

Whom Do We Serve?

“If it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”
—Joshua 24:15

ONE OF THE QUALITIES

inborn among a majority of mankind is the desire to worship and serve some higher being, or god. Today, as in the past, these have taken on many forms. Some have been based on religious beliefs, others have come about through mythology. Some have been viewed as personalities or living beings, and others as inanimate objects. Some view a higher being as merely an extension of themselves, with perhaps

more wisdom and greater noble qualities.

Regardless of the nature of the “gods” which mankind has believed in down through the centuries, one common theme is that the “believer” feels that in some way he gains certain insights from the god or gods he worships. The believer may also claim

that these higher beings, whatever form they may take, have the power to influence their life, whether for good, evil, happiness, sorrow, or in other ways.

For those who believe in the Bible, and its teaching of one Supreme Being, the confusion of believing in many gods is done away. The Prophet Isaiah, speaking for God, wrote under divine inspiration, “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.” (Isa. 46:9) Moses emphatically declared to the Israelites, “The LORD our God is one LORD.” (Deut. 6:4) In the New Testament, during the time in which Roman and Greek mythology was flourishing, the Apostle Paul, upon visiting the Greek city of Athens, spoke of the multitude of gods which they superstitiously worshipped.

“Men of Athens,” Paul began, “I perceive that you are in every respect remarkably religious. For as I passed along and observed the things you worship, I found also an altar bearing the inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. The Being, therefore, whom you, without knowing Him, revere, Him I now proclaim to you. GOD who made the universe and everything in it—He, being Lord of Heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries built by men. Nor is He ministered to by human hands, as though He needed anything—but He Himself gives to all men life and breath and all things. He caused to spring from one forefather people of every race, for them to live on the whole surface of the earth, and marked out for them an appointed span of life and the boundaries of their homes; that they might seek God, if perhaps they could grope for Him and find Him. Yes, though He is not far from any one of us. For it is in closest union with Him that we live and move and have

our being; as in fact some of the poets in repute among yourselves have said, For we are also His offspring. Since then we are God's offspring, we ought not to imagine that His nature resembles gold or silver or marble, or anything sculptured by the art and inventive faculty of man."—Acts 17:22-29, *Weymouth New Testament*

TWO OPPOSING INFLUENCES

The Scriptures inform us that since the fall of our first parents in Eden two powerful principles have been operative in the earth, one righteous and the other evil. Back of these principles have been their masters, or sources of influence. The principle of righteousness emanates from and is promoted by the Creator, the one God mentioned in the foregoing passages. The principle of evil is promoted by the great Adversary of God, the fallen Lucifer, variously designated in the Bible as the Devil, Satan, and "that old serpent."—Isa. 14:12; Rev. 12:9; 20:2

Man, in his original perfect condition, was created, as stated in the Bible, in the image of God. (Gen. 1:26,27) In such a condition, therefore, it would be natural that he prefer to yield to the God-like influences of righteousness and to live in harmony with them. However, on account of the original transgression of Adam, the entire race is born in sin. (Ps. 51:5; 58:3) Hence, man has tended to incline away from God and from the high principles of righteousness sponsored by him. There have been a few, however, throughout the ages to whom God has spoken and with whom he has specially dealt. These, under the encouragement of this divine fellowship,

have striven against the downward and evil tendencies with which they have been surrounded, and by God's grace, they have been overcomers.—James 5:10,11

SIN ALLOWED FOR A PURPOSE

Sin in the earth, under the leadership of the fallen Lucifer, could have been prevented by the Creator, but in his wisdom he saw that great advantage would accrue to the human race by permitting them to experience the terrible results of disobedience to divine law. (Rom. 7:13) Additionally, the fact that Satan and the principles of unrighteousness have mostly dominated in the affairs of men since Eden does not indicate that God has lost control of the situation, nor that his spirit of love and righteousness is inadequate to combat the forces of evil. It is simply that he continues to permit evil in order that each generation of the race, in its turn, may experience what the rulership of Satan means.

Later, when Satan is bound and unable to deceive the people any longer, God's thousand-year kingdom of righteousness will begin to operate throughout the entire earth. All who have died shall come forth from the grave, and the opportunity will be given to each of mankind to learn righteousness and choose between good and evil. Then their choice will be an intelligent one, based upon actual experience, first with evil in this life, and with righteousness during the coming kingdom.—Rev. 20:1-3,6; Matt. 6:10; Acts 24:15; II Pet. 3:13

In Genesis 3:14,15 God gives us a hint of the great struggle that would exist between those who would serve him and those serving the Adversary.

He explains that he would put enmity [Hebrew: hostility] between these two classes, which he here symbolically describes as the “seed” of the woman and the “seed” of the serpent—the visible representation of Satan. The seed of the woman mentioned in this account is later described as the “stars of heaven,” in reality the Christ or Messiah of promise, consisting of Jesus, the “Head,” and the “church,” his “body.”—Gen. 22:16-18; Gal. 3:16,29; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18

The Adversary, however, did not understand this at the time of Adam’s disobedience. During the ensuing ages God, beginning with Abel, has been selecting certain ones from the fallen race and preparing them for future service in the Messianic kingdom. Satan has taken occasion to oppose these too, so that all who have served God and endeavored to live righteously from Eden until now have felt the result of his enmity against them. This will continue until Satan is bound and the kingdom established. We are told that then the “rebuke” of his people God will take away from off the face of the whole earth.—Isa. 25:8

BOTH MASTERS DEMAND OBEDIENCE

When, in Genesis 3:15, God said that he would put enmity between those who served him and those who did not, he did not mean that he would be the creator of strife. The resulting strife, rather, is the unavoidable result of obedience to God by those who serve him, and the yielding to the influences of evil on the part of those who serve, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the other master, Satan.

God has allowed this warfare only in the sense that he has set up the high standard of righteousness for which those who desire to serve him are invited to strive to that end. As tests of loyalty and faithfulness, God permits the Adversary to exercise his counter influences in an effort to beat down their courage. However, God is with them, and if they meet these tests by keeping their faces toward God and are resolved to overcome, they will secure victory through his marvelous grace and strength.—Ps. 22:19; 46:1; Heb. 4:16

The divine law, which has been the touchstone of righteousness, has, throughout the ages of God's plan, called for obedience in many and various ways. Regardless of the details, however, the incentive for obedience, as well as the great objective to be obtained by it, has been selfless love. Satan, on the other hand, has influenced mankind through the appeal of selfishness. Every detail of the confused mass of misconceptions and deception by which he has led people away from God for six thousand years has been an appeal to the self-interest of those under his influence.

“God is love,” the Bible says. (I John 4:8) He demonstrated this principle which motivates all his purposes, and by which he desires his servants to be influenced, by giving the dearest treasure of his heart, his only begotten Son, to be man's Redeemer. (John 3:16) Satan's spirit of selfishness and pride is revealed by the scriptural explanation that he attempted to usurp God's position in the universe. It is this same spirit of self-seeking that he has successfully inculcated in so many among mankind throughout the ages.—Isa. 14:12-14

It helps in an understanding of what constitutes God's spirit of love, the Holy Spirit, to contrast what the Scriptures say about it, with what they say about the selfish and unholy spirit of the great Adversary. Various aspects of the Holy Spirit are referred to as the Spirit of Christ; of holiness; of truth; of promise; of meekness; of grace; and of prophecy.—Rom. 8:9; 1:4; I John 4:6; Eph. 1:13; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 10:29; Rev. 19:10

The various manifestations of the spirit of Satan are described as the spirit of fear; of bondage; of slumber; of the world; of antichrist; and of error. (II Tim. 1:7; Rom. 8:15; 11:8; I Cor. 2:12; I John 4:3,6) Just as all the various manifestations of God's Spirit represent, and are in harmony with, the operation of love in one form or another, so these different forms of evil are all in agreement with pride and selfishness.

DIVINE ADMONITIONS TO OBEDIENCE

Many of the divine admonitions contained in the Scriptures for the guidance and encouragement of the Lord's people reflect the thought of the two masters who are calling for our obedience. One of these, for example, is that of our opening text, Joshua 24:15, in which Joshua calls for the obedience of Israel to God by saying, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." In this particular instance the choice was to be made between heathen gods, served by the nations from whom the Israelites were separated, and Jehovah, the true God. From the time that Israel left Egypt, Satan had endeavored to lead them away from Jehovah, most often by appealing to their selfishness. God permitted

them thus to be tested, the tests almost always being in connection with material plenty and comforts.—Exod. 16:3,8; 17:2,3

The gods set up by Satan, the master of all false gods, are not always those of wood, metal, stone or clay such as have been worshiped by millions down through the ages. Indeed, many people today are not likely tempted to venerate physical objects to nearly the extent as has been the case in past centuries. Yet, even among otherwise God-honoring people, rather than choosing a life of full devotion to the Heavenly Father, significant time, strength and influence is given by most to the worship of some type of symbolic “golden calf.”

It is said that in the city of Ur, from which Abraham was called by God, the people were worshipers of a moon-god. The spiritual seed of Abraham today are not tempted to worship a deity like that, so Satan appeals to their selfish instincts along other lines. He endeavors to lure them away from the course of full devotion to righteousness by holding up before them the “pleasure god;” or the “god” of ambition; or pride; or vainglory. Any or all of these may become idols which we could set up in our hearts, and by worshiping them be drawn away from full devotion to the true God.

A DAILY CHOOSING

It is not enough that, in the beginning of our way as a Christian, we choose to serve the living God. Every day from that time forward our great Adversary, by one means or another, sets before us the opportunity of serving other “gods.” He brings all the pressure upon us he possibly can in order to

turn us aside from the course of full devotion to the Heavenly Father. Daily, therefore, and in each experience, we will find it necessary to choose whom we will serve. Our success in overcoming the selfish influences of the various suggestions and deceptions with which we are daily presented will depend largely upon the firmness with which we decide to follow righteousness. Hesitation and faltering indecision are almost certain to lead to defeat. On this point the Scriptures admonish us, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."—James 4:7; I Pet. 5:8,9

It is folly to suppose that the Christian can successfully serve two masters. This is clearly pointed out to us in Luke 16:13, where we read, "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." In this particular case the master, Satan, makes his appeal for our devotion through the love of earthly riches or "mammon." The same principle, however, holds true irrespective of the method which this "master" may use in appealing to our selfishness. The Apostle James expresses the same principle when he says that "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."—James 1:8

Not only does Satan, the master of unrighteousness, endeavor to lure us away from our devotion to the true God by direct appeals to selfishness, but he attempts also to break down our determined devotion by putting obstacles in our pathway which make it difficult to carry out our consecration. He may bring persecution, for example, coupled with the tempting suggestion that we could avoid all

this by being less zealous in our service of the true Master. He may cause the loss of our friends, or of our good name, and in many other ways impress upon us the many disadvantages which accrue from what he presents as the foolishness of serving the true God. All of this is part of the enmity which he manifests toward the “seed” of the woman. The Christian’s only hope of being able to withstand his attacks is by relying on God’s promises of grace to help in every time of need.—Heb. 4:16

DARKNESS FOR LIGHT

In addition to the allurements and the obstacles by which the Adversary attempts to break our allegiance to God, he also uses the method of subtle deception described by the apostle as the art of being “transformed into an angel of light.” (II Cor. 11:13-15) This simply means that he attempts to have us serve him while truly believing that we are opposing him and serving our Heavenly Father. The only safeguard against being misled by this deception is that of our full devotion to the principles of righteousness revealed in God’s will for us. The great objective of God’s plan for each of his servants is that they might be filled and controlled by his spirit of love. Service to him based on any other motive, we can be sure, comes from the false “angel of light” spoken of above.

For the Christian during the present Gospel Age, the great test of obedience to the principle of love is the willingness to lay down time, energy, and even life itself if it were called upon, in the divine service. In this we have Jesus as our example. If our dedication to God is not wholehearted and absolute,

the Adversary might easily deceive us by pointing out ways of alleged service which do not call for the laying down of our lives in sacrifice.

Our flesh does not like to sacrifice. It is better pleased when it is pampered, cared for and made comfortable, when it is looked up to and praised. Any deceptive suggestion calculated to make us believe that we should thus cater to the flesh will, indeed, deceive us if we lose sight of the terms of our consecration. If we keep in mind the demands of love, and remember that the narrow way in which we are walking leads to sacrifice and death, not to ease and comfort, Satan will not be able to influence us by any of his seducing doctrines.

Darkness and light as opposites are closely associated in the Scriptures with selfishness and love, which are also contrary one to the other. As our Heavenly Father is the God of love, he is also the God of light; and as the Adversary is the god of selfishness, he is also the god of darkness. Allied with these opposites are also death and life. Thus when we think of the master, Satan, we associate with him the principle of selfishness which leads to darkness and death. Conversely, when we think of God, our Heavenly Father, we associate with him the thought of love and light and life.—I John 4:16; 1:5; Ps. 36:9; John 17:3

Darkness symbolizes the present reign of evil accompanied by all the nighttime experiences of fear, pain and finally death. Contrasted with this is the beautiful symbol of light and the blessings of peace, happiness and ultimately of everlasting life in the coming Messianic kingdom. These blessings will be available for all who, when the opportunity is afforded, bring themselves into obedience with

God and the great principle of love for which he stands, and by which all his intelligent creatures who want to live forever must be motivated. Highlighting this contrast, we quote these prophetic words: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning,” the morning of the new kingdom day, when the “Sun of righteousness” will arise with “healing in his wings.”—Ps. 30:5; Mal. 4:2

JESUS—OUR PERFECT EXAMPLE

Throughout the ages there have been those among mankind who, through their selfish arrogance, cruelty, and degradation, have been apt representatives of Satan. Likewise, there have been many righteous and noble characters, as, for example, the ancient faithful men and women of the Old Testament. These, through their love for their fellowman and their devotion to the principles of divine righteousness, have exemplified, in various ways, the character of God. In addition to all this “cloud of witnesses” there is another who stands out preeminently, so preeminently, in fact, that he could say to his disciples, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”—Heb. 12:1; John 14:9

This was Jesus, the perfect, living example to us of what is involved in serving the true God. Jesus was fully one with his Heavenly Father, and in the perfection of his glorious character, he displayed fully the love which caused his Father to send him into the world to be man’s Redeemer. We read: “In him was life; and the life was the light of men.”—John 1:4

Of Jesus it is also said that he was God “manifest in the flesh.” (I Tim. 3:16) This, of course, does not mean that Jesus was God, for Jesus himself said,

“My Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28) What it means is that the clearest conception we may have at the present time of the glorious character of God is that which we see exemplified in the life of Jesus. By his faithfulness in laying down his life, Jesus revealed for us the true significance of all the divine requirements of those who take up their cross to follow him.—Matt. 16:24

When Satan presents his deceptive theories which are calculated to turn us aside from the narrow way, we need only to look unto Jesus and learn from his example how he interpreted the divine will in his own life. Thus we can be sure of what God would have us do. Jesus, then, is our living example and as such, our Master, our Teacher, in the things of God.—Matt. 23:8-10

FINAL VICTORY

The enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman will end in a complete victory for God and for all the forces of righteousness emanating from and sponsored by him. The church will be given the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, and in God’s due time Satan himself will be bound, and no longer able to spread his darkness and evil control over the earth and its people.

Through the Christ, the evil influences of selfishness, darkness and death will be dispelled and finally eradicated. “The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” (Isa. 26:9) The knowledge of the glory and love of God will fill the earth. (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14) Those who yield fully to its influence will, themselves, become filled with the Spirit of God—the spirit of love. They will not only be brought back to

perfection, but given the opportunity of living forever among the other billions of restored and happy humanity. The perfect human race will be happy because they have learned that the way of love is the best and only true way to life. ■