

The Christian's Faith Not to Be Prescribed by Men

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Among the different denomination there seems to be a determination developing to bind the consciences of their members. They are building up barriers about their own sects, and forming a purpose to listen to nothing outside of their own doctrines. They are restricting themselves from hearing anything new, or any doctrine presented by any other people than those who belong to their own church. But it would be well for them to inquire from what origin this determination arises, and who has sent forth this order? Certainly the Lord has made no such restrictions, for he has his message, and his messengers are to go forth and present it to the people, in warnings, reproofs, and instruction in righteousness; and he has given the people directions as to what they shall do. The apostle says, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

Ministers of popular churches are many of them softening down and diluting the plain word of truth. They are obscuring the light, and changing the message, in order to accommodate it to the prejudices, and adjust it to the opinions and habits, of the people. Thus they cater to the taste of the world-loving members of the church. But while they are so free to change the truth of God, on the other hand they advise their members to exercise the greatest caution lest they hear the message of God from the messengers he chooses to send to the people.

Oh, let there be no cautioning of the people on the danger of studying the word of God! Let there be no concealment of truth, no measures taken to evade or ignore truth. Let no one entertain the erroneous idea that the people of this or that denomination are in need of no more light. Open the door of the heart, place yourselves in a position where you may catch new revelations of the character of God. Light comes from the very throne of God. When some familiar truth presents itself to your mind in a new aspect, when a text of Scripture suddenly bursts upon you with new meaning like a flash of light that scatters the mist, and you see the relation of other truths to some part of the plan of redemption, God is leading you,

and a divine Teacher is at your side. Will you not then open the door of your heart to receive more and more of the heavenly illumination?

It is by contemplation of heavenly things that the soul is brought into fellowship and communion with the Spirit of God, and the soul that is teachable, that is continually seeking for fresh rays of light, will be blessed with brighter and brighter views of divine things. But there are many classes of religious teachers who seem to be determined to close every avenue whereby fresh rays of light from heaven may come to the people. They would bind the members of their churches by certain rules and regulations that forbid them to go to other places of worship, or listen to messengers outside of a certain class of teachers. In this way men and women are led to give up the liberty that God has ordained for them, and they fail to improve the mind and gather up the divine rays of light which emanate from sources outside their own church.

"Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price." We are God's property, and are to honor and glorify God. But we do not honor and glorify God when we become the servants of men, when we consent to have our liberty restricted by men or by councils of men. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ, in order that we may be just and generous to our own souls. I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God, that you break every band that would restrict your liberty in Christ. God has light to impart to all his children that is of a more radiant character than any we have received, and you have no right to bind yourself in such a way as to shut yourself away from the light. You have no right to do after the inventions of any society of men, who would circumscribe the limit of your thought, and cause you to become a mere mechanical Christian.

You have many things to learn, and much to unlearn. You will have to sit at the feet of the great Teacher and learn of him concerning themes that are higher and nobler than the themes which now engage your attention. I am free to address you who have shut yourselves away from the light, because I know that a higher Teacher than man is calling you. You have lost much in your religious life, because you have failed to improve the opportunities that have been presented to you from the Father of lights. Fresh rays of light from heaven are always given that the character may be transformed, that the soul may be able to contemplate truth in a new relation. When Jesus is welcomed into the heart, he will refine and mould and fashion the character. Those who receive him more fully, will not have less energy in their religious life, but their religion will be of a higher, holier type than ever before. They will work in such a way that their usefulness will be increased. God would have his professed children reach a higher standard, and ever go on, still reaching up to that which they have not

attained. They should cherish every divine inspiration, for as his property he requires this of them.

No man or woman is to bind himself in such a way as to become a slave of men in any way. No man or set of men have the right of laying out to others what they shall or shall not do in religious matters, or in any way prescribing their faith. A voice speaks to us to which we are bound to listen. It is the voice of Christ, who says, "Follow me." He says, "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." The Christian is never to be tame and dull. Those who are imbued with the Spirit of Christ, will work in the Master's vineyard, and the heavenly fire of the soul will ever be kept burning. Our security is in Christ, in studying the guidebook he has given. Those who are studying the ways and methods of men and following their customs, are deceived if they think that they are following the directions of God in the matter.

Jesus says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." The service of Jesus does not consist in outward show simply. It is not a matter of form and ceremonies, of parade, exclamation, gestures, noise, and a display of the commonplace passions. Pure religion consists in keeping the heart and mind in communion with the great Leader, Jesus Christ. It consists in having the inward adorning of a meek and quiet spirit. The indwelling Holy Spirit will give life and tone and style that will not be after the inventions of men, not in imitation of any earthly, human leader, but after the Pattern, Christ. Religion does not consist in playing upon words, in uncouth gestures; bodily exercise profiteth little in this matter. There is no divine eloquence in this kind of exercise.

The religion of Jesus Christ is ever to be distinguished from all other religions by its holiness of character. In true religion will be found great truths clearly defined in words, and wrought in the life of its professors as a principle from the divine Author. In true religion the Holy Spirit will work in connection with human agents, confirming the truth of God. Every part of the service of Christ will be characterized by decorum and reverence. The truth of Christ cannot be confined to a certain range, yet it will be active to create for its environment, manners and habits and practices that will be in harmony with its Author. Everything will be done decently and in order. Wild methods and strange freaks and confusion are not authorized by the God of order. The methods employed by the church of Christ should be such as will win souls from allegiance to the prince of darkness, and cause them to take their stand under the blood-stained banner of Prince Emmanuel.

Some may say that these methods of reaching men will not avail to reach those who are poor and low down in the scale of humanity. But this matter must be regarded in an altogether different light by those who would be soldiers in the army of Christ. Do not cherish the error that you must follow after a pattern presented to you by some man. Study your Bible more, and let the habits and practices of men have less and less of your attention. Do not dishonor your God by thinking that it requires but little knowledge of what saith the Scriptures, to be a useful worker in his cause. You are to study the manner of the great Teacher, and keep his example ever before you. No human being is to be your Pattern. The Lord of heaven is to be the Teacher and Pattern for everyone who would win souls to God.

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