

Whom Do We Worship?

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In the Inspired Version of the Bible there is recorded in Genesis 3:1-5 the telling of a great conflict that was fought before God over the agency of man. Satan came before the throne of God, and *“sought to destroy the agency of man, which I the Lord God, had given him”* (Gen. 3:4). Jesus approached God with the promise, *“Thy will be done, and glory be thine forever.”* (Gen. 3:3)

We know the outcome. Jesus was recognized by the Heavenly Father as *“His only begotten Son”*. Satan desired to destroy agency (Gen. 3:4), and redeem all mankind so he could have *“the honor”* which was God’s. Scripture tells us that Satan came before God, *“saying, I will be thy Son, and I will redeem all mankind.”* (Gen. 3:2) Jesus honored God, the Father. This battle was decided forever in the heavens, but this conflict was then to be carried out on earth over God’s creation of mankind. Man was the only part of God’s creation granted the ability to choose or exercise agency. All of the rest of creation functioned by natural instincts or by God’s laws of nature. This right to choose came with great responsibility. Man could choose good or bad, rightly or wrongly. Genesis states that Satan was allowed to be present in the garden of Eden. From the very beginning, out of Satan’s desire to have God’s honor - the devil tempted man to choose that which would displease God, and have mankind worship and follow Satan.

Scripture tells us in Genesis 7:40, *“And in the Garden of Eden gave I unto man his agency; and unto thy brethren have I said, and also gave commandment, that they should love one another; and that they should choose me their Father.”* This gift of agency, having been given to man by God, clearly indicates that Jesus was victorious in His conflict with Satan. However, there is in this victory some responses required of man. Men are commanded to love one another, and choose God as their Father. God desires for us to keep these two commandments through exercising our agency by *“choosing Him”* and loving one another.

We see these commandments reinforced by God in two primary sets of statements, referred to as commandments, in the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, Exodus 20 records what we call the *Ten Commandments*. We see in these commandments that the very first commandment states, *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God...”*

In the New Testament, Matthew 22:35-38 records what we call the *Two Great Commandments*. We see in these two commandments these words, *“Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”*

We find in these two sets of commandments that nothing is to come between man or woman and their God. Something that comes between us and separates us from our worship of God is considered to be idolatry. The Living Church does not allow anything to separate the church from the focus of its worship and praise for God and its sacrificial service to others. Nothing!

In Exodus, 32:4 we see that the children of Israel became dismayed that Moses had gone up onto Mount Sinai and did not return to them as quickly as they had desired. In their angst, they sought out Aaron, the brother of Moses, and counseled Aaron to do something. We know what Aaron and the people did – they would make out of gold a calf to worship. They said, *“These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”* (Exodus 32:4)

Blasphemy! They knew and would come to know through Moses that there are to be no other gods before the true, and living God. What happened here is what happens to any person or people that worships anything but God – judgement and separation. We can only be redeemed of this judgment and separation by the *“blood of the Lamb”* (Rev. 12:11) and repentance.

The golden calf is an easy example for us to look at as an idol. It is not hard for us to recognize the golden calf as a symbol of placing other gods before the Living God. But is it possible to take something good and place it between us and God so that instead of it bringing us closer to God it causes us to be further away from Him? In II Kings 18:4 we see such an example.

As the children of Israel were heading to the promised land, it is recorded, that they were attacked by “fiery serpents”. These serpents were biting and many of the children of Israel were dying from the bites. The people came to Moses and acknowledged that they had sinned. The people pleaded with Moses to ask God to take the serpents out of their midst. Moses prayed for the people, and God commanded Moses to *“Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.”* (Number 21:8) Moses did as he was commanded and those who obeyed were spared this horrible death.

This serpent on the pole would be a symbol of Jesus being lifted up on the cross for the salvation of those who would look up unto Jesus. John 3:14-16 says, *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; That whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life.”* This tells us that the symbol of the brass serpent was still of importance to God even though He had allowed it to be destroyed. The children of Israel had kept this pole with the serpent on it in their possession as a remembrance of being spared unto life. The pole was a symbol of the children of Israel being healed and delivered from the biting serpents. They would not have known about this pole being in the likeness of Jesus on the cross at this time. So, this pole would be viewed as a holy artifact which would bring to remembrance God’s deliverance for His people coming out of Egypt. This would without question mean that this relic of the travel to the promised land would be treasured and considered sacred. And it was.

The time would come later that Judah would have a king named Hezekiah. It was said of Hezekiah that he began his reign when he was 25 years old, and that he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem.

It says of him in II Kings 18: 3, *“He {Hezekiah} did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.”* II Kings 18: 4 tells us something of note about Hezekiah, *“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan.”* The serpent did not deliver the people, but it was by the power of God that they were delivered. *He {Hezekiah} trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.”*

He did what? He broke in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made. Why would he do that? Because they began to worship the inanimate, non-living object, instead of accepting and believing in a living God and a living Lord and Savior. That which was good was not being used in *“the manner designed of God.”* (D&C 128:8c) The children of Israel were worshipping an object that God had commanded to be made and not the creator who directed Moses to make it. And because of this God allowed this sacred object to be destroyed and blessed Hezekiah.

This gives us cause to make serious reflection. Do we of the Restoration have “good things” that we have placed a value on that are causing us to worship the “thing” and not the Living God? This does not have to mean that the “thing” is not a “good thing”, but rather that we may be using the “thing” in a manner that it was not designed for. I now raise for discussion examples of the subject I am writing about that may cause great discomfort for you the reader. These items will not be an entire list of examples, but it will allow you to examine other things that we do as well. I do not do this to raise controversy or conflict, and I apologize if I upset you. I will give you three examples of what I am writing about, and let me add I believe in these things with all my heart, but please listen with your heart and mind.

- 1) Branches of the Restoration – Our current condition continues to struggle. The Restoration Branch is a vital part of church organization and structure and has been set in order by God. I whole heartedly endorse the existence and functioning of Branches. I believe some of our struggle in our current condition is because we are asking branches to function in some ways that they do not have authority to do so or are incapable of doing so. See the article, *“Thoughts on Restoration Branches”*. I can give you a copy.
- 2) Church Organization and Structure – We sometimes present the church as the priesthood offices, the gifts and fruits of the Spirit, and Jesus as the cornerstone. That is an acceptable way of presenting the Church, but I do not believe it is the best way. All of those things are vital and important to the Church. The Church is Jesus Christ. Arthur Oakman said that Jesus is the kingdom in the individual mode. Jesus is the Church in the individual mode as it is meant to be. The picture of the church as the organizational structure is important to understand, but it represents the organizational church, not firstly that this is the Church of Jesus Christ or as we have known it – The Reorganized

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. People are not invited to have conversion to a structure of Priesthood offices, but to come to Jesus Christ. In our ordinance prayers we pray at the time of water baptism, "*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.*" In the prayers over the Sacrament we are told, "*It is expedient that the church meet together often to partake of bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus.*" (D&C 17:22a) The Church is a messenger for Jesus but He is the message. Jesus is the only name under heaven by which mankind can be saved. I truly believe this Church was called "out of the wilderness" to assist in the establishment of Zion and God's kingdom on earth and these things are to be in the hearts of the people. I believe we are called to be a Living Church. Jesus is alive, and the people are alive, but church organization, as vitally important as it is, is an inanimate object that has been created for a holy purpose which is to give order to the Living Church. The Church has not been created to become our focus of worship, but to point us to He who we should worship.

- 3) Interpretation of the Scriptures – I include this with a prayer that this will be understood by those who read this. I have spent my entire adult life reading Scripture. I have countless testimonies of the divinity of Scripture. I have read the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants from cover to cover. I have in the past and will continue in the future to not have any doubt in their validity, but I do wish to express some thoughts on how we use them. Arthur Oakman stated that the Scriptures are the "record of the word." Jesus Christ is the word. The gospel of John states, "*In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made which was made. In him was the gospel, and the gospel was the life, and the life was the light of men; And the light shineth in the world, and the world perceiveth it not.*" I am quite positive that all Restorationists believe in the truth of the Scriptures. Restorationists believe that God has spoken in all ages. So why do we have misunderstanding and division? I believe that one cause of this confusion is the interpretation of Scripture. The reason I have included this part is not to do away with the Scriptures, but to have us examine how we come to understand Scripture. Too often we develop a belief and we become unyielding in our interpretation even if it causes us to be upset with someone else who has a different point of view. This is understandable to a point. We separated from the RLDS Church leadership just as Moses led the children of Israel away, or Lehi led his family away from Jerusalem. We do not doubt that they had no other course of action that they could have taken because of the iniquity of their environment and the purposes God had for them. But what if someone's interpretation is wrong or partially wrong or not fully developed? What if the one who is wrong is me? What if I am right, but because I have no sympathy for the other person's viewpoint I say, "*Too bad, the important thing is I am right and you are wrong.*" Do I worship my rightness over the condition of others? Does

rightness supersede righteousness? Did Jesus do this, at the cross? He was right, but instead of bringing the wrath of God down on those who crucified him, Jesus simply said, *“Father forgive them; for they know not what they do, (Meaning the soldiers who crucified him).”* (Luke 23:35)

Whom do you worship?

I have written this paper to cause us to think about what we do and how we go about doing it. I have not taken a position to begin a new church, or to ordain men to “higher” offices. That is part of the organizational church. I believe we are to become first the Living Church. I believe we are to respect and love one another, even if we cannot agree, *“if ye cannot fully agree on all the points of the law, be patient and be not contentious; so far as you can agree work together without heat, confusion, or malice. Ye are equal in worth of position and place in the work of the church; and if in honor ye shall prefer one another, ye will not strive for precedence or place in duty or privilege, and shall be blessed of me.”* (D&C 122:16) However, D&C 122:17 goes on further to say, *“Let nothing separate you from each other and the work whereunto you have been called.”* This may include us laying aside what others would find disagreement with us on in regards to responses we have made. This may appear to have been easier to do in the day this revelation was given because there was an accepted, organized church with a recognized Prophet of God as the leader. Often, we feel that our generation has it tougher than previous generations. If we wish to excuse ourselves from what the Lord has spoken in Section 122 then we fall short in our worship of Him, and receive not this blessing.

We can and will achieve in our day great accomplishments as the glory of God endows His people on the earth - *“but the Lord came and dwelt with his people, and they dwelt in righteousness. And the fear of the Lord was upon all nations, so great was the glory of the Lord which was upon his people.”* (Genesis 7:20-21) Enoch’s city was not built until later - it was recorded in Genesis 7:25, *“And it came to pass in his days, that he built a city that was called the city of Holiness, even Zion.”* The natural sequence is for the Living Church to give birth to the organizational church, just as the Living Church in Enoch’s day (the Gen. 7:23 church) gave birth under *“the glory of the Lord”* to the building of the city of Holiness even Zion (Gen. 7:25) or like the woman coming out of the wilderness will give birth to the child which is the kingdom of God (Rev. 12:7) in the last days. The act of giving birth represents giving life. A Living Church represents life. Jesus said, *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”* (John 10:10) When this occurs, the process for Zion to be built will come about quickly such as it did in Enoch’s day.

We must not let anything get between us and our relationship with God. Let us worship solely our God and His Son by the power of the Holy Ghost now and for eternity. If we do this, we can become one and He will lead us to the promised land of our day – Zion.

Amen.

