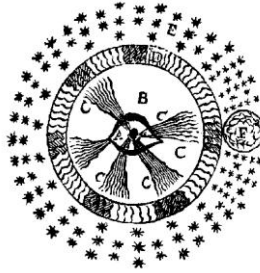


Spirit's Day Studies

The Writings of Jane Lead,
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Worship of the Letter a Denial of the Spirit

In these days of haggling over the printed word, it is good to be reminded that the Bible, as well as other spiritual writings, can be worshipped in a way that is detrimental to the soul. For as much as we are to love and revere the Word of God, we must remember that these Holy-Spirit-inspired writings are not the end—but rather a “means” to an end: which is the New Man, reborn and made perfect in the glorious image of the Son of God. This is what the Bible refers to as the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

The following is an excerpt from William Law’s *Power of the Spirit*, Chapter 3. Paragraph numbers were not in the original, and are used here only to provide a reference point. (dmg)

1. The Holy Scriptures are the divinely inspired Word of God, and therefore to be fully believed, highly revered, and strictly obeyed. Since faith comes from hearing the Word of God, and “the just live by faith,” we must ever remember that the basis of the Christian life is a constant meditation upon and simple acceptance of all that the Bible would say to us. But as Christ’s work of redemption in the flesh was only preparatory to His future indwelling us by the Spirit, so the written doctrines of Scripture are only a means to all that inward teaching and powerful working of Christ’s Spirit within us. As we must beware of neglecting the Word of God, so also we must beware of resting in the mere letter without expecting through the indwelling Holy Spirit a real and living experience of all that Scripture holds out to our faith. Nothing of divine love, life, or goodness can have birth or place in us but by inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. So they who imagine these virtues can be acquired by studying the letter of the gospels and epistles are under the same deception as the Jews that Christ said would not come to Him because they thought eternal life was in and by the Old Testament Scriptures alone.
2. The Bible should be revered as doing all that words can do to bring us to God—that is, to point the way. But the life-giving power of Christ does not reside in Greek and Hebrew syntax, but in the quickening of the Holy Spirit: for “*the gospel is not in word only, but in power and in much assurance of the Holy Spirit.*” What folly to ascribe to the letter of Scripture that power which the words themselves most plainly tell us is solely in the quickening Spirit of God! Yet Scripture has suffered this very perversion of teaching at the hands of those who claim to uphold most ardently its infallible inspiration. Thus many profess a sound doctrinal understanding of the letter of Scripture, but at the same time they

reject the very work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives to which the plainest meaning of the Scriptures they so zealously study and guard would point them!

3. This basic error is much encouraged by the pitiful reasoning of great Bible scholars and preachers who affirm that God no longer communicates with men except through the words of Scripture: and who, on the grounds of a completed canon, deny the reality of the Holy Spirit's inspiration and communion presently active in the soul and spirit of man. Let us put their doctrine into the letter of the text, which will best show how true or false it is. Our Lord says, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you." That is, it is expedient that I discontinue teaching in audible words, that you may have the written page to look at with your eyes: for if I go away, I will send written words which shall lead you into such a truth of doctrine as you could not have while they were only spoken from my mouth. These will be the heavenly Comforter abiding with you—the most supreme illumination you can receive from me. According to these teachers, the fellowship Jesus offers is nothing so extreme as the reality of the Holy Spirit actually manifesting Christ to our spirits and His works in our lives; rather it is the wonderful, heavenly, sublime communion between our intellects and the letter of Scripture.
4. What can this intellectual approach bring to the study of Scripture except that which the most wicked scholar could also boast through a knowledge of Greek and his natural memory? A historical, intellectual or grammatical learning of the words of Scripture can do no more towards removing the fleshly nature and its works from the soul of man than the same human knowledge of mathematics or literature. What more is then needed to prove that though the Scriptures are now complete, yet a completeness of words is not sufficient for our salvation? "The things of God knoweth no man, but by the Spirit of God." Without the present inspiration of the Spirit, a man's knowledge of the letter of Scripture can be no more than ideas in his head. We need the same powerful working of the Holy Spirit today that made the apostles living examples of all they were inspired to write. In no other way can we know the reality of Christ's redemption which the early Christians daily experienced.
5. Yet Bible scholars are generally looked upon as having a divine knowledge when they are as ready at chapter and verse of Scripture as the learned philosopher is at every page of Plato or Aristotle. On the basis of a prescribed religious education, the clergyman is thought to be fully qualified to engage in that ministry for which the apostles had to receive an endowment of power from on high. This scholarly worship of the letter has greatly opposed the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and blinded men to the living reality which the gospel holds out to those who believe. The manner in which Greek and Hebrew scholarship is admired and sought after in the church would lead one to believe that a man has all the divine life and reality of a Paul if he can only say his epistles by heart. What could such a man truly be said to have, except the letter of the gospel without the Spirit? And what would be the advantage if he knew this letter in the original Greek, and had thoroughly mastered all the niceties of grammar and shades of ancient meanings? Such a man, while more thoroughly grounded in the letter, must remain just as empty of the reality of the gospel, unless he knows in his own experience the immediate inspiration and quickening power of the Holy Spirit.

6. Judas Iscariot knew Jesus Christ, and all that He said and did from the beginning of His ministry to His crucifixion. He knew what it was to be at the Lord's table, and to partake of the bread and wine fresh from the hand of the Saviour and under His blessing. Yet with much more truth it may be said that he knew nothing of all this, and had no better knowledge of Christ than a Pontius Pilate or a Barabbas. And all knowledge of Christ except that which is from the divine inspiration of the indwelling Holy Spirit is as poor and profitless as was Judas' knowledge.
7. Peter's acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, did not come from a mere outward knowledge of the words Christ spoke and the miracles He had done, but from that divine inspiration for which we here contend. Is not this what Christ meant when He said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven"? In like manner Paul wrote, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Flesh and blood may say to Christ, "Hail Master," and betray Him with a kiss; but no one can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit.
8. What fuller argument is needed for this divine inspiration as being beyond the poor power of mere words, than the self-evident fact that the natural man is everywhere in the church singing of his love for Jesus and calling Him Lord with his lips, while betraying Him to the world with his life! Nor could this lukewarm apostasy masquerade under the banner of Christ, except that our worship of the letter of the gospel has denied its power. Men are more concerned about proving who has the right doctrinal interpretation of Scripture than they are concerned with whether or not the reality of the gospel is being demonstrated in their daily lives. And all because we assume that the Holy Spirit, having finished His inspiration of apostles and prophets for the writing of Scripture, now withholds that same necessary inspiration and illumination from those who today read these holy truths.
9. Since calling Jesus Lord must be more than mere words, what could so fully oppose the Holy Spirit as that worship of the letter of Scripture that is so prevalent among Christians today? When this empty, powerless knowledge of the letter of spiritual truth is held to be the possession of the truth itself, then darkness, delusion, and death overshadow Christendom. For gospel Christianity is in its whole nature a ministration of the Spirit: it has but one life, and that is the life of God by the divine nature brought to birth and power in the believing heart. It has but one light, and that is the Lamb of God. Whatever is not of and from this life and governed by the Holy Spirit in possession of the heart, call it by what high name you will, is no more a part of the gospel state nor will better influence man's final end than a similar learned knowledge of secular history.
10. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What is God's kingdom in heaven, but the manifestation of what God is and does in His heavenly creatures? How is His will done there, except that His Holy Spirit is the life, the power, and mover of all that live in heaven? We daily read this prayer, and yet (for the sake of sound doctrine, it is supposed) preach and write against all that is prayed for in it. Nothing less than the manifestation of the life of Christ through mortal flesh in the power of His Holy Spirit can do that which we pray may be done. Where can God's kingdom reign? Only where every

other power but His ceases to be. How can His will be done? Only as the Spirit that wills in God also wills in the creature.

11. What then can a learned knowledge of literature and language and oratorical abilities perform in this kingdom? Just as much as they can do towards the resurrection of the dead; for all that is to be done in this heavenly kingdom is nothing less than resurrection into divine life from the death of sin. Therefore the power which gave eyes to the blind, cleansed the lepers, cast out devils, and raised the dead can and must alone do all that is to be done in this gospel Kingdom of God. Every smallest work of grace must be as solely done by God as the greatest miracle, because in every work of grace is the same overcoming of nature and sin as when the dead are raised to life. A letter-learned zeal, far from making any man a partaker of the divine nature, only confirms him in his own fallen state: for his proud glorying in the letter blinds him to his emptiness and lack of reality in the Holy Spirit. One can be so proud of his doctrinal soundness that the Holy Spirit cannot convict him of the unsoundness of his life.
12. Vain men give to one another a special recognition as having great power and position in this heavenly kingdom by virtue of a proficient learning in languages and Biblical history, or skill in doctrinal analysis. If the faith of illiterate fishermen did more for the establishment of the church in a few years than centuries of prodigious scholarship, one may readily understand that a trust in the wisdom of men and the letter of Scripture has caused the church to fall from its first gospel state in much the way that Adam fell through eating of the same tree of knowledge. The Bible teacher and religious leader who gain and hold a church position through intellectual attainments and oratorical skills can be said to differ from lesser men only as the serpent differed from the other beasts of the field—in that it was more subtle. And the old Serpent has elevated many of his servants through this same subtlety into places of authority and influence within that which pretends to be the Church of Christ.
13. In this fallen state of the Church today, Bible scholars are everywhere given over to the self-assuming workings of their own natural intellectual powers. Preachers and teachers come forth to play the orator with gospel mysteries as though the kingdom of God were a kingdom of words, and not as it is in reality the inward work of the Triune God in the soul and spirit of man. Paul said that his gospel was *not* in word only, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. But these men profess to preach the same gospel as Paul, while denying that same power of the Holy Spirit that he knew; and the gospel in their mouths has become a play upon words, so that they are always studying new ways to present them. They maintain a form of godliness while denying the power thereof. The truth has become in their hands no longer the piercing sword of the Spirit of Truth, but the persuasion of cleverly fashioned phrases. In this way the living Word of God has died in the hands of those who profess to be its dearest friends.
14. Nor do such men always handle the Word of God with apparent deception or obvious unbelief. They are often most careful to “rightly divide the word of truth,” and frequently foremost in pointing out doctrinal errors held by others less astute in the Scriptures. This very consciousness of being sound in the letter of doctrine has blinded them to the need of a real and constant working of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. The kingdom of God has

become to them and to their disciples, not a matter of practical righteousness, triumphant peace and boundless, overflowing joy in the Holy Spirit; but that kingdom consists for them in doctrinal teachings and new-found phrases about these things. Such a false kingdom of creeds can only be maintained and extended by defining and disputing the meaning of words. And so the apostle's warning is manifested to be true, that "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."

15. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." As soon as any man makes a dead letter out of Christ's words, he can no longer know the living experience of that which Christ taught. When Scripture creates a hunger and thirst to be filled and blessed with His divine nature through the Holy Spirit, then the letter kills not, but leads directly to life.
16. All the truths and doctrines of Scripture have but one errand; to call men to the Christ who said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." This risen Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption," must live His life in us and be our all, or His words only make an outward sound upon our ears and a passing image in our minds, while our hearts remain empty of His life and power. The one thing taught and meant by all that is so variously said in Scripture is, "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life," "but the wrath of God abideth on him." If the living Word, who is Christ Himself, is not living as Lord and Master in the depths of our spirit now, then those outward words He spoke can only condemn us in that coming day; and the more familiar we have been with the letter of doctrine, the greater will be our judgment for having neglected that reality which these words continually held out to us in the truths we professed with our lips but denied with our lives.
17. The letter of Scripture has so long been the province of intellect and reason that the difference between opinions about words and a living divine knowledge is all but lost in the professing Church. And if any awakened Christian suggests that something more dynamic and vital may be known of God in daily experience than that which every scholar can know of words and ideas, immediately the cry of "enthusiast" is raised after him, whether he be a priest or one of the laity. Such an accusation could have some justification only if it could first be proved that the apostle's text ought to be thus read, "The Spirit killeth, but the letter giveth life."
18. To justify the lack within his own heart of the fire of the Holy Spirit, the well-read theologian explains that the ancient way of knowing the things of God, taught and practiced by apostles and early Christians, is not for this present age. Primitive Christians indeed needed to have the fullness of the Holy Spirit's manifestation given to every man—but this was only for a time, until the completeness of the written canon of Scripture should give scholarship sufficient words to study and teach. Behold the folly of human reasoning! For as soon as this first power and illumination of the Spirit of God as a present work among men is denied for today, then nothing is left but the fleshly work and carnal wisdom of the old man. And the Church of Christ has become a kingdom of scribes and Pharisees.

19. Christ said to those who sought after the letter, "In them (the Scriptures) ye think ye have eternal life; but these are they which testify of me: and ye will not come to me that ye might have life." To come to the Scriptures and to know all the letter of them is of no avail unless through them we are led to the crucified Saviour to receive life from Him. Christ Himself, brought to life in us through the new birth, is our whole redemption, justification, and hope of glory. This is the one thing said and meant by Christ, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."
20. All the New Testament with one voice testifies that every true Christian must be indwelt by the same Holy Spirit as were the first Christians. And in none of the New Testament can a verse be found to show that Christ intended the gifts, workings and power of the Holy Spirit to diminish in the Church; indeed, He Himself said, "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater. . ."
21. Now as surely as Christ never told His disciples to tarry at Jerusalem until the power of education or learning should come upon them, so surely did He not refer to the completed letter of Scripture when He said, "He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever;" and "He will guide you into all truth." The letter of Scripture can only direct to the doing of that which it cannot perform, and give notice of a living reality that it cannot supply. It is the coming of Christ Himself as the fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets; and of His Holy Spirit, as the fulfiller and powerful inward and outward working of Christ's gospel, that alone can give the possession and life of all that to which the Scriptures direct us.