

Pastor and People.

What is Prohibited in the Second Commandment?

BY THE REV. SAMUEL HOUSTON.

The second commandment has to do not with the object of worship but with the manner in which worship is paid. What is forbidden in the question we are now to consider is not the worshiping of false gods at least directly, but mistakes that may be made in the way in which we render homage to the living and true God. The doctrine that there is but one God who is the supreme and only object of worship has been established, and now the thought presents itself: What precisely is the mode in which we are to adore and worship the dread Being? Or more particularly the question now before us is: What are we prohibited from doing when we draw near to God—what is it that we are to mark off in thought and most carefully avoid in holding immediate intercourse with the Divine Being?

In this prohibition we are turned away from errors of human invention which too many are opposed to adopt and follow, and the feet are planted firmly on the supremacy of the written word of God. The ground of the prohibition is equally opposed to rationalism on the one hand and to superstition on the other. It is affirmed again and again that there are modes and forms of worship, which, while they are not founded on the word of God, and are therefore not essential to divine worship, yet are helpful in some measure, stimulating the feelings and elevating the emotions, and because of that we are justified in putting them into practice. And not only is this asserted but we see such forms to be in actual use. In view of such proceedings, a careful reading of the answer to this question urges on us the inquiry, what saith the Lord? It is our duty to follow explicitly what Scripture teaches not what the promptings of human taste or human wisdom may suggest.

The intelligent heathen and the intelligent Romanist alike honestly and sincerely repudiate the idea that they worship the image or picture, before which they bow down and which the eye contemplates during the act of devotion. What they say is substantially this: We do not worship the idol, but the god that the idol represents; we do not worship the image or picture, we simply present an object to the eye in order that the emotions may be stirred up to a higher pitch of fervor. Admitting that all take as high a view as that of such helps to devotion, which may not be admitted for a moment, nevertheless even that is utterly erroneous, for the second commandment forbiddeth the worshiping of God by images.

Multitudes of Protestants, however, of every name, are in the habit of assuming, through want of thought, of course, that this prohibition has no practical application for them. It is all very well to have such a gun in good condition, scoured and oiled, so as to fire a broadside from time to time with telling effect into the camp of the Papists over beyond, or for the foreign missionary to use when he enters upon a struggle with idolaters; but the rebound from Popery inaugurated by the Reformation and crystallized into permanent consistency by the increase of knowledge and of freedom of thought, which has swept on with greater intensity of force ever since that era, has separated Protestants far enough from error of that kind. When assuming so much, have they considered sufficiently the way in which our Lord expounded the commandments, especially in the sermon on the mount? Let us look into this for a moment. One or two aspects of more than ordinary interest in the present age must suffice.

WORSHIP OF PRAISE.

Praise is an essential part of the worship of God. There is no clearer injunction in Scripture than that in which all the people are directed to praise God. We are not aware that any branch of the Church of Christ, in theory at least, disputes the obligation under which all are to join in the singing of praise. In the sifting and scepticism of these times, whatever other doctrines and duties are questioned this element of worship has escaped unscathed. Scepticism and infidelity are, however, not the only ways in which Satan manages to weaken the force of the outcome of divine life in the soul. The modes in which the life of a doctrine or a duty may be sapped, and the flow of blood checked are various. The truth is not assailed either openly or covertly, and if it is not put into practice it becomes a dead letter. We may enter hundreds of places of worship in this or in any other nominally Christian land, and of all denominations, and find many of the supposed worshippers, in not a few cases the large majority of them, silent when the psalm or hymn is sung. Praise is handed over to the choir which in some select cases is composed of a quartette. A few throughout the assembly may join in a faint and diffident manner as if they were ashamed to let their voices be heard. The people have surrendered the duty and privilege of praising God to occupants of the organ loft or orchestra, whose demeanor after the performance is over, (in such circumstances it can be nothing but a performance,) is often a scandal, an exclamation even in the eyes of the men of the world. It may well be asked, how can all this be in agreement with the words, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also?" It is utter mockery to say that it is. A higher measure of the aesthetical may be reached in that way, at least, that is the design intended, but the devotional is lost sight of until it is doubtful whether it has not altogether disappeared in the process. It is a safe position to assume that when a choir monopolizes the service in which all the people are commanded to participate, God is worshiped in a way not appointed in his word.

WORSHIP OF GIVING.

Again, contributing to the cause of God is an essential part of worship, as much so as prayer or praise. The erroneous views held and practiced on this subject are legion. There are some who object to be more

pious than ordinary, and so intensely spiritualized and unworship in their mode of reviewing religion, that they relegate to the secularities of the society all that pertains to money. Contributing to the cause of God, whether for the support of the ministry at home or for the spread of the gospel abroad, but especially for the former, is not to be thought of, is not to be spoken about, much less is the filthy lucre itself to be handled on the Lord's day, and in the house in which the Lord is worshipped. Handling money is business, and business is to be done in the counting-house and during the six days given to man for work. Others are more rational in their mode of regarding money given to such objects, and yet they are not inclined to grant that the presentation of offerings is essentially divine worship. They are shrewd enough to discern, at least some are, that to grant that position must necessarily involve the putting of the hand much deeper into the pocket than they are in the habit of doing. It is lamentable to think that in this age of advancement, so called, so few are found to sympathize intelligently with the injunction of the apostle, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." There is abundant wealth at the disposal of professed members of the church of Christ. If that wealth were consecrated in keeping with the professions that are made, there would be no necessity for the call, pathetic and imperative by turns, which is heard on every side and from every branch of the church, for means to support the agencies at home and the spread of the gospel abroad. There is no reason why those that preach the gospel should lack a sufficient support, or why the treasuries of the Boards should be empty, or worse than that, viz., be in debt.

RESULT OF TRUE WORSHIP.

Were believers to perform this part of worship in the way appointed in the Word, the Lord's treasury would not be empty, there would be enough in it and to spare. It is not depression in financial affairs that effects the treasury, causing depletion and bankruptcy; it is worldliness, fashion, love of display, lack of principle in dealing with obligation—in fine, it is covetousness, which the sacred writer says is idolatry. There is a guilt resting upon the professed followers of the Lord, because of their disregard of what is forbidden in the second commandment. Honest worship is not paid in some cases because of ignorance, but let us beware of counting such ignorance a light sin in these days. It cannot be said to be due to lack of opportunity, but to want of diligence in taking advantage of the opportunities that are available. It is want of thought, but such want of thought is very nearly akin to wilful, deliberate sin. Let the children of God be very careful not to present sacrifices to the Lord in a way not appointed in his Word.

In general terms there are two essential elements in worship, and whatever is opposed to or inconsistent with either is forbidden. These are sincerity and obedience to the revealed will of God. Heartiness is essential, but heartiness is not everything. In these times men's ears are dinned with the sentiment that if a man be only sincere, that is all that God requires of him. In one sense the sentiment is correct; in another it is utterly erroneous. Here is another the sentiment is correct. If a man be honest in his sincerity, he has no scruple in conforming his life, and therefore the mode in which he worships God, to the divine will, so far as revealed. But that is not what the so-called advanced thinkers of the day mean by sincerity. What they mean is a sincerity apart from and independent of the Bible. These two elements—sincerity and submission to law—are virtually and substantially embraced in the statement, "They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." The "in spirit" represents sincerity, the "in truth" represents obedience to the law of God. Both are absolutely necessary, the one cannot be left out any more than the other.

INTELLIGENCE IN WORSHIP.

One lesson is obvious, especially from the remarks just made, and with that we must close. It is that intelligence is demanded in the worship we present to God. An ordinary consideration of the truth, as presented in answer to the question now before us, proves that what is known under the term cant of fanaticism is not acceptable worship; it cannot even be an element in that worship. A superficial grasp of what God is and of what we are, and of our relation to him, is not even admissible. As believers on the Son of God it is not possible to avoid being guilty of what is forbidden here unless we bring our faculties of intelligence with all our might to bear on such topics. It is by intelligent worship, accompanied by the blessing of the Spirit, that men are made to participate in the gift of life eternal. It is pertinent in the highest degree to ask, How is it possible for a man to avoid worshipping in a way not appointed in the Word, unless he have a competent acquaintance with what that Word teaches? It is not possible. If then as followers of the Lord Jesus we would be free from blind devoteism, let us be sure that we understand what we do when we worship God, let us be acquainted with what the Bible says on the matter, and let us cherish a spirit of obedience to what we are convinced is the will of God. Thus only will we be clear from what is forbidden in the second commandment, thus will we keep ourselves from idols.

How before talent, even if unassociated with goodness; but between these two we must make an everlasting distinction. When once the idolatry of talent enters, then farewell to spirituality; when men ask their teacher, not for that which will make them more humble and God-like, but for the excitement of an intellectual banquet, then farewell to Christian progress.—Robertson.

If we wish to strengthen our conviction in reality and usefulness, we should seek as much as possible to bring our own life into close contact with what is genuine in our fellow-men. We cannot help measuring the great world by the little world of our experience, and we have the choice of this or that in our company and our friendships.—Rev John Ker.

Giving as an Act of Worship.

BY THE REV. J. M. GIBSON, M. A. OF CHICAGO.

There are three ways in which the grace of Christian liberality is commonly presented and commended: as a matter of duty, as a matter of pity, and as a matter of profit. It is well that the subject should be presented in all of these aspects; but there is another, and very important one, which is much overlooked, viz: giving as an act of worship. It is especially important that we should consider the duty in this, its highest aspect, on account of the general tendency in our times to degrade it. Is it not a very common thing to look upon the collecting of money for charitable and evangelical purposes as nothing else than a necessary evil? "If our Christian work could only be carried on without that continual appeal to the purse of the Christian community how much better would it be; if we could get rid of this constant begging for religious purposes, how much more smoothly and comfortably would every thing get on." So many seem to think. They see the beauty of praise and prayer in the House of God; but they see no beauty, nothing but stern, secular, hard necessity in the bringing of an offering. The vessels used in the communion service are sacred in their eyes; but the collection plates are common, if not unclean—secular, if not profane—something of the world brought from dire necessity into the Church.

Such ideas as these would have no place if giving to the Lord's cause were looked upon in the light in which it is presented from first to last in the word of God, viz: as an act of worship, a sacred duty, a devotional exercise.

It could very easily be shown that giving is a very natural way of expressing many of the feelings which enter into our devotions, such as reverence, gratitude, love. But not to be tedious, we present at once the scriptural testimony, or such portions of it as we can find space for.

Taking up the Old Testament, the very first act of worship of which we read was an offering: Gen. iv, 3, 4. Passing on to the father of the faithful, we find him giving tithes to Melchizedek, as a priest of the Most High God. When Jacob at Bethel suddenly found himself, before he knew it, in the House of God and at the Gate of Heaven, he hastens to bring an offering with him. No funds were needed to build that temple or keep it in repair, or maintain its ministers; and yet the solitary worshipper brought a princely offering to the Lord.

The entire Mosaic economy might be appealed to as a proof that God desires to be worshipped by offering. A very large part of the service consisted in the presentation of offerings to the Lord; and besides the offerings prescribed by law there was an indefinite margin left for free-will offerings—purely spontaneous acts of worship. Observe too that the same language is used in setting apart the tithes of substance as the seventh of time. It is not, "So much money is needed for this and that and the other thing, and you must bear your share of the burden!" but this: "It is the Lord's, it is holy unto the Lord." Lev. xxvii, 30. And this same tone is kept up throughout. "Honour the Lord with thy substance." "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; bring an offering and come into His Courts." And so in many other instances.

Turning to the New Testament, here again the very first act of worship we meet is a presentation of offerings. Matt. ii, 11. And mark, it was not to replenish an empty exchequer, or prop up a sinking charity fund, or extricate a struggling evangelization society, that the wise men presented these offerings; but simply to worship the Lord. Again, read Matt. v, 23, 24, and you will see that the Lord Jesus recognizes the offering of gifts to God as among the duties of His kingdom, and moreover that he recognizes it as a strictly devotional exercise, demanding a right state of heart as imperatively as the Holy Communion itself. For the apostolic view of the subject, reference may be had to the directions given to the Christians to lay as do their contributions on the first day of the week, i. e., on the day specially set apart for worship.

A word now in reference to the place that giving holds in New Testament worship. Our ordinary public worship consists of three parts: hearing, singing, praying. The last of these is two fold, for what we have to give is of two kinds, "the fruit of our lips," and the fruit of our labours. We thus find that giving as a part of worship ranks along with praise. And is not this the highest place of all? It is a great privilege to be allowed to stand in God's presence and hear Him speak. It is a greater to be permitted to speak to Him as supplicants. But is it not the greatest honour and highest privilege of all to be permitted to bring Him a present out of the poor things which we can command? "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; and therefore, if we are to distinguish between the different parts of worship, the service of song and the offering of gifts take precedence both of prayer and of the reading and preaching of the word. They are second in sacredness and dignity only to those solemn sacramental acts of worship by which God's covenant with us is signified and sealed.

As to the significance of giving as an act of worship, it might be shown that it is a most appropriate expression of the homage which we owe to God as the stewards of that which is really His—the gratitude we owe Him for all his gifts, and especially "His unspeakable Gift—the love to God and man which inspires self denying devotion to the cause of God and man—and the faith, which is exercised by those who really believe it to be better to give to God than to lay up for themselves. All this however is left without illustration, that space may be had for a few inferences from this view of the subject.

First, in regard to the blessedness of giving. The only difference here is the counting of the gains. (1.) Every act of worship, simply as an act of worship, is "twice blessed." There is the blessing realized in the exercise itself, and there is the reward afterwards. Take the case of prayer, for example. In the very offering of prayer

there is spiritual profit gained—the first gain. And there is the answer which comes in its own time—the second gain. So it is with giving. There is blessedness in the feelings which as an act of worship it expresses; there is blessedness in the very expressing of these feelings; and then, there is the manifold return which God will certainly make, if not in kind, then in better kind, according to His promise and his invariable procedure. But (2) what is offered of our substance not only is itself "holy to the Lord," but consecrates all the rest. Just as giving a part of our time to God hallows all the rest, (for what Christian is there who does not feel and rejoice to think the whole week is consecrated by the Lord's Day at the beginning of it), so the giving of a part of our substance in worship to God hallows all the rest, makes it much more enjoyable, and more beneficial. Then, (3) be let that special blessedness which is attendant on giving as an act of worship, there are all the advantages which spring from giving simply as a matter of duty or benevolence, such as the satisfaction of having discharged duty, the joy of doing good, the pleasure of watching the ripening fruit of your liberality. To say then that giving as an act of worship is "twice blessed" is but to beggar the theme. It is blessed a thousand fold.

2. As to the mode of giving. Much might be said here, but we shall only insist on regularity and system. If it is a part of worship, it should be regular like all other parts of worship. And surely once every Lord's Day ought not to be considered too frequent. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." Observe the last clause. It is obvious that the apostle wished the duty discharged calmly, deliberately, systematically, as in the presence of God, rather than of Paul. How different is the course so generally adopted now: the people gathered together, the case fully and feelingly presented, a powerful appeal made, and then a collection or subscription taken up before the excitement has died away. Surely the other is the more excellent way.

3. As to the extent of the obligation. Are the poor to be excluded from any part of the worship of God? Are the children to be excluded? Are any to be excluded? Thank God, His worship is not restricted to any age or class. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store." Let no one despise the smallest gift. Think of the poor widow and what the Lord of Glory said about her. By all means, let all the poor be encouraged to give, and let all the children know the luxury and the blessedness of it.

2. As to the amount of the giving. The Lord Jesus is sitting over against the treasury, and looking you full in the face as you drop your offering, representing, symbolizing, embodying, expressing, your gratitude and love to Him. Realize this, and then please yourself as to the amount. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich." Do you? Do you? Do you? Then give just what you think right.—Issued by the Committee of the General Assembly on Systematic Benevolence.

The Church and the Theatre.

In a recent plea for the theatre, the editor of one of our popular monthlies says: "We have only to remember that the theatre is with us, that it will stay, and that the Church has a great responsibility concerning the stage of the future. If it supposes that condemning it at a street's length, and indiscriminately, will discharge its duty, it will find itself sadly mistaken." In the same article, the writer, however, insists that the theatre is very largely responsible for the position of the Church, in regard to it, but that "the stage is better than it was on the whole," and that the best class of managers, and actors, and actresses have only to be "patient with a state of things which a multitude of their predecessors, and many of their contemporaries have helped to bring about. The Church is gradually working toward their recognition, and they must give it time to move."

We have no disposition to throw stones at any sinner in or out of the theatre, much less at those who have tried to elevate and purify the drama, and whose moral characters are "of good report." The theatre has made its own record for ages, and for eighteen hundred years the Church of Christ has been compelled to bear testimony against its general irreligious and demoralizing influences. Efforts to purge it have only been spasmodic, and have ended in failure. Exceptions prove the rule. The Church has far more concern with the stage of to-day than with that of the future. She will never find strength or help at the shrines of the drama. Bitter experience has always proved that her members who indulge in that sort of recreation, injure themselves and the Church together. Christian principle is sunk in expediency, and expediency runs into license, and spirituality and usefulness decline, and conscience loses its power.

It is sadly true that many formal professors of religion patronize the theatre; but that "the Church is gradually working towards its recognition" is absolutely untrue. She can do that only at the cost of her allegiance to Christ, and of every principle that separates her from the world. She has enough to do now-days to keep her true members of the play-house, and to contend with their self complacent worldliness and lack of real spirituality, without setting the seal of the Cross upon the placards of the drama.

The law of God's house, the vows of Christians, the principles of Christian expediency, the purity of the churches, the Spirit of Christ, combine to demand that the Church shall keep herself pure. The friendship of the world is enmity against God, and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." The line between the world and the Church is too plainly drawn in the Bible to be mistaken; and that long line runs directly in front of the doors of the theatre.

We plead for Christian consistency for a higher order of religious life, and for a spirit of consecration, all which are impossible, and therefore are never seen in those who frequent even the best of metropolitan theatres. Say what men may about the dramatic instinct, whose cravings must be satisfied; and let every good thing be averred respecting the necessity of innocent recreations and amusements; we simply plead for the sway of that religious principle which rejects only what is destructive of piety, and rejoices in all that is good. There is a higher law than that of natural instinct, and a better way of recreating weary minds than that which sacrifices faith, like a bullock, upon the altar.

In saying these things, we mean to place religion and the Church upon their own rightful ground. The world will take care of the theatre, as it has always done. But the Church must take better care of herself and of her members, by rigidly maintaining the highest standard of biblical morality and of spiritual life. But this can never be done by "gradually working towards a recognition" of the theatre. If that day should ever come, the Church will be no better than the theatre; and the "candlestick will be removed out of its place."

The worst phase of this whole subject is the specious sophistry by which, in the name of Christianity and of the Church, the drama is exalted and the Gospel belittled; and the young and the thoughtless are beguiled under the plea that human nature demands that sort of recreation, and that it will remain among us. But the Church and the Gospel are also in the world, and they will remain here; and man requires them both, as the absolute necessity of his nature, for the life that now is, and for that which is to come. Christianity moves forward, never by compliance with the world, but by its antagonism to all that is wrong in the world. "Be not deceived." The Gospels cannot be rewritten, the Church stands upon the old rock, and her security depends upon her fidelity to Christ.—N. Y. Christian Intelligencer.

Random Readings.

Down the dark future, through long generations, The sounds of war grow fainter, and then cease; And like a bell with solemn, sweet vibrations, I hear once more the voice of Christ say, "Peace! Peace! and no longer, from its brazen portals, The blast of war's great organ shakes the skies; But beautiful as songs of the immortals The holy melodies of love arise."—Longfellow.

We cannot live in this world indifferent to appearances.—P. W. Robertson.

What a rich Father we have if we are God's children.—Hudinger.

He who thinks he has nothing to fear from temptations is most exposed to a fall.—Heubner.

The tempter can throw no standing Christian by force.—M. F. Besser.

God delivers only those who do their lawful utmost to deliver themselves.—R. South.

God's demands are always endorsed by our own consciences.—Heubner.

CHRISTIANS, when most deserving, are often most derided.—Ibid.

EXTERNAL influence, happiness, glory are no signs of a true church.—Starks.

THE more God empties your hands of other work, the more you may know he has special work to give them.—Garrett.

BEST of all is to preserve everything in a pure, still heart, and let there be for every pulse a thanksgiving, and for every breath a song.—Gosner.

THE heights of early promotion and glory lifts us no nearer heaven. It is easier to stop there from the lowly valley of humiliation and sorrow.—Pocock.

ALONE on the throne of God, and not below, in the footprints of a trampling multitude, are the sacred rules of right, which no majesties can displace or overturn.—Charles Sumner.

THE greatest thing, the first thing, the last thing, the most important thing, we can all do—we can all pray. Let us do this as a preparation for every other duty, and God will hear and bless.

CHRIST, and everything in him and with him, is an incomprehensible mystery; fall but explore it, and thou art but a fool; but believe what is revealed to thee of it, and it is enough for thy salvation.—Starks.

A GENTLEMAN is a Christian in spirit that will take a polish. The rest are but plated goods; and however excellent their fashion, rub them more or less, the base metal appears through.

WE are surprised at the fall of a famous professor; but, in the sight of God, the man was gone before; it is only we that have now first discovered it. "He that despiseth small things shall fall by little and little."—Newton.

THE religion of Jesus Christ is altogether a practical thing. Just consider how we are taught anything else that is practical. It is not by hearing or reading about making shoes that a man becomes a shoe-maker, but by trying to make them.—Augustus Hare.

SOME one inquired of Bunyan, "What is it which makes people so troubled about their afflictions?" "They are too much addicted," was Bunyan's reply, "to the pleasures of this life, and so they cannot endure that which makes a separation between them. The Lord useth the fall of contribution to separate the chaff from the wheat."

SCRATCH the green rind of a sapling, or wantonly twist it in the soil, and a scarred or crooked oak will tell of the act for centuries to come. How forcibly does this figure teach the necessity of giving right tendencies to the minds and hearts of the young!

NONE of the loftiest and most learned of this world ought to be ashamed of the simplicity of the Gospel, for God himself, the highest and wisest of all, let himself down to it. Sufficient it is for us that an infinite power resides in the cross, to deliver us out of all our deep depravity.—Starks.