Let us now note the effect of this upon Aaron. "Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. *And Aaron held his peace.*" "I was dumb and opened not my mouth, because *Thou* didst it." Aaron saw the hand of the Lord in the solemn scene before him, and *was still*; not a murmur escapes him; "*it is the Lord,*" and "He will be sanctified in them that approach Him." "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about Him." There is something unspeakably grand and awful in this scene; Aaron in solemn silence before the Lord; his two living sons on one side, and his two dead ones on the other. What an example of the inflexible justice of God! The bodies of these two men were, it appears, burned by fire, but their priestly robes were untouched, for their cousins were told by Moses to go near and carry them forth; and "they carried them *in their coats* out of the camp." Here we learn a solemn lesson: we may, by disobedience, reduce ourselves to such a condition that there will remain nothing but the mere outward form, as seen in the "coats" of Aaron's sons. If any one had looked beneath these coats, he would only have seen the blasted bodies of two priests! The substance, the reality was gone; nought remained but the external covering: such is "a form of godliness without the power," "a name to live while dead."

Lord, keep us very solemn and watchful, for we know but little of our fearful capabilities of evil until we are brought into circumstances to develop them! We may retain the outward appearance of priests, the phraseology of worship, acquaintance with the furniture of God's house, and, after all, be void of godly reality and power in our souls. Oh! reader, let our worship be *pure*, let our hearts be simple as to their object, let us have the *pure* incense and fire, and ever remember that "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of His saints." I would here observe, that in looking at Aaron and his two sons standing over the dead bodies, we are forcibly reminded of the last chapter of Isaiah, a truly solemn chapter: "They shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

But we are now called to contemplate the finest principle of truth in the entire passage. "And Moses said unto Aaron and his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes, lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people; but let your brethren and the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle, lest ye die; for *the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you.* And they did according to the word of Moses." When one enters upon the office of the priesthood, he is brought out of the region of nature's influence, and must no longer yield to its claims. This is exemplified by Aaron. Natural ties had been burst asunder violently. A melancholy blank had been made in his affections, yet he must not be influenced in the least by all that had taken place before him; and why? "The anointing oil of the Lord was upon him." Surely this is a practical lesson for us. Why has nature such a power over us? Why have earthly circumstances and connections such influence upon us? Why are we so much affected by the things that are passing around us, the vicissitudes of this earthly scene? Why are we so inordinately acted

upon by the mere claims and ties of nature? Because we are not *abiding* as we should *in the tabernacle*, with "the anointing oil of the Lord upon us." Here is the real cause of all the failure. In our not realising our priestly place, our priestly dignity, our priestly privileges. Hence it is that we are so carried away by present things, and dragged down from our high elevation as "Kings and priests unto God."

May we then be quickened by this passage, this solemn passage of the Word, to seek more and more of the holy elevation of mind expressed in the words, "Uncover not your heads!" May we get more deeply into the mind of God about present things, and our own place therein! God grant it, for the sake of His dear Son!