

SERMON BY ELDER G. T. GRIFFITHS,

At Lamoni, Iowa, April 7, 1894.

Subject, GOD'S WORD.

I AM glad to meet with so many of my brethren and sisters and friends. It has fallen to my lot to address you to-night. I would much rather be one of the audience than the speaker on this occasion. However, the powers that be have said that I should speak to you. I have one request to make; that is, that you do not indulge too largely in criticism; rather, that you remember me in your prayers.

I solicit your attention to the seventeenth verse, seventeenth chapter of St. John: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." I desire to associate another passage with this, found in the fourth chapter of Matthew, fourth verse: "He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

On last evening, and also this morning we had two timely sermons; first, on the kingdom of God, second on the law of God. To-night I have selected as a theme for our consideration the word of God. In this connection I desire to call the attention of the audience to a few of the many proofs that can be adduced from the Scriptures in support of the emphatic statement made by our Lord in that eloquent and beautiful prayer that he offered to his Father a short time prior to his departure from this mundane sphere. In that appeal he makes the positive assertion that God's word is truth, for he says, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." I do not believe that our Savior referred at this time to the Bible; that is, commonly called the word of God, but he evidently referred to the word of God as contained in the Bible, that which has come to us through his servants; viz., the patriarchs, prophets, Jesus Christ, apostles, and all of God's servants of every age, including the present dispensation, of whom it is written that they wrote and spoke as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost.

At this juncture I wish to remark that a great many of our eminent theologians

and renowned biblical students of the present day have divided the contents of the Book of books into three distinct parts; historical, prophetic, doctrinal. Thus you see that they do not hold God amenable for every word found between the lids of the Bible.

We are living in an age when the great majority of the Christian people believe that the Bible is wholly inspired. However, thousands of those in question are honest and upright in heart, seemingly sincere in their opinion as we are, with whom the only trouble is that they have been traditioned in the wrong direction. The Bible does not claim this kind of inspiration; but it is quite apparent to the intelligent mind that God had inspired men, especially during the dark ages, to protect and to preserve the Bible. However, I do not intend to discourse in regard to the divinity of the Bible. My object is to talk about the word of God as found in the Scriptures.

In the first place, I want to substantiate the statement that God's word is true by referring to a few instances in the Bible. We read in Genesis that God created man, and that he fashioned him after his own image and likeness. He soon afterward created a woman, and the record says that he put them in a beautiful garden, known to us in all history as the garden of Eden, and it is also written that he gave unto them a special commandment; or, in other words, he spoke to them. The substance of what he said to them is simply this: that they could go just where they pleased and be at liberty to partake of all the fruit in the garden, with the exception of one particular tree, and with regard to that tree he said unto them, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Not long after this interview another character appeared on the scene, with whose name you are all familiar. It appears that he was cognizant of what God had said to these persons, for he said, "God has said, 'In

the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die; but I say you will *not* surely die." The point I want to make is as to who told the truth? God said, "Thou shalt surely die." He did not say, "maybe, or perhaps you will, I may change my mind after you do the deed." O no; God does not talk in that way. He said unto those characters, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Satan said, "Thou shalt *not* surely die." I believe you will all agree with me that God spoke the truth. Jesus Christ had this in view with many other instances; hence he could say, and say truly, "Thy word is truth." You can search the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation and in not one instance where God has spoken has his word failed. Adam and Eve did partake of the forbidden fruit, and as a result their understanding was enlightened and immediately they realized their said condition. But this was not the only result, for when God returned into the garden he did not find them in the place where he left them; hence a voice was heard inquiring, "Adam, where art thou?" But Adam was in hiding. By and by, after repeated calls by the Lord, he answered, "Here am I." He did not tell any stories about it, but proceeded to relate to the Lord what they had done. Now the Lord spoke again and said unto this man, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." I think we can all testify to the truthfulness of this statement, especially when we are called upon to place those whom we love so dearly in this life within old mother earth to crumble away into the elements from which they were formed. How often do we think when we have this sad rite to perform, of the Maker's word, uttered but little this side of the threshold of time, wherein he decreed that man should return to dust whence he came.

Again, in that connection he said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; . . . thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth." I often thought of that when in Canada, watching the Canadian farmers gathering in their grain, when they had to contend with almost an innumerable amount of thistles. Hence, as a result of this decree we find obnoxious weeds in all the world, which are of no benefit to man, but only an annoyance.

But God said something else to man, "By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Says one, "I do not believe that; there are a great many people in this world who never sweat for their bread." I want it distinctly understood that the principle is true, just the same. If there are those who are fortunate enough not to have to sweat for their bread, some one else has to do the sweating for them, as thousands can testify who have to toil and sweat from early morn till late at night for a small pittance.

Now, I wish to call your attention to a man who was quite prominent in his time, a man of God. Men of God are supposed to have a great amount of faith and confidence in the great I Am. The Lord requested this man to go from Judea to Bethel and cry against the altar, give a sign, and deliver a peculiar message to that people; and that he should not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way that he went. I suppose he intended in his heart to carry out every particular of that word before he started on his journey. The record says he reached Bethel and proceeded to do all the Lord had commanded him, and while there he performed a wonderful miracle, to the astonishment of all who witnessed it. As he was about to return home, he was approached by King Jeroboam who invited him home to eat and drink with him, which invitation he declined.

This man of God started homeward, but had not gone very far before he met another prophet who insisted that he go home with him and have refreshments. The man of God still persistently declined, stating that God had commanded him not to eat nor drink while on that journey; but finally the prophet informed him that an angel had appeared to him and requested him to invite the man of God to go to his house and eat and drink with him, and this argument had the desired effect upon the man of God, for he yielded to the temptation, and while he was seated at the table in the act of eating the prophet prophesied that this man of God should never be buried with his fathers, for the reason that he had disobeyed God's word. This man continued his journey homeward with a sad heart, and in a short time men coming from the direction that he went informed the old

prophet that they saw an ass standing in the road and a man on the ground, dead, and a lion standing by him; thus you see the man of God had to suffer the consequence of disobedience. This again proves that God's word is truth; so you see it will not do to cater to that argument so often adduced by some that it is immaterial whether we carry out every little thing in God's word so long as we are sincere and honest. The command is that we shall live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.

Once upon a time there was a great monarch whose greatness had reached the heavens. So great was this man that the Lord compared him to a head of gold; and again, God speaking of this same individual through his prophets, compared him to the lion, the king of beasts; also to the eagle, the king of birds. It was also said that he was a great conqueror in his day, for his fame was known far and near. This king whom God had exalted above all other men in his day became lifted up in the pride of his heart, but notwithstanding his greatness the Lord deigned to speak to him, and gave him a number of dreams in which he indicated what his condition would be, peradventure he would not heed God's word and act accordingly. One day while he was walking in the garden he said: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" But the Lord said to him, "They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, . . . and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will." Thus you see that God is not partial; he has no more respect for the kings of the earth than for the poorest of mortals. It is written that God is no respecter of persons, but we must not forget the fact that he is of principle; therefore whosoever among us honors his law by keeping his commandments, God will respect that person, whether he be among the laity or the officials of the church. Again, if we wish to succeed in the spiritual warfare and be instrumental in the hands of God in doing good, we must ever remember

that Jesus said that God's word is true, and always be obedient thereto.

There is another department of the subject to which I wish to invite your attention more particularly. I am talking this evening to those who are within the pale of the church, and you know that oftentimes in our prayer service and testimony meetings we hear the Saints breathe unto God this sentence, "O Lord, help us to live by every word that proceedeth from thy mouth."

Not long since the President of the church proclaimed it publicly that the hastening time had come, and has not the Spirit throughout the world given the invitation to come up higher? The Lord wants the church to occupy a higher plane than they have been occupying in times past, and this standard can only be reached through true humanity, and righteousness, and a faithful performance of duty on our part. Jesus said that he that loved him would keep his commandments, and in another place he said he would not judge us, but that his words would judge all. Again in the seventh of Matthew he says: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man;" and this is in harmony with the sayings of Paul wherein he advised the ancient saints to become wise unto salvation. Hence if we desire to be wise in the sight of God we will study the word very closely, and thereby ascertain what the Lord would have us do.

In the thirteenth chapter of St. John, thirty-fourth verse, we read: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples." I fear that through the weakness of the flesh we do not always observe this saying, as I oftentimes come in contact with individuals who manifest in their talk and by their actions that they do not love all their brethren and sisters as Christ loved us. When a person takes special pains to point out the weaknesses and faults of others you may depend upon it that the spirit of malice and hatred has taken possession of that person's heart—that the Spirit of Christ, which is love, does not dwell there. I here wish to relate an experience of my own. Some years ago I was sent on a mission to

Canada, and just before starting a certain brother of some prominence in the church found fault and criticised me very severely. As a consequence I went on that mission not having just the feeling I ought to have had towards that brother. At the same time I was trying to point men to the Lamb of God and to the things he had commanded them to do; and one Sunday while in the rostrum I quoted this passage—1 John 4:20, 21: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." I made up my mind that thereafter I would strive to practice what I preached, and I sought the Lord earnestly in secret prayer to give me the Spirit of Christ to enable me to love all my brethren, for he who loveth God loveth his brother also.

The command to love one another is just as applicable to us, as to the ancient Saints. "But," says one, "how can I love a person who is continually trying to injure me when I have done him or her no harm?" How can you? In the same way that Jesus Christ loved those who hated and persecuted him. I am sure no one could do us a greater injury than to rob us of our lifeblood, and this is precisely what Christ's enemies did to him when they put him to death on the accursed tree; and the record says that the last words that fell from his lips were an appeal to his Father: "Forgive them, they know not what they do." We are commanded to follow him, for he is the way, the truth, and the life.

I have met with persons who when they greet you hand you two of their fingers, while their faces turned in another direction, while again others put their whole hand in yours but are careful not to press it very warmly. A person can always tell the feeling of the persons he meets by the shake and pressure of the hands, but so far as I am concerned I prefer the "old-fashioned pumphandle shake." Again I have been going along the road and would meet a brother coming towards me on the same side of the street and when I would get very near the crossing he would take advantage of the opportunity and go on the

other side of the street to avoid meeting me, and at the same time he made the claim that he loved God. To my mind such actions on the part of Latter Day Saints are hypocritical, for actions speak louder than words. Suppose I should tell my wife that I loved her and at the same time I would constantly ill-treat her by finding fault and criticising everything she did, do you think she would believe my statement that I loved her when my deportment towards her was to the reverse? I would to God we had the love for one another that would enable us under all circumstances to cover one another's weaknesses with the mantle of charity, as for instance, I once read in a book of a prominent artist who was engaged by some very intimate friends of Alexander the Great to paint his portrait. In one of his famous battles the general had received a scar that disfigured his forehead, and his friends desired the artist to paint so as not to reveal the scar. This caused considerable meditation on the part of the artist, as it was a difficult thing to do, but finally he painted the picture of the general in a sitting posture with one finger on the scar as if in deep thought and the execution was very gratifying to his friends. How pleasing it would be to our heavenly Father did we as his people imitate the example of the artist and conceal one another's weaknesses with the finger of charity.

We should be very careful not to allow the green-eyed monster—jealousy—to come in among us. The sons of Israel became very jealous of their little brother Joseph simply because the Lord had favored him with a few dreams which indicated what his future would be; and this jealousy led to murder in their hearts, for they planned the death of their innocent brother, and had not God intervened they would have accomplished their evil design. "But," says one, "do you suppose that Latter Day Saints would murder one another?" Did it ever occur to your mind that there was such a thing as spiritual murder which is the worst of crimes especially when it is done in the name of Jesus Christ and under the cloak of Christianity? Perhaps you would like to have me tell you how this is done. The brethren suffer themselves to become jealous of one another,

and sometimes the sisters are tinctured with this weakness too. I have been in branches where there would be from two to ten elders from which the branch would select one of this number to preside over it; and perhaps the one selected was the youngest of the number, but by his faithfulness and apparent ability to preside he was elected to this office. It is not long, however, until some of the elders begin to criticise and to find fault with what he does. They go to work and set a trap and plan one scheme after another with a view to get him out of position. He braves the current for a time, but finally gives up the struggle in despair, and dies a spiritual death; and some person or persons will be responsible for this man's death in eternity. This cloven foot can be seen in the church in more places than one; sometimes it also makes its appearance in the Sunday school and in the Sisters' Prayer Union, but the sooner we get rid of this great evil the sooner success and prosperity will come to the church. The Savior said to the apostles that we should love our enemies. I have heard people say there was not a man on the earth that could love his enemies. Do you suppose God would ask his people to do something that was impossible to do? Did not our Master demonstrate the fact that it could be done when he freely forgave those who murdered him. We admit that Jesus did, but it is said that he had greater power than we have: but what about poor Stephen? was he Christ? did he not pardon his enemies who stoned him to death? It is said that he looked up to heaven and requested the Lord not to lay the sin to their charge—there was another man who forgave his enemies. Joseph of Egypt—when the sons of Jacob went to Egypt during the famine for corn, they came face to face with their brother whom they had left in the pit to die. I presume when Joseph saw them he said in his own mind, "Vengeance is mine and I will repay;" of course he remembered how they had treated him when but an innocent boy, and by reason of their ill-treatment he had been robbed of parental care all these years. However, this man of God did not return evil for evil, but did precisely what Jesus did and every other man will do who is sufficiently un-

der the influence of the Spirit and power of God—he forgave his enemies. It is said of him that he prepared a great feast and summoned all of his former enemies to it and greeted each with a brotherly kiss.

In Matthew the sixth chapter it is written: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." If this statement be true, it is folly and hypocritical on our part to ask the Lord in private or public to forgive our sins that we have committed against him until we have fully and completely forgiven those who have sinned against us. I used to think years ago that if a man offended me and I had not given him occasion to do it that I was justified in keeping out of his society, and that I was at liberty to associate only with those who were good and kind to me. Another thought, and that is, if we know that a brother has aught against us we must leave our gift at the altar and go to that individual and seek a reconciliation. "But," says one, "how am I to know that a brother has aught against me." It is said that a hint to the wise is sufficient; it is not always necessary that a man come to me and tell me that he has aught against me. For instance; Bro. Sheehy and I have been intimate friends for a great many years. Suppose we should meet one year from now at Independence, and he would come to greet me in his usual friendly way, and I would hand him two of my fingers and turn my face to one side and walk off and soon afterward leave him standing on the sidewalk alone, would it be necessary for some one to inform Bro. Sheehy that I had aught against him? has not my deportment manifested that fact? If he would keep the saying of the Lord it would be his duty to come to me and ascertain how and in what way he had offended me, and if I would refuse to impart the information he sought, then it would be his duty to bring witnesses and make another attempt at reconciliation; and a failure upon my part to comply with the demands of the law would necessitate his placing the whole matter in the hands of the officers of the church, who are to proceed with the case as the law directs.

The word of the Lord received some years since was, "Cease to contend." I

tell you, brethren and sisters, there is no time to contend. "The hastening time has come;" there is no time to be consumed in faultfinding, criticising, and backbiting one another; we should be up and doing, attending strictly to our Father's business.

The Apostle Peter admonished the saints in his time to add to their faith virtue, but it is necessary that we first have faith; and there are degrees of faith presented in the Scriptures. Jude says that we must "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." We should seek to be possessed of the kind of faith in God that Daniel and many more of the ancient worthies had.

Take Daniel, for example. I often think of him; he once desired a special blessing, and he made up his mind he would petition the Father for it. He showed his sincerity by making a sacrifice, and fasting—how long? He fasted and prayed for twenty-one days before the blessing came. In times past I have gone to the Lord for a certain blessing. I would start in fasting, and after continuing a day or two would get impatient and would make up my mind that I would not ask any more. I was sincere, but my faith did not hold out. Daniel did not do that way; he fasted for one week, and then did he stop discouraged? No, he did not stop; he kept on fasting and praying, and on the twenty-first day a messenger came along and said that the Lord was pleased with him and told him that the first prayer he offered was heard and that he was sent with an answer, but could not immediately come to him; that he was prevented by one of the princes of darkness. We want the identical faith that Daniel had; we want that implicit confidence that God will stand by his truth.

I would to God we had the faith in us that those young Lamanites had, of whom we read in the Book of Mormon. There were two thousand lads whose fathers had been converted to the church and had made a covenant that they would never make war against their brethren again. The Nephites were being severely pressed in a war with the Lamanites and those two thousand boys volunteered their services. They said to their parents that they had not made any covenant, therefore they wanted to go

out and fight for the protection of their church, and their country, and themselves. So they offered their services. They looked very young and innocent, and they were told, "No, you had better stay home with your mothers." That was the purport of it, at least; "If you go out there those Lamanites will kill you all." They said, "No they won't. We are not going to be killed." "Why, how can you help it?" they were asked. They replied: "Our mothers have taught us if we have faith in God he will protect us."

I wish we had that kind of mothers in our day all over the world, that when children grew up and commenced the warfare of life they would have the implicit confidence of these lads that God would stand by them and not permit them to become victims of the Devil. This is the kind of faith to have. Let us try to live up to our profession, add to our faith virtue, being virtuous in thought, having pure minds and holy desires; that is how the Lord would have us live, in order to have us come up higher and manifest to the world that we are the children of the light. Virtue means to be courageous, and stand up for the right, and maintain our integrity.

It is our duty to investigate God's word and find out what he would have us do and then have the courage to act accordingly. I used to think: "Well, there is so and so; I had a good deal of faith in him." I have, as the saying is, pinned my faith to the sleeves of others at times in the past. They were good people, but I found that they were like myself, mortals and liable to fall. I do not lean on any man now. God does not want us to lean on any man, but to trust in his word and have faith as saints in all ages have had, then we will prosper and flourish and people will not have to ask us if we are the people of God. God said to his people years ago, "Ye are the light of the world," and that they should be like a city set on a hill, that could be seen afar off. He also said, "Ye are the salt of the earth," and in and through us God designed that he should be glorified. "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance." Be temperate in eating, be temperate in thought, temperate in drink, temperate in talk, temperate in sleep. We

give offense; we wound one another's feelings by unwise talk. This should not occur. It is displeasing to God, and because of these things his love departs. If we would live up to our profession we would be the happiest and grandest people on the face of the earth, and God would open the windows of heaven and pour out such blessings upon us as we cannot now conceive of. I can testify to-night, that when I do what is right, when I keep God in view and deport myself according to his word, then I am blessed; and when I do not do it, I realize that God withdraws his Spirit from me.

I see my time is up, so in conclusion, let me say: I came into this church sev-

enteen years ago the 22d of this month, and when I look back and see how merciful God has been to me and from whence he brought me, you do not know how grateful I feel. Sometimes I can hardly realize it; it is a miracle to me.

May God give us grace, power, wisdom, and light, and a desire to believe in and keep his word; for by it we shall live, and by virtue in all that that word means we shall be rewarded in the end. May God's peace, blessing, and power be with you and me, that we may win the race by reason of the fact that we are obedient to his word and thus manifest to him that we love him and keep his commandments.

(Reported for the *Herald* with the Edison phonograph by F. E. Cochran.)

SYNOPSIS OF SERMONS

Delivered at Southern California Reunion, Downey, California, July, 1894.

ELDER W. P. PICKERING:—

God's word is true in all ages. In previous ages he spoke to man, and he can speak to us to-day. His word is always the same. After Christ had fasted forty days the tempter came unto him and quoted the words of God, but Christ answered by the same words and sent him hence. In former times God condescended to speak to man while he remained righteous, but departed from him when he became evil. God did so in all ages, and he does so to-day. Now, if Christ referred to his Father's word how much more must we study the word of God!

Christ said he had not come to condemn the world, but to save the world. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak."

Here Christ spoke not of himself; he did not dare to; he spoke the words the Father gave him. The word of God is unchangeable, and as he directed his people ages ago, so he will direct them now. The condemnation is to those who reject the word. If it

was necessary for Christ to obey his Father's word and fulfill the prophecies, how can we expect to receive the blessings unless we obey them too. It is just as necessary for you and me. Then if we see this necessity we should find out what the word of God is. God's word is as important in the New as in the Old Testament.

What has he taught? Jesus said: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Here he told the disciples to go unto all nations; so the message is to us. But we must be careful that when we receive the message we know from whom it comes. Christ authorized his disciples to preach, so we must listen only to those who have authority. The promise is to those who will accept the message that they should know of his doctrine, whether it be true, or whether it be false. The first step is to repent and then be baptized for the remission of sins and we shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We must not only hear, we must also obey; for the promise is to those who obey, and obedience is a power unto sal-