

Beware Of Men

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Idolatry

The Bible begins with the record of how the Creator made man in His own image (Gen. 1:27). But something went wrong in this Creator-creature relationship. Now we see the creature trying to conform God to his own image. Idolatry is simply man's attempt to make God in his own likeness. Man wants to worship the god of his own conception, which is really only an extension of himself. Says the Lord, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Ps. 50:21.

Human nature takes the doctrines of the Bible and bends them or molds them to suit the image of the god which he has set up in his own mind. He has an insatiable urge to project himself into the work of God and mold it according to his own idea. Even within the Advent Movement, Ellen White speaks of certain men who "have been holding positions of trust," and who "have been molding the work [of God] after their own similitude, as far as they possibly could."—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 80.

Man's disposition to conform God, His doctrines and His work to his own image, is condemned by the second commandment. God is jealous for His own image. "The work of God is not to bear the image and superscription of man."—*Desire of Ages*, p.182.

Therefore, "Beware of men." The Conscience and Human Authority When God spoke the law on Mount Sinai; the very mountain was fenced in from the people. No human hands were permitted to touch even the mount, much less the law itself. Uzzah was slain when he put his hand on the ark. There is a place for human authority

— whether it be church authority, parental authority or civil authority; but when it comes to binding and loosing the consciences with moral and spiritual law, only God can legislate. He declares, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." Deut. 4:2.

The church is not called to be a legislator, but an ambassador (2 Cor. 5:20). An ambassador must not impose his own laws or even express his own opinion. He represents only the will of the government which sends him. So Jesus charged His disciples, "Whatever you forbid on earth, shall have already been forbidden in heaven. And whatever you permit on earth shall have already been permitted in heaven." Matt. 18:18,

An Expanded Translation (Kenneth S. Wuest). This command of Jesus, recorded in Matthew 18:18, and cited above, is often grossly misused as if Christ gave to His church an open check of unbounded authority. The Catholics are not the only ones who cite these words from Jesus to give credence to the arbitrary authority of the church. But the passage does not mean that heaven will ratify anything men do down below in the name of church authority. The original verbs of the Greek text (as brought out in the preceding translation) make it clear that Christ charges His disciples that they must only forbid what has already been forbidden in heaven—nothing else. They are not to act out their own feelings or opinions. They are simply to declare what Christ has said. Thus the Lord's prayer will be fulfilled, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

Unto no man, or body of men, has Christ delegated authority to legislate on doctrine. No authority other than God Himself should pass laws which can bind or loose the consciences of men. Notice how the principle is forcefully stated in the following words from *The Desire of Ages*, page 826:

"In the commission to His disciples, Christ not only outlined their work, but gave them their

message. Teach the people, He said, 'to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' The disciples were to teach what Christ had taught. That which He had spoken, not only in person, but through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament, is included. Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man's theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ's servants to teach."

When the Word of God is mixed with faith, it will profit the receiver. But when it is mixed with human opinions and decrees, it becomes like the bread which Ezekiel was commanded to eat. The Lord said unto the prophet:

"Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and fitches . . . and thou shalt

bake it with dung that cometh out of man, in their sight. And the Lord said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread . . ." Ezek. 4:9, 12, 13. Luther declared:

"I want to have the pure unadulterated Scriptures in all their glory, undefiled by the comment of any man, even the saints, and not hashed up with any earthly seasonings. But you [the schoolmen] are the very people who have not avoided profane and vain babblings (to use Paul's words, I Tim. 6:20), and have wanted to cover these holy and divine delicacies with human glosses and pep them up with earthly spices. And like Ezekiel (Ezek. 4:12) my soul is nauseated at having to eat bread baked with human dung. Do you know what this means? . . . The word of man when added to the Word of God serves as a veil to the pure truth. Nay, worse, as I have said, it is the human dung with which the bread is baked, as the Lord figuratively expresses it in Ezekiel."—Answer to Latomus, Library of Christian Classics, vol. xvi, pp. 344, 345.

The writer of Hebrews makes special mention of Moses for being faithful in all the affairs of God (see Heb. 3:5). The Spirit of Prophecy calls him the most illustrious character in the Old Testa-

ment. Along with his meekness, what characteristic made Moses so great in the eyes of the Lord? It was his faithfulness to do exactly what the Lord commanded. When he built the tabernacle, it is repeatedly said that he did everything "as the Lord commanded Moses" (see Ex. 40).

Moses added no specifications of his own. He did not do what was right in his own eyes, but exactly "as the Lord commanded Moses." In his diligence to keep self out of sight and to make the will of God supreme in everything, Moses was a type of Jesus. In the garment of Christ's perfect character, there was not one thread of human devising. He did not do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. He was so fully emptied of self that the Father alone appeared in His life. Thus, Christ's work bore the image and superscription of God.

The Image of a Man

In Daniel 2 history is presented under the figure of an image of a man. The kingdoms of prophecy were kingdoms of men. They were the result of man's genius, ambition and selfishness. The feet of the image were a mixture of iron and clay. Daniel declared, "They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men." Dan. 2:43. The mingling refers to a sort of marriage between the parties represented by the iron and the clay. As the prophecies which follow point out, it was a "marriage" of church and state. Ellen G. White says,

"The mingling of church-craft and statecraft is represented by the iron and the clay."—SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, pp. 1168, 1169.

Now what is meant by the "seed of men"? The Word of God is likened to seed—the good seed of the kingdom. The seed of men, by way of contrast, would embrace the doctrines and opinions of men. So Daniel 2 speaks of a church-state union based on purely human authority and opinions. The Papal horn of Daniel 7 is represented as having eyes "like the eyes of man." Dan. 7:8. The Papal system was formed when

members of the church of Christ began to do that which was right in their own human eyes. Christ established a pure church. It had a pure government and a pure faith. But when churchmen began to look at the problems of church government through the eyes of their own understanding, they gradually developed echelons of church office and a hierarchy of human authority that resulted in the Papacy. When human scholarship and theology tried to explain the mystery of the incarnation and sinlessness of Jesus, the result was the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. When natural reason attempted to explain how an immature Christian who had not reached a state of sinlessness could enter heaven, it came up with the teaching of purgatory. The Papacy resulted from a gradual, almost imperceptible substitution of human teaching for divine revelation. As were the "eyes" of the Papacy, so was its "mouth that spake very great things." Dan. 7:20. Its words—its dogmas and decrees—were the doctrines and commandments of men.

In Revelation 13 the Papacy is represented as a beast having the number of a man's name. Paul calls it the "man of sin." All this demonstrates that the Papacy is merely the product of human nature. It is actually the supreme revelation of human nature existing in a corporate capacity.

The Danger of Good Men

The Papacy came into being because God's professed people did not give due heed to Jesus' warning, "Beware of men." The Papacy is surely the most evil thing that man has ever created on this earth. But we will fail to learn the necessary lesson unless we realize that those who helped form the Papacy were not all wicked, scheming men. Many good men helped form the Papal system. For instance, Augustine (A.D. 350-430) was the greatest of the Latin fathers. After a riotous youth, he was converted to Christianity. Ellen G. White remarks how God answered the prayers of his mother in his remarkable conversion. He became a brilliant Christian scholar. When it came to upholding the Christian faith against Pelagius, Augustine was the man for the hour. On the main aspects of the nature of sin

and the doctrine of righteousness by faith, he was a clear Christian thinker. Church historians point out how he was the spiritual father of Luther.

One has only to read Luther to recognize that Augustine was the quarry from whence Luther dug many of the stones for the Reformation. Yet the astonishing thing is that this same Augustine was just as much the father of the Inquisition. He justified the use of force against the heretical Donatists, arguing that compulsory worship was implied by the Lord's command, "Go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in."

"Augustine's most famous work, *The City of God*, took him 17 years to write. It presented a heady concept of the role of the church in the world. He saw the church as the great stone of Daniel 2, which would subdue the whole world to Christ. *The City of God* was the product of Augustine the saint at his best. In it his imagination of what the church could do for Christ soared to lofty heights. Yet the very genius of its human philosophy inspired the creation of the Papacy. It was Augustine who conceived the idea of the church developing into a type of Jewish theocracy. He advanced the idea that the church was the custodian of an infallible system of doctrine, and that salvation was available only to those who would submit to its discipline. In the eyes of this great and good man, the church would be greatly blessed and greatly honored if she fulfilled the role outlined in *The City of God*. But while Augustine slept in the grave, it was his idea that lived on, playing a vital role in the creation of the most heinous and blasphemous institution the world has ever seen. Sacred history justifies the Master's warning, "Beware of men." Some imagine that this only means, "Beware of evil men." But sacred history demonstrates that good men may be more dangerous than evil men. Even when a good man puts his mold on the work of God, nothing but evil will come of it. Good men are often the more dangerous because their influence in religious things is greater. Think of the great evil wrought by Gideon after God had used him mightily to deliver Israel from the Midianites. ". . . instead of

waiting for divine guidance, he began to plan for himself."—Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 555.

The fact that he was a mighty man of valour, greatly favoured of the Lord, made his departure from the truth the more dangerous. "The people were led away from God by the very man who had once overthrown their idolatry."—Ibid., p. 556.

Think of John Calvin, the pious theologian the Reformation. No one will deny that he was a man of faith and prayer. That he accomplished great good in the service of God is a matter of history. Yet the same John Calvin was the true spiritual father of the worst Puritan bigotry and intolerance. He was responsible for the dreadful martyrdom of Michael Servetus. His co-worker, the saintly William Farel, presided over the "holy rite" of burning the heretic. This earnest Christian minister could actually bow his head in sincere prayer, asking God's blessing upon the abominable act of burning a man who did such "wicked" things as deny the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul. Think of Peter, James and the other leaders at Jerusalem, counselling Paul to go to the temple and participate in a ceremonial purification. The whole scheme was politically motivated. It was the product of human nature, and brought great loss to the early church (see Acts of the Apostles, pp. 399-406).

"Beware of men." The work of God is not to bear the image and superscription of men; it is not to be spoiled by one thread of human devising. Even when good men do what is right in their own eyes (which is the most natural thing to do), the work of God is molded to the image of the creature instead of to the image of God. Sunday keeping is the classical example of man putting the mark of his image on things divine. In the eyes of the church fathers, Sunday keeping was a brilliant innovation for the glory of God. Firstly, it made it easier for millions of Sunday-observing pagans to accept the Christian faith. Secondly, it demonstrated the church's antipathy toward Judaism, which was responsible for the death of Jesus. There is no question but that churchmen thought they were honouring Christ

in the same way as Cain "honored" God with his own offering. The second commandment forbids man to worship or honour God according to man's idea of how God ought to be honored. God must be worshipped according to His idea of how He ought to be worshipped. God's reaction to men's honour is reflected in David's response to man's idea of honour.

When one claimed he performed meritorious service for David by slaying king Saul, he incurred the fatal wrath of the king. On another occasion two men proudly brought the head of Ishbosheth to David, thinking to win his congratulations. How surprised they must have been when he commanded them to be slain. So men bring their offerings to the Lord. If these offerings are the product of their own idea of worshipping God, they are not more acceptable to God than Ishbosheth's head was acceptable to king David (see 2 Sam. 4).

A candid study of Adventist history will show that some of the worst mistakes that have left their evil effects within the movement—have been made by good men. The Minneapolis Conference of 1888 is a notable example. The overwhelming impression one gets from reading Testimonies to Ministers is that there has been one continual struggle in the church. It has been a struggle over whether divine or human authority should control and mold the work of God. The problem is very much with us yet, for all of us carry the problem around in our own hearts.

The Mark of the Beast and the Seal of God

More is involved in the mark of the beast and the seal of God than an argument about the keeping of a particular day. The last conflict is the final struggle in the age-long contest between human and divine authority. The issue is over the religion of man versus the religion of God. The Papal beast of Revelation 13 is the man of sin. He has a name and the number of a man. The word "beast" does not in itself mean bestial, grotesque or ugly. There is something majestic and beautiful about a wild beast. The beast of Revelation 13 inspires the wonder and admiration of the world. Those artists who try to excel

one another with illustrations of hideous-looking monsters should consider that Satan excited Eve's admiration with the most beautiful beast of the field. The main thought we should get out of the word "beast" is that this is a creature which presents itself as an object of worship, whereas Revelation 14 commands men to worship the Creator. The mark of the beast is the mark of the creature. A religious system will be presented before men in the most attractive and pleasing light. It will appear as "a new and more exalted system of religious faith."—Great Controversy, p.589.

The image of the beast will be the most marvelous thing that man has ever devised. It will not be all evil, but will combine some of the most beautiful and brilliant ideas for human betterment. Yet this whole religious system will bear the mark or signature of the creature.

The number of man's name will show from whence it originated. It will bear the image and superscription of man. On the other hand, God's last work will not bear one thread of human devising. The human element has marred the work of God to some extent from age to age. Pentecost and the Midnight Cry movement of the summer of 1844 were the most free from the imprint of human imperfection. The disciples of the Reformation in Germany were called Lutherans. Those who joined in the Methodist revival in England were called Wesleyans. The early Adventists were called Millerites. But the loud cry will not be conspicuous with any human title. "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." Revelation 18:1-5 describes the Advent Movement when it shall become free of all human imperfection. Just as the last great work of Satan will bear the mark of the beast, God's last work must bear the seal of God. In the very nature of the case, the last gospel work, presented under the symbols of Revelation 18:1-5, must bear the pure signature of Jehovah. Just as the mark of the beast is religion that bears the signature of man, so the seal of God is religion that bears the signature of God. The seal of God will be pure, unadulterated truth (see Testimonies, vol. 3, p. 267).

It will be received and proclaimed by those who have given full heed to the Master's warning, **"Beware of men."**

