

WORSHIP

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One of the most solemn and soul-destroying fallacies of the day is that unregenerate souls are capable of worshipping God. Probably one chief reason why this error has gained so much ground is because of the wide-spread ignorance which obtains concerning the...

REAL NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

People imagine that if they attend a religious service, are reverent in their demeanor, join in the singing of the hymns, listen respectfully to the preacher, and contribute to the collection, they have really worshipped God. Poor deluded souls, a delusion which is helped forward by the priest-craft and preacher-graft of the day. Over against this delusion are the words of Christ in John 4:24, which are startling in their plainness and pungency: "God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

VANITY OF FALSE WORSHIP

"Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:6,7). These solemn words were spoken by the Lord Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees. They had come to Him with the complaint that His disciples did not conform to their traditions and practices in connection with ceremonial washings and cleansings. In His reply, Christ exposed the worthlessness of their religion...

These scribes and Pharisees were raising the question of the ceremonial "washing of hands," while their hearts, remained filthy before God. Ah, dear reader, the traditions of the elders may be diligently attended to, their religious ordinances strictly observed, their doctrines devoutly upheld, and yet the conscience had never been searched in the presence of God as to the question of sin. The fact is that religion is one of the greatest hindrances against the truth of God blessing men's souls.

God's truth addresses us on the ground that God and man are as far apart as sin is from holiness: therefore his first great need is cleansing and reconciliation. But "religion" proceeds on the assumption that depraved and guilty men may have dealings with God, may approach unto Him, yea, worship and serve Him. The world over, human religion is based on the fallacy that fallen and sinful man can have dealings with God. Religion is the principal means used by Satan to blind men to their true and terrible condition. It is the devil's anesthetic for making lost sinners feel comfortable and easy in their guilty distance from God. It hides God from them in His real character—as a holy God who is of "purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab 1:13).

A flood of light is thrown upon this side of our subject if we weigh attentively the awful incident recorded in Matthew 4:8,9. "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." *The devil seeks worship*. How few in Christendom are aware of this, or realize that the principal activities of the enemy are carried on in the religious sphere!

Listen to the testimony of Deuteronomy 32:17—"They sacrificed unto *demons*, not to God; to gods whom they knew not." That refers to Israel in the early days of their apostasy. Listen again to 1 Corinthians 10:20, "But I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils [demons], and not to God." What light does that cast on the idolatries and abominations of heathendom! Listen again to 2 Corinthians 4:4, "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." *This means that Satan is the inspirer and director of the world's religion*. Yes, he seeks worship, and is the chief promoter of all false worship.

THE EXCLUSIVENESS OF TRUE WORSHIP

"God is Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). This "must" is final; there is no alternative, no choice in the matter. It is not the first time that we have this very emphatic word in John's Gospel. There are two notable verses where it occurs previously. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye *must* be born again" (John 3:7). "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so

must the son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Each of these three “musts” is equally important and unequivocal. The first has reference to God the Spirit, for He it is who regenerates. The second refers to the work of God the Son, for He it is who made atonement for sin. The third has reference to God the Father, for He it is that seeketh worshippers (John 4:23). This order cannot be changed; it is *only those* who have been born of the Spirit, and who are resting upon the atoning work of Christ, that can worship the Father.

To quote again the words of Christ to the religionists in His day, “This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me.” Ah, my reader the worldling may be a generous philanthropist, a sincere religionist, a zealous denominationalist, a devout churchman, a regular communicant, yet is he no more capable of *worshipping* God than a dumb man is of singing. Cain tried it, and failed. He was not irreligious, He “brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord” (Gen 4:3). But “unto Cain and his offering He had not respect.” Why? Because he refused to own his undone condition and his need of an atoning sacrifice.

In order to worship God, God must be *known*: and He cannot be known apart from Christ. Much may be predicated and believed about a theoretical or a theological “God”, but He cannot be known apart from the Lord Jesus. Said he, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6). Therefore it is a sinful make-believe, a fatal delusion, a wicked farce, to cause unregenerate people to imagine that they can worship God. While the sinner remains away from Christ, he is the “enemy” of God, a child of wrath. How then can he worship God? While he remains in his unregenerate state he is “dead in trespasses and sins”; How then *can* he worship God.

What has just been said above is almost universally repudiated today, and repudiated in the name of Religion. And, we repeat, religion is the principal instrument used by the devil in deceiving souls, for it insists—whether it be the “Buddhist religion,” or the “Christian religion”—that man, yet in his sins, can have dealings with and approach unto the thrice holy God. To deny this is to stir up the enmity and call down upon one so doing the opposition of all mere religionists. Yes, it was that very thing which brought down upon Christ the merciless hatred of the religionists of His day. He refuted their claims, exposed their hypocrisy, and so incurred their wrath.

To the “chief priests and the elders of the people” (Matt 21:23), Christ said, “The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matt 21:31), and at the close of his discourse it is added, “They sought to lay hands on Him” (v 46). They attended to outward things, but their inward state was neglected. And why was it that the “publicans and harlots” entered the kingdom of God before them? Because no religious pretensions stood in their way; they had no self-righteous profession to maintain at all costs, no pious reputation to keep up. Under the preaching of the Word they were convicted of their lost condition, so took their true place before God and were saved. Only *such* can be worshippers.

THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

“God is Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” To worship “in spirit” stands contrasted from the fleshly rites and imposing ceremonies of Judaism. To worship “in truth” stands opposed to the superstitions and idolatrous delusions of the heathen. To worship God “in spirit and in truth” means in a manner suited to the full and final revelation which God has now made of Himself in Christ. It means to worship spiritually and truly. It means giving to Him the homage of an enlightened understanding and the love of a regenerated heart.

To worship “in spirit and in truth” stands opposed to a carnal worship which is external and spectacular. It bars out all worshipping of God with the senses. We cannot worship Him who is “Spirit” by gazing on ornate architecture and stained glass windows, by listening to the peals of a costly organ, by smelling sweet incense or “telling” of beads. We cannot worship God with our eyes and ears, or nose and hands, for they are “flesh” not “spirit.” “Must worship in spirit and in truth” excludes everything that is of the natural man.

To worship “in spirit and in truth” bars out all *soulical* worship. The soul is the seat of the emotions, and very much of the so-called worship of present-day Christendom is only soulical. Touching anecdotes, stirring appeals, thrilling oratory of a religious character, are all calculated to produce this very thing. Beautiful anthems by a well-trained choir, rendered in such a way as to move to tears or to ecstasies of joy may stir the soul, but will not and cannot affect the inner man.

True worship is the adoration of a redeemed people, occupied with God Himself. The unregenerate look upon “worship” as an obeisance which God exacts from them, and which gives them no joy as they seek to proffer it. Far different is it with those who have been born from above and redeemed with precious blood. The first time the word “redeemed” occurs in Scripture is in Exodus 15, and it is there also, for the first time, we behold a people “singing,” worshipping, adoring God Himself. There, on the far shores of the Red Sea, that Nation which had been brought out from the house of bondage and delivered from all their enemies united in praising Jehovah.

“Worship” is the new nature in the believer stirred into activity, turning to its Divine and heavenly Source. It is that which is “spirit” (John 3:6) turning to Him who is “Spirit”. It is that which is the “workmanship” of Christ (Eph 2:10) turning to Him who re-created us. It is the children spontaneously and gratefully turning in love to their Father. It is the new heart crying out, “Thanks be to unto God for His unspeakable Gift” (2 Cor 9:15). It is sinners, cleansed by blood, exclaiming “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph 1:3). *That* is worship; assured of our acceptance in the Beloved, adoring God for what He has made Christ to be unto us, and what He has made us to be in Christ.

It is worthy of our closest attention to observe that the only time the Lord Jesus ever spoke on the subject of Worship was in John 4. Both Matthew 4:9 and Mark 7:6,7, were quotations from the Old Testament. It should indeed stir our hearts to discover that the sole occasion when Christ made any direct and personal observations on worship was when He was speaking, not to a religious man like Nicodemus, nor even to His apostles, but to a woman, an adulteress, a Samaritan—a semi-heathen! Truly God's ways *are* different from ours.

To that poor woman our blessed Lord declared, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23). And *how* did the Father “seek” worshippers? Does not the whole of the context supply the answer? At the beginning of the chapter the Son of God is seen taking a journey (vv 3,4). His object was to seek out one of His lost sheep, to reveal Himself to a soul that knew Him not, to wean her from the lusts of the flesh, and fill her heart with His satisfying grace; and this, in order that she might meet the longings of Divine love and give in return that praise and adoration which only a saved sinner can give.

Who can fail to see in the journey which He took to Sychar's well in order to meet that desolate soul and win her to Himself, that we have a most blessed adumbration of that still greater journey which God's Son took—leaving heaven's peace and bliss and light, coming down to this world of strife and darkness and wretchedness. He came here seeking sinners, not only to save them from sin and death but to give them to drink in and enjoy the love of God as no angel can enjoy it; that from hearts overflowing with the consciousness of their indebtedness to the Saviour and His dear Son for them, they, realizing and accepting His superlative excellency, might pour forth unto Him the sweet incense of praise. *That is worship*, and the remembrance of God's seeking love and Christ's redeeming blood are the springs of it.

One of the most blessed and beautiful examples recorded in the New Testament of what worship is, is found in John 12:2,3. “There they made Him a supper, and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” As another has said, “She came not to hear a sermon, though the Prince of preachers was there. To sit at His feet and hear His word was not now her object, blessed as that was in its proper place. She came not to meet the saints though precious saints were there; but fellowship with them, though blessed, was not now her object. She came not, after a week's toil, for refreshment; though none knew better the blessed springs of refreshment which are in Him. No, she came to pour out upon Him that which she had long treasured up, which was the most valuable of all her earthly possessions. She thought not of Simon the leper, sitting there a cleansed man; she passed by the apostles; so, too, Martha and Lazarus, her sister and brother in the flesh and in Christ. The Lord Jesus filled her thoughts: He had won her heart and now absorbed all her affections. She had eyes for no one but Him. Adoration and homage were now her one thought to pour out her heart's devotion before Him.” *That* is worship.

The subject of worship is most important, yet it is one upon which many have but the haziest ideas. We read in Matthew 2, that the “wise men” were laden with “treasures” to present to Christ (v 11). They brought to Him rich “gifts.” That is what worship is. It is *not* a coming to receive *from* Him, but to render *unto* Him. It is the pouring out of the heart's adoration. O that we may bring to the Saviour “gold and frankincense and myrrh,” i.e. adoring Him because of His Divine glory, His moral perfections, His fragrant death.

The object of worship is God; and the inspirer of worship is God. Only that can satisfy God which He has Himself produced. “Lord...Thou also hast wrought all our works in us” (Isa 26:12). It is only as the Lamb is exalted in the power of the Spirit that saints are made to cry, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46,47). The general and conspicuous absence of that worship which is “in the spirit and in truth” is due to an order of things over which the Spirit of God does not preside, where the world, the flesh and the devil have free play. But even in circles where worldliness, in its grosser forms at least, is not tolerated, and where outward orthodoxy is still preserved, there is, almost always, a noticeable absence of that unction, that freedom, that joyousness, which are inseparable from the spirit of true worship. Why is this? Why is it that in numbers of churches, meeting houses, Brethren assemblies, where the letter of God's Word is ministered, that we now so rarely find those overflowings of heart, those spontaneous outbursts of adoration, that “sacrifice of praise” which should ever be found among God's people? Ah, is the answer hard to find? It is because there is a *grieved spirit* in the midst. This, my brethren, is the reason why there is so little living, refreshing, worship-producing ministry of Christ today.

HINDRANCES TO WORSHIP

What is worship? Praise? Yea, more; it is the adoration flowing forth from a heart which is fully assured of the excellency of Him before whom it bows, expressing its profoundest gratitude for His unspeakable Gift. There it is at once apparent that the first hindrance to worship in a child of God is *lack of assurance*. Whilst I entertain doubts as to my acceptance in Christ, as long as I remain in a state of uncertainty as to whether my sins were atoned for at Calvary, I cannot, really, praise and adore Him for His death for me; I cannot actually say, “my Beloved is mine, and I am His.” It is one of the favorite devices of the enemy to keep Christians in the “Slough of Despond,” his object being that Christ should not receive from them the homage of their hearts...

Another great hindrance to worship is *failure to judge ourselves* by the Holy Word of God. The priests of Israel did not remain at the brazen altar in the outer court of the tabernacle. It needs to be pointed out that before they passed into the holy place, there to burn incense, they were required to wash at the laver. Approach unto the laver of brass speaks of the believer's unsparing judgment of and upon himself (cf. 1 Cor 11:31). The using of its water points to the application of the Word to all our works and ways.

Now just as the sons of Aaron were required under pain of death (Exo 30:20) to wash at the laver before they entered the holy place to burn incense, so must the Christian today have the defilements of the way removed before he can suitably approach unto God as a worshipper. Failure at this point brings in death, that is, I remain under the contaminating power of dead things. The defilements of the way are the result of my passing through a world which is “alienated from the life of God” (Eph 4:18). If these are not removed, then I continue under the power of death in a spiritual way, and worship becomes impossible. This is brought out fully in John 13 where the Lord said to Peter, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me.” How many Christians there are who, through failure to place their feet in the hands of Christ for cleansing, are hindered from exercising their priestly functions and privileges.

One other fatal hindrance to worship needs to be mentioned, and that is *worldliness*, which means the things of the world obtaining a place in the Christian's affections, his ways becoming “conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2). A solemn example of this is found in the history of Abraham. When God called him to leave Chaldea and go into Canaan, he compromised: he went only as far as Haran (Gen 11:31; Acts 7:4) and settled down there. Haran was Half-way House, the wilderness lying between it and the borders of Canaan. Later Abraham fully responded to God's call and entered Canaan, and there “he builded an altar [which speaks of worship] unto the Lord” (Gen 12:7). But there is no mention of his building any “altar” during the years he dwelt in Haran! O how many children of God today are compromising, dwelling at Half-way House, and in consequence they are not worshippers. O that the Spirit of God may so work upon and within all of us that the language of our lives, as well as that of our hearts and lips, may be “Worthy is the Lamb”—

worthy of whole-hearted consecration, worthy of unstinted devotion, worthy of that love which is manifested by keeping His commandments, worthy of real worship. May it be so for His name's sake.