

Pastor Russell's Sermon

ONLY ONE TRUE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

True Message Almost Buried Under Human Tradition.

PERVERSIONS OF GOD'S WORD.

Pastor Russell Says the Gospel of Politics, of Social Uplift, of Wealth, of Society, of Good Works, of Formalism, of Purgatory and Eternal Torment Are All False, All Accursed or Condemned—Man's Duty to the Lord.



Providence, R. I., Sept. 15.—We report one of Pastor Russell's discourses today from the text, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the Grace of Christ unto another Gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you and that would pervert the Gospel of Christ;—Galatians I, 6-8.

When we remember that there is but one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, presented in the Bible we are astounded to find so many faiths, so many "Gospels," presented by so many denominations, all bearing the name of Christ and all bearing marks of some relationship to the Truth—the Divine Revelation.

St. Paul noted the fact that even in his day the brethren in Galatia had "as soon" turned away, in part at least, from the true Message to another, a perversion. No wonder, then, if during fifteen centuries that Gospel was almost buried under human tradition. And need we wonder that we make such slow progress since in getting back to "the faith once delivered to the saints," the Truth that Jesus declared to be the sanctifying power of God working in His people?

It will not do to say that we have many denominations, but only one Gospel. Denominations were not organized for amusement, but because the founders of each believed that they saw a sufficient reason, a sufficient difference of Gospel, to justify them in forming a new sect. We are bound to admire their zeal for the Truth, which led them often through severe persecutions and through martyrdom towards the Light.

All the same each of us owes the duty to himself, to his brethren, and above all, to the Lord, to search carefully for the original Gospel of the Word of God—no matter what it may cost him to reject the more or less false Gospels handed down by well-meaning brethren of the past.

The Galatians' New Gospel.

The new Gospel which the Galatians were disposed to accept was one that is very prevalent today, and is as much to be reprehended today as when St. Paul wrote. Their new Gospel consisted of a mixing of the Jewish Law with the Grace of God in Christ, as the Apostle shows. They said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, surely; He is the Savior, He is the Redeemer; we must believe on Him, but that is not enough. We must become Jews under their Law arrangement, and between the Law and Christ we will obtain salvation. Many Christians today are making the same mistake of adding something to the Gospel of Christ. They hunger for some command, and desire to be under a Law, as a dog used to wearing a collar and chain feels himself unless thus restrained.

Such dear Christian people, like the Galatians, do not fully appreciate the Master's statement, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Such feel lost without Divine commands—Thou shalt, Thou shalt not, etc.—and rejoice specially in holy days and Sabbaths, Church going and formal prayers, because they do not understand that God is better pleased to have us sons than to have us slaves. The poet got the thought correctly when he wrote,

"We can no longer be
The slaves beneath the Throne,
Our souls now 'Alba, Father,' cry,
And lie the kindred ones."

A measure of bondage to forms, ceremonies and commands is probably reasonable to expect in immature Christians, whom St. Paul styles "babes in Christ." (I Corinthians III, 1.) But growth in grace and knowledge must bring such more nearly to the stature of manhood in Christ and to an appreciation of their relationship to God as sons, else they will not make their calling and election sure to the best things that God has provided.

The Social-Uplift False Gospel.

From the most prominent pulpits of Christendom the Gospel of Christ respecting the forgiveness of individual sin, the reconciliation of the individual heart, the individual begetting of the Holy Spirit, and the personal walk in newness of life has been discarded. Long ago this Message was considered too personal. Many of the preachers, having had no such experience themselves, properly enough were chary of talking about what they did not understand. But salaries must be paid, and sermons, therefore, must be preached, and something must be said. The Social Gospel has been brought forward to fill the gap. The message of

the hour, according to this pseudo-Gospel, is not saintliness, not following in the footsteps of Jesus, not Bible study, but athletics, manliness, position in society, attention to political duties, attainment of honorable positions in the world, and great names which will make the church register shine—and money withal.

Far be it from me to teach inattention to the duties and responsibilities of life. Nothing in the words of Jesus or the Apostles admonishes or exemplifies carelessness in respect to health, manhood, womanhood, education, good name and a proper provision of the things needful to the present life. The Gospel of Jesus and the Apostles, however, tells us—most distinctly impresses upon all the followers of Jesus—that their consecration as disciples of Jesus means their death to worldly ambitions for wealth, praise of men, political office and the giving of chief concern to the preservation of their earthly lives. It exhorts that these are all to be considered quite secondary to the new ambitions, the new ideals, set before us in the Gospel.

The followers of Jesus are enjoined to do good unto all men as they have opportunity. This would include, of course, everything akin to social uplift. Indeed, we cannot imagine that any one could be a Christian—a follower of the Lamb of God—without having a deep sympathy with everything appertaining to the welfare of humanity and a social uplift. But the Apostle's expression, "as we have opportunity," is a limitation. The mission of the Christian is not social uplift. That is not the work to which the Lord Jesus and His followers dedicated their lives—at least not the kind of social uplift generally understood.

A Social-Uplift That Will Succeed.

The whole work of God in connection with human redemption is to be an uplifting work for Adam and his entire race. This uplift which God has planned and which He has revealed in the Bible is to be a most thorough one, such as humanity has never conceived. It is to be an uplift mentally, morally, and physically—back to the image and likeness of God—lost in Eden, redeemed at Calvary. This social uplift of mankind which God is interested in, and of which God is the Center and Fulcrum, is the line in which all the followers of Jesus, rightly instructed, are more interested than any other people in the whole world.

However, the followers of Jesus are soldiers of the cross under His Captaincy, and they are not at liberty to follow theories either of their own or of other men respecting the way in which the great work of uplifting the world is to be accomplished. They are deeply interested in everything which men and women can do for the betterment of humanity in any and every sense of the word. And, as they have opportunity, they are glad to give a word of encouragement and appreciation, or occasionally a helping hand. But theirs is a far more important work. They are co-laborers with God—not with men.

God's Plan is first to select the Church, the Body of Christ, to be His joint-heirs in the glorious Messianic Kingdom. Then He will use that Kingdom for the thorough and complete social uplift, which all agree is so necessary. The world sees not the Divine Plan, and even the Message of the Grace of God is foolishness to them; hence also the world may probably think of Jesus and His followers as chimerical. Their theory, God's testimony, is foolishness to the world—and those who follow the Divine arrangement, as St. Paul says, are counted fools all the day long—because they are spending their lives for the accomplishment of things which the world cannot see, understand, appreciate—"the deep things of God." (I Corinthians II, 10.)

Forms of Godliness.

The Gospel of form and ceremony is not always hypocrisy. If reverential forms and chants and printed prayers always came from the heart and were never merely forms, there would be much in them to approve and enjoy. Still, ceremonies are no part of the Gospel of Christ, and to put them instead of it is to make of them false Gospel. Who will say that either Christ or any of the Apostles presented a Gospel of forms and ceremonies?

The human heart is deceitful above all things, say the Scriptures. It likes to delude into worldliness and frivolity and sometimes into sin, and then to deceive itself into believing that it is the Elect of God and a special subject of His care and care of heavenly glory. Many such appear to know nothing whatever respecting the Gospel of Christ. There is a Gospel of good works, donations to hospitals, to social uplift and Church work and forms and ceremonies. They feel a burden roll away when they repeat weekly the phrase, "We have done those things which we ought not to have done, and have left undone the things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us. Be merciful to us miserable sinners."

But any suggestion that these are miserable sinners and need to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, and to become justified saints if they would be helped of God, they would resent. The Gospel of formalism has done great injury to such people, many of whom, rightly informed respecting the Gospel of Christ, might be greatly blessed, sanctified, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

As an illustration of the religious stupor produced by the Gospel of formalism and ceremony, let me tell you of a gentleman of prominence in London whom I met recently. He said, "I was out to hear you last Sunday. I was one of that audience of thousands, and I want to tell you that you disturbed me greatly. I did not

come away from your meeting happy and contented, but the reverse. I was disappointed. Why, the way you presented the matter, showing the terms and conditions of discipleship in the narrow way, and cross-bearing in the footsteps of Jesus, shocked me. I said to myself, Then I am not a Christian at all. I have not even taken the first steps in the Christian way. But when I went home my good mother-in-law said, 'Do not be alarmed at all—stick to your own religion.'"

The Gospel of Christ was waking that man up out of his lethargy of formalism. I told him that I sought to do my duty in presenting the Gospel of Christ in no uncertain terms and that if he should profit by my message and become a joint-heir with Jesus in His Messianic Kingdom as a result of being waked up, he would thank me for it to all eternity.

Gospel of Hell and Purgatory.

Of all the various things substituted for the Gospel of Christ the most awful perversion are the Gospels of Purgatory and eternal torture. Yet so perverted is the human sensibility to the Truth that if one said he "heard a real Gospel sermon," the majority would understand it to mean that he heard horrible misrepresentations of the Divine character and purpose to the effect that nearly everybody—all except the saints—are enroute for torture at the hands of demons, and that the saints few are to go to heaven and to all eternity look over its battlements at their brethren and sisters in torture and to all eternity to hear their wails of distress.

How terrible the perversion which could call such stuff "good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people!" I am glad that the Bible Students, recently in Convention, repudiated such a Gospel as being the one of the Bible. I was glad that they called upon the ministers everywhere to declare themselves in no uncertain terms, and I was glad to note through the newspapers a very general repudiation of the torture Gospel. Nothing that the heathen have is as bad, and the wonder is that missionaries have made any progress whatever in heathen lands. For the real Gospel, I believe the real heathen are in readiness, hailing—the Mohammedans also.

The Gospel of Faith-Healing.

Faith-healing is another of the false Gospels opposed both to the letter and the spirit of Jesus' teachings. Not a single one of the Lord's disciples was healed miraculously, nor a single Prophet of old. The miracles which Jesus performed were wholly upon outsiders, not His disciples, and were illustrations of how Himself and His Church in Kingdom glory will bless, heal, uplift and restore all the families of the earth—all the willing and obedient. St. Paul blessed napkins and handkerchiefs to be sent to the sick, but never one of these was sent to the brethren. When Timothy was sick, St. Paul instead recommended a change of diet.

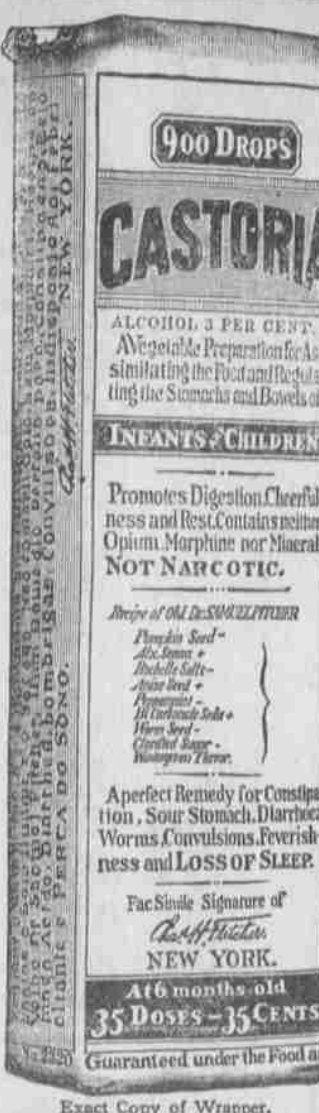
Many dear Christian people are misled by the spurious statement of Mark 16: "These signs shall follow them that believe," etc. They cling to the passage even after being given abundant proofs that it was added to the Scriptures in the Seventh Century, and that it was omitted properly from the Revised Version. So deeply seated is the love for the Gospel of healing, that this passage is clung to by some even after it is pointed out to them that they would not dare to eat and drink poisonous things, as it mentions.

The Gospel of Christ, as applied to this Age, is the very reverse of the Gospel of healing. Jesus, who was perfect, laid down His life in doing good for others. His Apostles did the same. Indeed the stipulation of discipleship is, He that loveth his life and seeketh to save it will lose it; he that loseth his life sacrificially for My sake and for the Gospel's shall find it. The Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of self-denial and suffering and patient endurance—joy in the Lord and health of spirit, rather than joy and health of the flesh. True godliness and contentment do often bring to God's people an increase of health through their rest of mind. But this is neither promised to them nor to be prayed for by them. On the contrary, they are to follow the example of the Redeemer in laying down their lives for the brethren.

The True Gospel of Christ.

In combating the errors we have incidentally presented the Gospel of Christ. It is a Message that God proposes to bless the world through the Seed of Abraham, and that Jesus glorified is that Spiritual Seed. It is a message respecting His Kingdom which shall shortly be inaugurated with power and great glory for the blessing of Adam and all his race with human Restoration, giving to all fullest opportunity of return to the Heavenly Father's love through the merit of the great Sacrifice accomplished at Calvary. It is a Message, too, that the Redeemer, before taking the Throne of His glory, in harmony with the Divine Program, is now calling, choosing, and proving a "little flock" of believers justified through faith in His blood.

These are to be made perfect through suffering, through sacrifice, by walking in the Master's footsteps. They have the promise that if they suffer with Him, they shall also reign with Him; if they be dead with Him, they shall also live with Him. Whoever sees, hears, appreciates, this true Gospel of the Grace of God in Christ finds in it the power of God unto salvation. The more fully he receives it the more does he possess the power of the Truth, which, if co-operated with, will work in Him to will and to do the Father's good pleasure and eventually make him an heir of God and a joint-heir of Jesus Christ the Lord to the Heavenly Kingdom and eternal life in glory.



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