

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

Alfred P. Gibbs

Copyright © 1950

CHAPTER ONE

I. THE MEANING OF WORSHIP: OVERVIEW

Under this heading we shall consider seven things, namely: Some good definitions;

1. The word translated, "Worship" in the New Testament;
2. Its first mention in the Bible;
3. Some distinctions between prayer, praise and worship;
4. Worship as giving to God;
5. The holy perfume;
6. The meaning of the word in the Old Testament.

1. SOME GOOD DEFINITIONS

The term, "Worship," like many other great words, such as "grace" and "love," defies adequate definition. The meaning of these words, like the exquisite perfume of a rose, or the delightful flavor of honey, is more easily experienced than described.

Many have attempted to define the meaning of worship, and though unsuccessful in their attempts, yet their definitions have value. The following helpful quotations have been culled from various writers.

(a) One describes it as: "*The overflow of a grateful heart, under a sense of Divine favor.*"

Here the writer has emphasized the fact that worship is a spontaneous thing. It is not something which has to be laboriously pumped up, but that which springs up, and overflows from a heart filled with a sense of the greatness and goodness of God.

David spoke of this in Psalm 45:1, when he sang: "**My heart is inditing a good matter.**"

David was expressing the thought that his heart was boiling over, or bubbling up. As he meditated on the glory and majesty of God, as revealed, both in creation and His word, his heart began to warm within him, until it boiled over, and there ascended to God the fragrance of his worship.

He speaks of this experience again in that well known twenty-third Psalm, and sang: "**Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over**"! (Psalm 23:5)

(b) Another has defined worship as: *“The outpouring of a soul at rest in the presence of God.”*

Here the accent is on the spiritual condition of the one who worships. The believer is at rest. That is to say, he is in the full consciousness and enjoyment of his assurance of perfect acceptance before God, through the person of Christ. He has been brought to realize that, in Christ, he is seen by God as sanctified, redeemed, regenerated, justified, and blessed with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. As he thus basks in the sunshine of Divine favor, his heart goes out in adoration to the One who made it all so blessedly and gloriously actual in his experience. With the writer of the Canticles he exclaims: **“I lay down under His shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love”** (Song of Solomon 2:3-4).

(c) Another has put it thus: *“Worship is the occupation of the heart, not with its needs, or even with its blessings, but with God Himself.”*

Here the writer has sensed the subtle distinction that exists between prayer, praise and worship, which we shall discuss more fully later on.

David knew what this meant, for we are told that when Nathan was commissioned by the Lord to tell him that the throne of his kingdom should be established for ever, David’s heart was so full that he went in and sat before the Lord. As he did so he was soon lost in wonder and praise, and exclaimed: *“Wherefore Thou art great, O Lord God, for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears”* (II Samuel 7:18-22).

(d) Still another has expressed himself as follows: *“Worship is the upspring of a heart that has known the Father as a Giver, the Son as Saviour, and the Holy Spirit as the indwelling Guest.”*

In this definition, the essential prerequisite of the worshipper is indicated. Thus it is only the regenerated believer that can spiritually and intelligently worship the Father and the Son, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. An unsaved person, though perfectly able to recognize God as supreme, and Creator of the universe, has not been brought into living relationship with Him as Father, and consequently is unable to really appreciate what only the Holy Spirit can reveal. We are told that **“the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (I Corinthians 2:14-15).

Christ used the analogy of “living water” to describe the spiritual life which He came to make possible to all who believe: **“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”** (John 4:13-14).

This “living water” comes in to the believer at the new birth: **“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5).

- It springs up, within him, in worship (John 4:14).

It then flows out, from him, in service: **“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)”** (John 7:37-39).

Thus worship really consists of this “living water” returning to its source.

Long ago Solomon made the discovery that though all the rivers ran into the sea, yet the sea did not become any fuller thereby. He correctly assigned the reason as follows: **“Unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return”** (Ecclesiastes 1:7).

Thus the spiritual life which flows from God to us, returns to Him in worship from us, and thus the Divine cycle is complete.

Worship could well be pronounced, “worth-ship,” for it consists of the ascription of worth to One who is worthy. A striking example of this can be seen in the last book of the Bible.

In chapter four, the living creatures and the elders are described as falling down and worshipping the One who occupies the throne, and saying: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honor and glory and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” In chapter five, the numberless hosts, who surround the LAMB, join in a glorious chorus and sing: **“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!”**

It will be seen in these two instances, that not a single petition occurs. It is worship in its purest form, for it is the ascription of worth to One who alone is worthy, or in other words, worth-ship.

2. The Word Most Commonly Translated “Worship” in the New Testament is *“Proskuneo.”*

It means to do reverence, or homage, by prostration; to pay Divine homage, to worship, and adore. A few instances will suffice.

In Matthew 2:2, 11, the wise men are recorded as saying: **“Where is he that is born King of the Jews? . . . We are come to worship him . . . And when they saw the young child, they fell down and worshipped him.”**

The same word is used in describing Christ’s reply to Satan’s temptation: **“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve”** (Matthew 4:10).

Again it is used in John 4:24, where our Lord declares: **“God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth.”**

The word “*latreus*,” which is seldom used, refers largely to the worship of the sanctuary, and is so used in Philippians 3:3: “**For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh**” and Hebrews 10:2: “**For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.**”

3. The First Mention of the Word in the Bible

“The worship of the Lord, as also the work of the Lord, must be guided by the word of the Lord”

One of the many rules determining the real meaning of a word in holy Scripture, has been aptly termed: “*The law of first mention.*” This rule affirms that the first mention of a word, or doctrine, in the Bible, determines its meaning throughout the whole range of the Scriptures. If this be true, then the first mention of the word “*worship*,” is full of deep spiritual significance for us.

In Genesis 22:5, Abraham is described as saying to the young men who accompanied him and Isaac to the mountains of Moriah: “**Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.**” In this first recorded mention of the word, many things concerning worship are clearly indicated.

(a) *We learn, first, that worship is based on a revelation from God.*

“And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (Genesis 22:1-2)

“And God said.”

It was in response to a word from God that Abraham acted. It was not something he thought up himself, but was his response to a Divine revelation. Faith always presupposes a previous revelation.

We are told that: “**Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**” (Romans 10:17).

For one to act without Divine authority is presumption in the worst degree. Take faith away from Abraham’s act in offering up Isaac, and it becomes murder! The worship of the Lord, as also the work of the Lord, must be guided by the word of the Lord. The believer’s authority in worship is not the traditions of men, however hoary with antiquity, nor the subtle reasonings of human wisdom, however plausible; but the clear revelation of God’s word.

(b) *Secondly, we discover that worship is conditioned by faith in, and obedience to, that Divine revelation.*

“And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him” (Genesis 22:3)

Abraham’s response was unquestioning, prompt and full.

Unhesitatingly, he obeyed God’s command.

- He arose early in the morning,
- Saddled the ass,
- Cut the wood for the burnt offering,
- Secured the services of two young men,
- Took Isaac his son,
- Made his way in the direction God had indicated.

The inspired writer puts it thus: **“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac”** (Hebrews 11:7). In other words, Abraham did something in response to God’s word.

Thus prompt, unquestioning obedience to the known will of God, as revealed in His word, is essential to true worship. It is one thing to know what God has revealed concerning worship; and another to turn from all humanly conceived views and act, promptly and fully, on that Divine revelation. That is faith.

(c) Thirdly, we gather that worship involves a costly presentation to God (vs. 2).

In Abraham’s case, it meant the offering up of his only and well beloved son,

- The darling of his heart,
- His dearest possession,
- The one in whom all his hopes of future posterity were centered.

God was careful to emphasize this phase of his worship, for He said: **“Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest . . . and offer him for a burnt offering.”**

Worship is not a cheap thing, to be offered thoughtlessly or carelessly, with no sense of the self-sacrifice involved.

David realized this aspect of worship and declared: **“Neither will I offer burnt sacrifices unto the Lord my God of that which dost cost me nothing”** (II Samuel 24:24).

Thus when Abraham spoke of “worship,” he understood it to mean that it involved the greatest sacrifice he had ever been called upon to make. His heart was wrapped up in his son, yet he evidenced his willingness to give to God his heart’s best treasure.

We need ever to keep this in mind in our estimation of worship.

It is spoken of as a “sacrifice of praise” (Hebrews 13:15).

Sacrifice connotes cost, and true worship will soon be discovered to be a costly thing. It is very much easier to let someone else do our worshipping for us. Many seem content to lean back on their chairs and allow some clergyman to perform this act for them, and thus lose both the ability and joy of worship.

Many a believer has had to seal his testimony with his own life’s blood, in order to maintain a good conscience before God in this matter of worship. “The noble army of martyrs” give eloquent witness to this fact.

Worship will involve considerable cost to the believer,

- In the outlay of time for spiritual preparation;
- In the effort of Bible study;
- In the loss of the prestige of one’s social, business and ecclesiastical circle,
- In the outlay of money.

All this entails cost, but the energy expended in offering true worship, brings both pleasure and glory to God.

(d) Fourthly, we learn that worship necessitates a deliberate separation unto God.

“And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you” (Genesis 22:5).

Notice Abraham’s words to the two young men: **“Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship.”**

The two young men could answer to the things which would combine to hinder the believer from entering by **“the new and living way”** into the holiest, to pour out his heart in adoring worship.

Like Abraham, each Christian must resolutely say to all his home cares, business affairs and hobbies, etc.: **“Abide ye here, while I go yonder and worship.”**

We are all conscious, more or less, of intruding thoughts which often seek, even in our holiest moments, to divert our minds from occupation with God to the exclusion of all else.

- Many a meal has been imaginatively planned, cooked and served in a meeting which was convened particularly to enable the people of God to worship.
- Many a business deal has been thought out, when the believer was supposedly deep in meditation, and others imagined his heart was overflowing with worship!

These unlawful and distracting thoughts must be dealt with in the same uncompromising manner as Abraham dealt with these two young men.

They must be made, by a definite decision of the will, to abide outside of our meditations, lest they rob God of the worship due to His name.

This calls for real concentration of thought, and the repudiation of all self interests.

This is by no means pleasing to the flesh, which loves to wander, unrebuked, into the forbidden fields of fancy.

God's exhortation to the believer connotes both privilege and responsibility: "**Having an high Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith**" (Hebrews 10:22).

- Here is our privilege: "**having an high Priest.**"

- Here is our responsibility: "**Let us draw near.**"

Worship therefore calls for spiritual activity, or the energy of faith, by which the Christian is enabled to go from "**here**" to "**yonder**," and thus worship undistractedly in the presence of God.

It is significant that, in Abraham's case, after he had parted from the young man, he ascended the mountain, until he reached the summit, where his act of worship was consummated. In like manner the believer, having left the sordid things of earth behind, ascends the heights, until he experiences the reality of being, "Shut in with God, far, far above the restless world that wars below." Here his soul basks in the full enjoyment of the presence of the One Whom he worships.

(e) Fifthly, we perceive that worship predicates the absolute renunciation of self, in all its varied forms.

When Abraham said he was going to "*worship*," he knew that it meant the offering up of his son, and this involved utter self-abnegation.

Needless to say, this denial of self is entirely contrary to the flesh in true spiritual worship. Just as Abraham, by this act of offering up his son, resolutely denied the appeal of the flesh for self-expression; so each believer must recognize that the true worshipper is he who "worships God in the Spirit, rejoices in Christ Jesus, and has no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3).

As Abraham approached God, with his son, to worship: so the believer must learn that, as a worshipper, he must not only come to God in Christ, and through Christ, but also with Christ.

God is infinitely delighted with His Son, for He testified, again and again: "**This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.**"

Only as the believer concentrates his mind's attention and his heart's affection upon the Father's well beloved Son, will he learn to appreciate the glories and excellencies that are resident in Christ.

As he comes into the Father's presence with his mind and heart full of Christ, and mentions these excellencies which he has found in His Son, then the fragrance of his worship will rise as incense, and be well pleasing to the One who has so completely revealed Himself in the Son of His love.

W.B. Dick, has beautifully expressed this thought in the following words:

“We would, O God, present before Thy face
The fragrant name of Thy beloved Son;
By faith we view Him in that holy place
Which, by His dying, He for us has won.

We share Thy joy in Him who sitteth there,
Our hearts delight in Thy delight in Him;
Chiefest of thousands, fairer than the fair,
His glory naught can tarnish, naught can dim.”

(f) *Sixthly, we are impressed with the fact that worship glorifies God:*

“And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the Heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:16-18)

This act of worship on the part of Abraham delighted God's heart, and brought from Him an expression of His appreciation.

David, by the Spirit, was made to realize this truth, for God said through him: **“Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God”** (Psalm 50:23).

Worship gives to God the place of absolute pre-eminence and thus glorifies Him, to the exclusion of all others. We shall discuss this more fully, later on in our study.

(g) *Lastly, we discern that worship results in blessing to the worshipper* (verses 16-18).

In the first place, God gave him back his son.

Though Abraham may have ascended the mount with a heavy burden, he certainly descended it with a happy song on his lips, and a holy joy in his heart.

- God will be no man's debtor.
- All who honor Him shall be honored, by Him, in return.
- He will pour multiplied blessings into the heart of the one who, with a single eye, obeys Him fully, and gives Him the glory due to His name.

Then again, think of Abraham's greater appreciation of Isaac, as he witnessed his willing obedience unto death.

Isaac might easily have run away when his father confided to him that he was to be the sacrifice.

He might have resisted as his father bound him and laid him on the altar, but he did nothing of the kind.

As God restored Isaac to Abraham, it was with a deeper sense of his preciousness to him.

This is what God does for each true worshipper. He gives back, to the believer, His beloved Son, in all the glory of His blessed Person, and grants to him a far greater appreciation of all those Divine attributes, so perfectly revealed in Him, and expressed by Him. God not only gave His Son for us, on the cross, for our salvation; but He now gives His Son to us, on the throne, for our satisfaction.

It is a significant thing that we are not specifically told that Isaac came down from the mount with Abraham. Of course we know that he did, but this fact is not mentioned.

The next time Isaac's name is introduced, it is in connection with a bride that is to be wooed and won for him.

This delightful "courtship by proxy," so full of typical significance, is recorded in Chapter 24.

This beautiful romance is consummated when Isaac receives Rebecca to be his bride. For the sake of him, "*whom, having not seen, she loved,*" she made the long journey across the desert sands to be united to him as his chosen bride.

- The last sight the world had of Christ was on the altar of Calvary.
- The next sight it shall have of Him is when He is manifested in glory with His blood-bought Bride.

No wonder the Divine revelation concludes: "**Even so, come Lord Jesus, Amen!**"

~ end of chapter 1 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
