

MOCKING GOD

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"Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong; for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth."--Isaiah xxviii. 22.

In speaking from these words, I propose to consider--

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY MOCKING, OR BEING MOCKERS.

II. SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PERSONS MOCK GOD.

III. CALL ATTENTION TO SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOCKING GOD.

I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY MOCKING. The term to mock, in its scriptural sense, means to act hypocritically; to make false pretences or professions. We sometimes speak of having our hopes mocked, that is, they are disappointed. To be a mocker is to be hypocritical, to make false pretences, representations that are not true. To mock God is to pretend to love and serve him when we do not; to act in a false manner, to be insincere and hypocritical in our professions, pretending to obey him, love, serve, and worship him, when we do not. Anything that amounts to insincerity is mockery, anything that is only pretence, and does not represent the state of the heart. The term to mock, in ordinary language, means to dishonour. In this sense it is that God is mocked by not being honoured. He is not dishonoured really, but only, so far as man is concerned. When it is said in the Bible, "God is not mocked," it means God is not dishonoured really, although individuals do that which would dishonour him, if he could be dishonoured. I am now to call your attention to--

II. SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PERSONS MOCK GOD. And here let me say, in the outset, that if there be anything of vital importance to us, it is that we really understand what is our true position in respect to God; whether we are or are not accepted of him in the service which we profess to render unto him. I must pass rapidly over these thoughts; and, therefore, I cannot do more than make suggestions, which I beg you will think over and enlarge upon for yourselves. 1. I remark, in the first place, that we mock God when we present ourselves in the house of God as his professed servants, without the true spirit of obedience, love, worship, and faith. Unless we are really in an obedient state of mind, in the true spirit of devotion to his service, we mock him by the very fact of coming to his house as worshippers. For example, what do we profess in coming before him as worshippers? It is very important that we should understand what is really implied in coming to God's house, and taking our places before him, as worshippers of God. Why, in coming to God's house you profess to be devoted to his interests, service, and glory, that in your hearts you are really the servants of God, and that you come to his house to express what is in your hearts. You profess by this act to have an obedient spirit, love unfeigned, full confidence in him, submission to him, and the spirit of true worship. Now, every one who goes to the house of God without these sentiments of humility, love, and obedience, is a mocker, in the Bible sense of the term; and you are sternly asked, "Who hath required this at your hands, that you should tread my courts without the spirit of true worshippers--the spirit of truth, real obedience, love, faith, repentance, devotion, consecration to me? Why have you come before me as mere mockers, drawing near to me with your lips, while your heart is far from me?" Now, every one that comes to the house of God as a worshipper professes, by the very act, that he possesses the spirit of devotion to God, the spirit of consecration to his service and glory. 2. Again, it must imply in us two things, either that we already profess to be devoted to him, or that we come to inquire how we may consecrate ourselves to him and obey him. The language of the real Christian is, Let us go up to the house of God and inquire what the will of the Lord is, that we may understand his will, and that we may do it. By the very act of coming to inquire his will, they pledge themselves to obey it when it is made known to them. If this is not the case, what can it mean? For what purpose do you visit God's house? Let me ask you that are professors of religion, for what end do you come to God's house, if it is not to learn his will that you might obey him, and do more to glorify him? If this is not the disposition of your minds, if this is not what you mean, then you are mockers, and you appear before God in the character of hypocrites, virtually saying, "O God, we don't come to obey thee, we don't come to inquire thy will concerning us, with the intention of doing it: we only come pretending this, for in our hearts we have no desire to obey thy will, and do what thou requirest of

us." Suppose that there are some of this class of persons in this house now. No one can deny that we are met professedly to worship God, and the very fact of coming to such a meeting is surely a declaration that you wish to be instructed in the will of the Lord, that you may obey him and glorify his name. Now, is not this true? Why, yes it is! This is a meeting for God's worship, for God to reveal his will to his people in order that they may do it. Now, the very fact that you are come together, must imply that you have pledged yourselves, that when the will of the Lord is made known you will do it. The very fact that we come to God's house must imply that we come to worship God, that we appear before him as obedient people, with a determination in our hearts to do whatever he may tell us to do. Now, let me ask, is not anything short of complying with the spirit of this pledge, mocking God? Would you not regard yourselves as mocked if you were served in the same way by your fellow-creatures?--if an individual should profess great attachment to you, and after all have no such feeling in his heart? Let it be understood, then, that all assemblies meeting for the worship of God, who are really not in a state of heart to do whatever he commands them, are mockers. Just so far as they are not in a right state of heart they mock God, and all who come to such places and do not honestly intend to apply the truth, and obey it themselves when they return into the world, why they mock God. The very fact of their appearing before him implies that they mean to obey him. If they do not, they are mockers. Hear what the Lord said by the mouth of the prophet, "They speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come I pray you and hear what is the word that cometh from the Lord, and they come unto thee as my people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And lo! thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words but they do them not." They wanted to make him believe that they designed to obey him, and came out and sat before the prophet as the people of God, and heard his words with attention, and professed to love and admire them, but would not do them.

Now, let me ask, how is it with us here to-night? Do we realize what is implied in our coming here? Are we mocking God, or do we intend to redeem the pledge which we make to God by our appearance in this house? 3. Again: Confessing sin without repentance is also mocking God. When persons confess sin they profess to be sorry that they ever committed sin. I suppose that every person in the act of confession professes to be sorry for sin. Surely, then, if there is such a thing as mocking God, it is this--confessing sin without repentance. 4. Again: When persons confess sin without forsaking their sins, they mock God. Who can doubt this? 5. Again: We mock God by confessing sin and professing repentance for sin, without making restitution when we have done wrong. If we confess, without repentance, without forsaking, and without making restitution to those we have injured, of course we are mocking God in all this. I know it is true that persons oftentimes abound in confession, but go right on in the same way notwithstanding. Some persons are in the daily habit of confessing their sins, and then suppose that this is all that is required of them. If you tell them that they are sinners and must seek repentance, they tell you, "Remember, we confess our sins!" They confess that they are in a bad state of mind, that they do not do their duty, that they have done those things which they ought not to have done, and have undone those things which they ought to have done; they confess those things, day after day, and week after week, but never mean to forsake the sins which they confess themselves to be guilty of. Now, when persons confess sin and do not forsake it, and make restitution as far as lies in their power, where they have done wrong, all their confessions only amount to this--mocking God. For what does confession imply? Repentance! What is repentance? Why, repentance is heart rejection of sin; and if the heart turns away from sin the life must also of necessity, for the heart governs the external life. By a necessary law, if a man's heart is right his life will be right. By a necessary law of man's being this must be so. Now, where persons profess repentance for sin, without forsaking sin and turning away from it, by all their confessions they mock God.

Now, from all this you can judge whether you are guilty of mocking God, whether you are hypocritical. As a matter of course you mock God if you confess sin and do not forsake and resist it, as we have seen. What are your views of sin in general? Do you confess sin in your closets? Confess the sins of the day when you are about to retire for the night? If so, why do you do it? Do you intend to repent of your sins, or do you expect to continue to live just as you have lived? Do you confess your sins because you think it is safe as a matter of form? Now, all such confessions of sin as do not come from the heart, from a penitent heart resolved upon forsaking sin, are not only senseless, they are worse than senseless, much worse--they are downright mocking of God. 6. But, again: All mere formality in prayer, asking for things from mere custom. Some persons in their closets, if they are in the habit of closet prayer, will pray for things without thinking what they say. They pray according to custom, they go round about in a circle, always asking for much the same things without really considering what they say, or hardly knowing what they do say. They get into the habit of going a certain round, saying certain things from week to week and year to year. They have family worship, or an imitation of it. They keep up the custom, because they have a duty to perform, as they think: it

won't do to neglect their prayers, as they call them. They never fail to have these so-called family devotions, but they pray without faith, without deep feeling, and without anything that should characterise prayer. It is all a mere matter of form. Instead of coming from the depths of the heart, why it is mere talk and form. Now, of course such conduct as this amounts only to mockery--persons who act thus, instead of praying to God, shamefully mock him. There is such formality in family worship, that every member of the household can tell almost exactly what is going to be prayed for. Sometimes this same thing is seen in the public assembly also. Now, all such things as these are merely mocking of God. 7. Again, let me say, all matters of form, and stereotyped ways of doing things in public worship, that are done as things of course, because they are accustomed to be done: the want of sincerity, and the general state of mind implied in all this, is mocking God. For example, congregations are in the habit of doing certain things in a certain order. Sing! read! pray! sing! preach! sing! dismiss! Now, this is all very well if these things are done in the spirit of them; but suppose a congregation get into such a state that they do not enter into the spirit of the service, they mock God by the performance! For example, the minister reads the hymn and the people begin to sing; they are affected by the sound of the music, and in consequence think themselves very religious. It is a very common thing for individuals to suppose that they are very devotional, because they have some sort of emotional feelings when some plaintive hymn is being sung. For many years before I was converted, I led the music in a public assembly. I could shed tears in singing oftentimes; and so deep were my emotions frequently, that I used to take a self-righteous satisfaction in such feelings; but I was an impenitent sinner and a mocker of God. This is no uncommon thing. Some people who have been living in sin all day, and, having no purpose of amendment, can sit down and sing God's praises. Without being in a state of devotion, and never having given their hearts to God at all, they will sing such lines as these--

"Had I a thousand hearts to give,

Lord they should all be thine."

Indeed! when you have not given him the one that you have got! They will also sing--

"When I survey the wondrous cross

On which the Prince of Glory died,

My richest gain I count but loss,

And pour contempt on all my pride."

Who does not know that it is common for persons to sing these hymns whose lives tell you that they are not devoted to God? And who will deny that this is dreadful mockery! What can be more solemn and horrible mockery than for a man with a wicked heart to sing such expressions as these. Now, let me say, there is a vast amount of this in religious assemblies. And there is a vast amount of self-deception. I have observed in many places where I have been since I have been in the ministry, that just in proportion as a congregation loses the spirit of true religion, the true spirit of prayer, the true spirit of zeal and devotedness, they will spend their time in singing. You appoint a prayer-meeting to pray for sinners; but, instead of praying they will spend their time in singing. As many long hymns as you please they will sing, but make very short and lifeless prayers. They will amuse themselves by singing hymns, because they can do that and yet go on in their worldly and sinful indulgences; but they have not the heart to pray. Again and again have I known instances in which meetings have been called to pray for sinners, when those who have met to pray have spent nearly the whole time in singing. Instead of considering the guilt and danger of these sinners, and beseeching the throne of God in their behalf--instead of calling mightily upon God to lay hold of them and save them, they have spent their time in singing long hymns. Indeed, it is universally true, that professors will sing in proportion to their want of spiritual life. Ask them to pray, and they would rather sing, and by so doing frequently deceive themselves. I have seen so much of this mocking God in singing, that when I have taken up my hymn-book, I have been afraid to read a hymn for the congregation to sing, lest they should mock God. When I have known the state which they were in, and have had reason to believe the great mass of them were in a state of spiritual death, I have asked, Can you sing this? Can you--dare you sing it? Shall we quench the Holy Ghost in our hearts, and drive him from the assembly? Now, congregations very frequently, and professors of religion too, in singing oftentimes grieve and quench the Holy Spirit of God. If the heart does not mean what the lips express, you mock God.

8. Again: Persons often mock God at the Communion Table. What do they profess when they come to the Communion Table? Do they not profess to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ? Do they not profess by this act to pledge themselves afresh to him? And is this always the temper of mind in which they come? Is it not true, that many come to the table of the Lord as a mere matter of form, because they dare not stay away, and thus become mockers of God. Suppose any come with enmity and malignity in their hearts towards any of their brethren, or with a consciousness of having oppressed and injured those whom they may have in their employ, without having made restitution, do they not mock God, and grieve the Holy Spirit? To be sure they do! Although this is one of the most exalted means of grace, yet how often is it abused by persons coming to it in an improper state of mind and heart! Thus they mock God, and bring leanness into their own souls. 9. Again: Persons often mock God in professing to give thanks for his mercies. How often is giving of thanks but a mere matter of form? I recollect on one occasion having a note put into my hands by the deacon of a church where I was preaching, requesting me to return thanks for some person who had been ill. I found this was a common custom, for the request was partly in print. What was I to do? I did not know that this person was a sincere; I did not know that he was a Christian. Must I tell God that this individual came to thank him for his mercies when it might not be true? What could I do? Was I to do as I was desired because it was a custom? Was I to play the hypocrite in the presence of God and the congregation? And yet how often do ministers conform to this custom when there is reason to believe that the person for whom the thanks are requested has no gratitude in the heart at all. Now, it is true a congregation may themselves thank God, although the individual for whom the thanks are returned does not mean it; nevertheless, I have quivered sometimes when such things have been thrown upon me. I have been afraid to return thanks for individuals. I have asked myself, How shall I dare to appear before God as a mere matter of form or custom? Now, I am not finding fault with persons for returning thanks, for I think it is wise and proper to recognize the hand of God in everything. It is everybody's duty to do so, but let us beware lest we be found lying to the Holy Ghost, who requires truth in the inward parts, and abhors that which does not come from the heart. 10. Again, persons often mock God in the public consecration of their children to him in baptism, and especially in certain forms of consecration. Sponsors--godfathers and godmothers, as they are sometimes called--pledge themselves before high heaven on behalf of the children, that they will ensure their being Christians, and perhaps never see them again. What awful and intolerable pretence is this to make before a heart-searching God! If those who do not adhere to these forms profess to bring their children to God and dedicate them to him in baptism, and yet do not realize what is implied in the act, they are in danger of bringing upon themselves and their children that punishment which God will inflict upon those who mock him. 11. Again: All mere compliance with custom in private or public worship; to say and do things because they are customarily said and done, is mocking God. 12. Again: Saying the Lord's prayer is often a mere mockery, as all of you must be fully aware, from beginning to end! We now come to notice, very briefly--

III. SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOCKING GOD. The Bible says, in the words of our text--"Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong." What is meant by this? 1. The fact is, mocking God grieves the Holy Spirit, and sears the conscience; and thus the bands of sin become stronger and stronger. The heart becomes gradually hardened by such a process. Why should it not? Why should not the heart become fearfully hardened by such trifling with divine things? When individuals accustom themselves to say things without meaning, the effect must be that they come to disbelieve in them altogether, and their hearts become hard and callous to the invitations of the Gospel. 2. And not only do the bands of sin become strong, but delusion becomes strong. Their minds become so darkened that they lose all sense of what is true, spiritual, and good, in relation to religion, the Bible, and everything else. If I had time I might notice some facts on this subject, that have come under my own observation, but there is little need of this; I doubt not that most of you have witnessed the dreadful results of formality in religion, in hardening the heart, and perverting the mind from a perception of all that is true. Things that would affect the ungodly do not affect them at all. For example, if you can get an infidel to go away by himself and pray, he will find it a very solemn and awful business to speak to God; and will be impressed ten times more than the man who has for years been mocking God by his formality, and pretending to pray all his life. Men become gospel-hardened by mocking God. They mock God until the truth of God ceases to affect them. Their hearts have become so dead and their consciences so stupefied, that when God's voice calls upon men to repent, it passes right by them without affecting them in the least. 3. Again: They will get into such a state, and their darkness becomes so great, that they think and profess they are doing their duty, when they are only mocking God by their heartless formality. And, of course, the more such persons abound in their duty, the more are they hardened in sin. Who does not know this? Formalists are the most hardened class, because they mock God the most. It is always so, that just in proportion as persons abound in mere form, they become hardened in sin before God.

A few remarks must close what I have to say. Stereotyped forms tend to divert the mind from a true idea of religion. I have found that all forms of worship must, from the very nature of the case, tend to make men formalists, and blind their minds to a true idea of the spirituality of religion. For example, what true idea of prayer has the man who reads his prayer from a book? What is prayer? Why, it is the language of the heart, coming to God for the supply of its wants; like a little child coming to its parents for something that it wishes for. The child comes to its parent and asks, because it feels that it wants, and knows where it can get what it wants. Now, suppose a child, when it wanted a piece of bread, should read a prayer to its parent, without the word bread being mentioned in it; or if it was mentioned at the end, he must go right through the whole of the prayer before he got to it, and thus get his petition before his parent. Prayer is the language of the heart addressed to God. The language of those who feel that they are in need of something which God can bestow. Now, suppose prayer should be regarded in any other light; the man begin[s] to use a form of words which he calls prayer, because he thinks it is his duty, why he loses the true idea of prayer altogether. This is how persons often lose all true idea of religion and spiritual worship. Thus it was with the Jewish nation--they lost the true idea of religion in the multitude of their forms and ceremonies. Again, I remark, that without great care we are all liable to fall into the sin of insincerity. Be perfectly upright with God in your closet. I have been long satisfied that much of the backsliding we are called to witness, is caused by insincerity in private devotion. If any man is not honest with God in private, neither will he be honest in public, and thus his mind and soul will become ruined and alienated from God. It is but right and proper that every time we meet together for public worship, the minister should offer public prayer to God, but it never need be insincere prayer, for if the minister lives near to God, as he ought, he will always find enough to say. Yes, more than he could utter if he were to talk from morning till night. And if he does not walk with God, it were much better to say nothing at all, and not insult and grieve the Spirit of God by using language that is not dictated by the heart. Once more, from what has been said, you see how it is that some leaders in religious services become so excessively hardened. I have known some of this class in the midst of a revival so cold and callous that the truth never served to touch them at all. Now, there is nothing that will so soon blast and destroy the spirituality and prosperity of a Church, as men of this sort being leaders and chief men in the Church. The Lord deliver us from such. Again, persons should beware of anything like formality in their family worship. I know that some people think forms are better than nothing in a family, but I don't believe it. I am confident that nothing tends so much to ruin a family. It will make the children despise religion, and become hardened to its influence.

My beloved brethren, how is it with you, you that profess to be Christians? Are you honest with God; does he know that you are? Do you confess that sometimes you are not, and do you ask what you shall do when you do not feel in the spirit of prayer? Why, begin right there, and tell God that you have not the spirit of prayer. There is something true; some place where you can begin. Is it that you don't feel right? Then tell God that. Are you not in the spirit of prayer? Tell him that! If you want the Holy Spirit, tell him that! If you have sinned, confess that! Be honest, and make no pretence whatever. Let sincerity be the habit of your life, and you will always have something to say to God; your love, faith, and devotion will be strengthened, and your soul blessed. If you are honest with God, you will always find him honest with you! Some years ago I was acquainted with a young man who had been studying for the ministry; this young man, soon after he had completed his college course, became the subject of a very strong conviction that much of his religious profession had been nothing but a mockery. One night he retired to rest, and after having put out the light and laid down in the bed, he was very much surprised to see the room re-lighted; he sat up in the bed and looked to see whence the light came; he perceived a person in the room looking very earnestly at him, standing at the foot of the bed; in a few moments the whole light of the room concentrated itself into a single eye, and that eye was fixed intensely upon him. He trembled violently, and was in a state of dreadful agony: the eye continued to glare upon him, looking him through and through, searching his very thoughts. He never forgot this searching; it so completely subdued him, that he came to be one of the most holy men and devoted ministers I ever knew. One of the deacons wrote to me a short time ago, and said, "Mr. Hopkins is gone to heaven; we want some one to supply his place, but we cannot expect another Mr. Hopkins." Now, he became what he was, because the Spirit searched him and revealed his heart to himself. Oh, for the Spirit to search every one of us! Let him begin with me! Brethren, pray that my heart may be searched; that the hearts of all your ministers may be searched; that your own hearts may be searched. Pray that God may search us all, that we may be mercifully kept from mocking God, lest our bands be made strong.

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