

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

VII. THE MANNER OF WORSHIP -- SPIRITUAL AND SINCERE

By this is meant those inner spiritual qualities which must always characterize the believer if his worship is to be acceptable to God. It is possible for one to draw nigh to God with his lips, and yet be far removed from Him in heart. God had to say of Israel: **“This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me”** (Isaiah 29:13).

Through His prophet Ezekiel God declared: **“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”** (Ezekiel 33:31).

The tendency of everything, with which man is in any way associated, is to degenerate, and worship is no exception. In the case of Israel, that which was described in the beginning as a feast unto Jehovah, came to be referred to, hundreds of years later, as a **“feast of the Jews”**: **“Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the Lord . . . And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh”** (Exodus 13:6; John 6:4).

Thus, in the process of time, the spiritual emphasis was transferred from God to man.

It will be readily appreciated that anything presented to God must fulfil certain Divine requirements, if it is to meet with His approval. Not only must the offerer and the offering be acceptable to God, but the spirit in which it is offered must also be pleasing to Him. Though correctness of doctrinal belief and outward conformity to certain scriptural principles is necessary, it is not enough. The spiritual condition of the worshipper is a contributing factor, as to whether or not his worship is to be acceptable to the Father.

God taught Samuel this lesson, when He sent him to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king in place of Saul. As Eliab, the eldest of the family stood before him, Samuel's inward thought was: **“Surely the Lord's anointed is before me!” But God said to him: “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him; for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart”** (I Samuel 16:6-7).

Our Lord pressed this truth home upon His hearers:

Addressing the Pharisees, who were most punctilious in the outward observance of the many ceremonials of their religion, He said: “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

How this should search the heart of every Christian!

It is sadly possible to sing, most melodiously, a beautiful hymn of worship, and even audibly express, in well chosen and scriptural language, the worship of an assembly; and yet fail to reach God’s ear, or draw forth Divine approval.

The quality of worship is determined by the spirituality of the worshipper.

What may appear to be worship may, in reality, be only a “**fair show in the flesh,**” and, as such, only an “**abomination in the sight of God.**”

Let us, therefore, consider the manner of worship, or those spiritual qualities that must be the essential accompaniment if we are to worship God as we should. We shall think of three of these essential qualities: Worship must be spiritual, sincere and intelligent.

1. Worship should be spiritual

Our Lord declared emphatically: “**God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth**” (John 4:24).

In these words Christ indicated that only that worship which was prompted, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit would be acceptable to God. It is tragically possible for one who has been born of the Spirit, and who is indwelt by the Spirit, to be anything but spiritual. Paul divided all humanity into three distinct classes.

- First, is the natural man. By this is meant man as he is by nature: unregenerate, and therefore incapable of understanding Divine things, or of pleasing God.
- Second, is the spiritual man. He is one who has been born from above, is indwelt by the Spirit of God, and consequently possesses the capacity for discerning and appreciating Divine truth, and who seeks to live a life well-pleasing to God.
- Third, is the carnal man. This person, though born from above, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, lives his life on earth in the energy of the flesh, instead of in the power of the Spirit.

There were many such believers in the assembly at Corinth and he had to say of such: “**I . . . could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ . . . for ye are yet carnal**” (I Corinthians 2:14-3:2).

It is important to note that Paul does not, for one moment, question the salvation of these carnal believers, for he addresses them as “**brethren,**” and as being “**sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints**” (I Corinthians 1:2, 10).

What he does draw attention to is the fact that they were not “**spiritual.**”

That is to say, they were not living in the energy of the Spirit, or in the enjoyment of Divine things. Their lives were characterized by God-dishonoring manifestations of the flesh, as evidenced by their divisions, indifference, selfishness and lack of spiritual growth. While in this carnal condition of soul, their worship had been adversely affected.

The Lord’s Supper, which should have been characterized by Spirit-led worship, harmony and power, had degenerated into a thing of shame and confusion. In fact, many of these carnal believers had suffered the extreme punitive discipline of God, for Paul had to say: “**For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep** [or have died]” (I Corinthians 11:23-30).

Their carnality had grieved, quenched and limited the Spirit of God in their assembly gatherings, so that little worship had ascended from their midst. Instead of a spiritual atmosphere which was conducive to worship, there was the cold, clammy spirit of formalism and carnality which stifled any spiritual exercise of the soul in worship.

Let us not imagine, for one moment, that this spirit of carnality died with the Corinthian assembly. It is a danger to which every Christian has been exposed since the Christian era began. It is greatly to be feared that there is altogether too much of it in the present day.

It well becomes each believer to pray as David did: “**Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting**” (Psalm 139:23-24).

The price of spirituality is high. It may cost us all we have, but it is not too much, for nothing can compensate the believer for its loss. The high cost of spirituality is only exceed by the higher cost of carnality!

The price one pays for spirituality is the same as that of peace, namely, eternal vigilance. We shall note later some of the evidences of carnality under the heading, “*Hindrances to Worship.*”

We have seen that worship, to be acceptable, must be spiritual, and that this necessitates the spirituality of the worshipper. The believer must therefore resolutely and assiduously discipline himself, so as to cultivate his spiritual life on a high plane.

- The Devil and his wiles must be withstood, as the believer stands panoplied in all the armor of God.
- The world, with all its allurements, must be definitely declined.
- The flesh, with all its evil desires, must be constantly denied.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:10-18) and “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (I John 2:15-17) and “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).

Thus the Christian must rule himself with an iron hand, saying “no” to self in all its many forms, and “yes” to God in all that He demands.

The result of this will be spirituality, in the atmosphere of which he can worship God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.

Carnality would fain counterfeit spirituality, by substituting artificial enthusiasm for holy zeal; mere fleshly emotionalism, for the joy of the Lord; organization, for the unity of the Spirit; religious externals, for inward reality; and cold orthodoxy of doctrine, for the warm experience, power and enjoyment of its truth in the soul. The best preventative against artificiality is spirituality.

- There will be no need to pump up worship when the soul is in conscious communion with God, and living in the enjoyment of spiritual realities.
- There will be no call to force oneself to worship. It will rise spontaneously from the soul, even as the smoke of the burnt sacrifice of old ascended to the One to whom it was offered.

2. Worship should be sincere

Christ declared it must not only be in “**spirit,**” but “**in truth.**”

This is to say, our worship must not only be guided by the truth of God’s Word, but it must be presented in a truthful, or sincere way. There must be no sham in worship, or the pretence of claiming a greater spirituality than we really possess. God hates hypocrisy in any shape or form.

Our Lord’s reference to the Pharisee’s prayer, with its five capital “I’s” bears eloquent testimony to His detestation of religious humbug (Luke 18:9-14).

Someone has defined hypocrisy as: “pretending to be, what we don’t intend to be.”

The word “**sincere**,” means “*without wax.*”

In the olden days sculptors sometimes used to till up a slaw in the stone images they had carved. When the purchaser exposes this image to the rays of the sun, the wax melted and the imperfection was thus disclosed. Often a dealer in images would proclaim his wares as being “*sine cere,*” or “*without wax.*” Thus he guaranteed the purchaser against sham and pretense.

Paul’s desire for the Philippian believers was that they might be “**sincere and without offence till the day of Christ**” (Philippians 1:10).

God wants the sincere worship of a sincere heart. The history of Israel can again furnish us with an example of how God views the absence of sincerity in worship.

In the last book of the Old Testament we find God saying, through His prophet Malachi: “**Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the Lord of hosts. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen**” (Malachi 1:7-14)

The prophet Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa, was sent by God to both expose and denounce the apostasy and hypocrisy of Israel. Amongst other things, God said through him to Israel: “**I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream**” (Amos 5:21-24).

Thus the very feasts which God had given them explicit directions to observe became, through their hypocrisy and double dealing, an offence to Him! Though Israel maintained an outward orthodoxy in their observance of these feast days and the offerings which God had commanded, yet their unrighteous lives gave the lie to their profession.

From it we can surely learn that orthodoxy of belief and correctness of religious observance is a poor substitute for righteous living.

It is possible for a person's head to be in the clouds of orthodoxy, while his feet in the mire of unsavory practices. God's advice to Israel was: **"Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph"** (Amos 5:14-15).

God looks for consistency:

- Between standing and state;
- Between creed and conduct;
- Between lip and life;
- Between belief and behavior;
- Between profession and expression.

It was this that David had in mind when he said: **"Thou desireth truth in the inward parts"** (Psalm 51:6).

Through the great prophet Isaiah, God exposed the double dealing of Israel in these soul searching words: **"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"** (Isaiah 1:11-20).

This is simply another way of saying: **"They that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth."**

Our Lord twice quoted God's word through the prophet Hosea: **"For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice"** (Hosea 6:6). The word **mercy** is literally, "*goodness*," or rectitude of conduct and decency of life.

Christ quoted it, first in connection with the Pharisees' criticism that He ate with publicans and sinners.

The Pharisees were a sect of separatists who prided themselves on their meticulous outward observance of the ceremonial part of the law; but on the whole were utterly inconsistent in their lives. These people were Christ's bitterest enemies. They desired nothing more than to kill Him, because of His searching analysis of their character, and bold denunciation of their hypocrisy. Our Lord's words to them were: **"Go ye and learn what that meaning, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:' for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"** (Matthew 9:13).

It was not that God did not desire sacrifices, for He Himself hath ordained them. What our Lord emphasized here was that the act of sacrificing and offering of animals must ever be accompanied by the consistent life and sincere attitude of the offerer, if his worship was to be acceptable. If the choice is to be between strict observance of ritual, and goodness and sincerity of life: then the latter must always take the precedence.

Christ's second reference to Hosea 6:6 was in connection with the Pharisees harsh and unjust judgment of His disciples, as they plucked and ate some grains of wheat on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees argued that the plucking of these grains constituted "reaping;" and the rubbing of them in the hands constituted "threshing."

They affirmed that both these acts were a direct contravention of their tradition regarding the sacredness of the Sabbath. Our Lord rightly pointed out to them the error of their judgment. From the very Scriptures, which they affirmed were their authority, He showed them the shallowness of their argument and the inconsistency of their judgment. He then added the deeply significant words: **"But I say unto you that, in this place, is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice,' ye would not have condemned the guiltless"** (Matthew 12:1-8).

The very fact that this message is given to us three times in Divine revelation, should be enough to cause all believers to seriously ponder its spiritual import.

While the scriptural principles governing the order of worship are important, equally so must be the manner of our worship. One must not be held at the expense of the other, but each should be maintained as the complement of the other. Goodness and sacrifice must ever go hand in hand into the presence of God if we are to worship as we should. If our worship is to be both spiritual and sincere, there must be heart dealings with God.

- All known sin must be mercilessly judged, confessed to God and resolutely turned from with abhorrence.
- All subterfuge, equivocation and hypocrisy must be avoided like a plague. Transparent honesty must characterize the believer, both in thought, word and deed.
- Clean hands, a pure heart and sincerity of purpose, must ever be the necessary accompaniments of the worship of God if it is to bring delight to His heart.

The holiness of the One worshipped, demands a corresponding holiness of life on the part of the one who worships.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (I Peter 1:13-16)

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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