

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

Alfred P. Gibbs

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CHAPTER SIX

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

Having considered, in a somewhat lengthy manner, the meaning of worship, let us now discuss its importance, as seen in both the Old and New Testaments. Since worship is the Christian's highest occupation, it logically follows it must be of much importance. We shall consult the Scriptures and notice a sevenfold testimony to the fact of its importance.

1. It Was the First Commandment of the Law (Exodus 20:1-2)

“And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”

The law is the revelation of the righteous requirements of a God of infinite holiness. Divine righteousness has been well defined as “God’s consistency with His own character.” Inasmuch as God is infinitely holy, therefore His demands must be consistent with Himself. This law consists of Ten Commandments, which together form one law and not ten laws, as some mistakenly imagine. A reading of these commandments will at once reveal the importance of worship. This, as we have already seen, gives to God the place of absolute pre-eminence. Here God says: **“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”** (vs. 3).

Not only does God claim the first place, but He goes on to reveal His hatred and intolerance of everything that would deprive Him of this position. Later on, in this same book He says: **“Thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”** (Exodus 34:14).

Many things may arise in the life of a believer which will tend to draw away his heart from God as the supreme Object of his affection. The example of a backsliding Israel is quoted by the Spirit as a warning of this peril.

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

“Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (I Corinthians 10:1-12)

It is dreadfully possible for self, in its many and varied forms, to ascend the throne of the heart and displace God in the believer's life, so that little or no worship ascends to Him.

Among the many idols that have been known to turn a Christian's heart from God are: Business, Wealth, Home, Family, Possessions, Talents, Popularity, Power and Pleasure. Later on, we shall look at some of these in detail.

The concluding words of John's first Epistle should be soberly pondered by every believer: **“Little children, keep yourselves from idols”** (I John 5:21).

2. It is Seen in the Prominence it Receives in the Gatherings of God's People, at the Various Feasts He ordained (Leviticus 23)

God gave instructions that His people should periodically assemble themselves together. This was done in order to give them the double opportunity of acknowledging Him as the giver of every good and perfect gift, and of worshipping before Him.

In Deuteronomy 12:5-7, both the place and the purpose of such feasts is indicated: “Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither shalt thou come. And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds, and of your flocks. And there ye shall eat before the Lord your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye have put your hands unto, ye and your households, wherein the Lord thy God hath blessed thee.”

The first place which God selected was Shiloh and afterwards, Jerusalem; but the purpose for which these gatherings were convened remained the same. In brief, the purpose was to worship the Lord God and rejoice before Him.

This fact is seen in the opening verses of I Samuel.

This book opens with a description of a man named Elkanah, of whom it is said: **“And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship, and to sacrifice unto the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh”** (I Samuel 1:3).

These feasts of the Lord were seven in number, and are full of rich spiritual significance, as indeed are all the types.

The reader will be well repaid by making a study of their typical character.

The names of these feasts were the:

- Passover,
- Unleavened Bread,
- Firstfruits,
- Pentecost,
- Trumpets,
- Atonement
- Tabernacles.

When we turn to the New Testament, we discover that the Lord Jesus made a similar provision for His redeemed people by instituting the Lord's Supper.

The purpose of this ordinance is clearly indicated by the Lord's own words: **"This do in remembrance of me": "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come"** (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

At this feast of remembrance, worship becomes the predominant feature, as we have already seen.

From Acts 20:7, it seems clear that it was the custom of the early Church to come together each Lord's day to break bread, and thus express their unity in Christ, and their fellowship together in the bonds of Christian love, but it was at a special service where they gathered together for the Lord's table that the bread was specifically broken in remembrance of Him.

Besides the Lord's Supper, other gatherings are mentioned in the Acts.

The saints are described as gathering together for prayer, for the ministry of the word, and for a united testimony in the Gospel (See Acts 12:12; 11:22-26; 2:6-12).

Christ's well known words are surely appropriate in this connection: **"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"** (Matthew 18:20). At such gatherings of the Lord's people, every believer should seek to be present. He should lay to heart the exhortation: **"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is . . . and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching"** (Hebrews 10:25).

3. The Typology of the Old Testament Gives Worship the Prominent Place

Dr. Griffith Thomas once remarked that the Old Testament was characterized by three things.

First, it was a book of unfulfilled prophecies;

Second, of unexplained ceremonies;

Third, of unsatisfied longings.

As one turns to the New Testament, these unfulfilled prophecies, which speak of a coming Messiah, are meticulously and wonderfully fulfilled in Christ. The unexplained ceremonies become crystal clear, and scintillate with spiritual significance in the light of Christ's Person and work. The unsatisfied longings of the heart find their complete satisfaction in the One Who said: **"Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls"** (Matthew 11:29).

Two Scriptures will suffice to indicate the value of these types and shadows of the Old Testament.

Concerning the incidents of Israel's history, we read: **"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition"** (I Corinthians 10:11). These "ensamples" are the Old Testament *"types."*

The other declares: **"For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope"** (Romans 15:4).

The Epistle to the Hebrews is particularly rich in typical teaching. In thinking of this typology of the Old Testament, which places the supreme emphasis on worship, we shall consider five instances:

(1) *In the description of the Tabernacle* (Exodus 25:10; 23; 31)

The purpose of its erection is not left unexplained. God said: **"Make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them"** (Exodus 25:8).

God gave the pattern, or building plan, of this tabernacle to Moses in the holy mount where he was closeted with Deity for forty days.

The first article of furniture that God describes is the ark of the covenant, overlaid with the mercy seat.

Why is this particular thing selected as the first to be described? The answer is obvious.

It was of this ark of the covenant, overlaid with the mercy seat, that God said: **"There will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat"** (Exodus 25:22).

Thus the ark and the mercy seat constituted the place of worship, where God and man could meet together and enjoy sweet communion with each other.

Then follows the description of the other furniture of the Tabernacle in the order named:

- The table of shewbread,
- The candlestick,
- The brazen altar,
- The altar of incense
- The laver.

It is important to notice that this is quite different from the order of our spiritual apprehension of the truths typified by these things.

We begin, as sinners, at the brazen altar. It is here we learn the truth of the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lamb of God. From this, we proceed to learn the value of the other furnishings until, at last, we come to the realization of the spiritual significance of the mercy seat and of our highest occupation, the worship of God.

It is not without the deepest significance that it requires seven chapters, containing 243 verses, to give the description of the tabernacle, whose primary purpose was the worship of JEHOVAH. The account of the creation of the Heaven and the earth occupies but one chapter, containing only 31 verses.

(2) In the order of the camp of Israel (Numbers 1:52-52; 2:1-2)

We are told that “God is not the author of confusion, but of order” (I Corinthians 14:33).

This fact is evidenced very clearly in God’s instructions as to where each of the twelve tribes should be located, in relation to the tabernacle.

- The center of the camp was occupied by the tabernacle which, of course, speaks typically of Christ in the midst of His people.
- Those camping nearest to the tabernacle were the priests, the sons of Aaron, whose responsibility it was to officiate in the nation’s worship.
- A little farther off were the Levites, whose duties were associated with the service of the Tabernacle.
- Still further off, and forming a circle around the tabernacle, were the other tribes, who constituted the warriors of Israel.

Thus the order of precedence is given by Divine authority.

First the worshippers,
Then the workers,
Finally, the warriors.

(3) In the threefold division of Israel

We have before noted this division; the priests, the Levites and the tribes.

It is interesting and instructive to notice the ages at which these men entered upon their various duties.

The priests had to be thirty years of age before they were considered competent to engage in the worship of the Lord: **“From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation”** (Numbers 4:3).

The Levites must be twenty-five years of age before they could undertake their duties in connection with the service of the sanctuary: **“This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation”** (Numbers 8:24).

The warriors from amongst the tribes could enter the army at the age of twenty: **“From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies”** (Numbers 1:3).

- Worship is thus associated with spiritual maturity.
- Warfare is the characteristic of youth and immaturity.
- Work, of a little later in life; while worship comes still later.

Worship therefore calls for greater spiritual knowledge, deeper discernment and richer experience than work, or warfare; though both these are necessary to the Christian life.

(4) In the description of the five principal offerings (Leviticus 1-7)

These offerings, which combine to typically set forth the sacrifice of Christ, are given in a certain order. These, as in the case of the furnishings of the Tabernacle, are not given in the order in which we spiritually apprehend their typical significance; but they appear in the order of Divine appreciation. These offerings combine to present the virtue and value of Christ's Person and His sacrificial work in five distinct aspects.

Let us note them carefully.

The Burnt Offering, or literally, the “ascending offering” (Leviticus 1).

This “sweet savor” offering was consumed, in its entirety, by fire upon the altar. In fact, this offering gives its title to the brazen altar, for it is called “the altar of the burnt offering” (Exodus 3:28; 40:10, etc.).

The whole of this offering was exclusively for God's eye, estimation and pleasure. How eloquently this presents to us Christ's perfect dedication of Himself to His Father for His supreme delight and acceptance.

From the stable of Bethlehem to the cross of Calvary, our Lord's path on earth was marked by His willing submission to His father's will, His absolute obedience to His father's word and His perfect fulfillment of His father's righteous demands.

His whole life is summed up in the words: **"I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart"** (Psalm 40:7-8; Hebrews 10:7-9).

Thus Christ's sacrifice was primarily for God. Just as the burnt offering was wholly devoted to God, so also is worship. It ascends from the heart of the believer, as did the burnt offering from the altar, to bring delight to God alone.

Thus, first in the order of mention and of Divine preference is this burnt offering, which speaks of worship.

Then follows the description of the other four offerings:

(b) The Meal Offering (Leviticus 2).

This speaks of Christ's offering of Himself to God for the service of man. It consisted of fine flour, with oil poured over it, and frankincense placed upon it. This was then offered upon the altar as a sweet savor unto the Lord.

This typifies Christ as the Bread of God, in Whom the Father found complete satisfaction.

(c) The Peace Offering (Leviticus 3).

This indicates that aspect of Christ's sacrifice by which our peace with God was secured, and fellowship with God made possible, for both God and man shared in this offering. Thus a table was provided, at which God and man could sit, and each enjoy his portion of the offering.

In this offering both God and man are seen finding their satisfaction in the Person and Work of Christ.

(d) The Sin Offering (Leviticus 4).

This illustrates the tremendous truth that Christ died because of what we are by nature -- sinners.

By His sacrifice, the believer's sin, that is, the root principle from which sins spring as the fruit, has been condemned, and put away from before the eye of God: **"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"** (Hebrews 9:27) and **"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh"** (Romans 8:3) and **"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him"** (II Corinthians 5:21).

(e) The Trespass Offering (Leviticus 5).

This presents the work of Christ in relation to our sins, the evil things we have done, both in thought, word, deed and attitude.

These sins have been borne in His own body, and the full penalty paid by His most precious blood: **“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed”** (I Peter 2:24) and **“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:5-6).

It is good for the believer to realize that the sacrifice of Christ was of such tremendous importance that it required each of these five offerings in order to deal with all its implications.

In the order of our spiritual discernment and appreciation of these offerings,

- We think first of ourselves and our sin and need, so we approach God by way of the trespass offering.
- Later on, we see that Christ not only died to put our sins away, but to put sin away; that He not only died for what we did, but for what we were. Thus we learn the value of the sin offering.
- Later still, we grasp something of what it means to have fellowship with God because of the peace Christ has made, and come to appreciate the peace offering.
- Still later, we apprehend the perfection of Christ’s life on earth and His service to God on our behalf, and come to value the meal offering.
- Later still, the greater aspect of His sacrifice is made clear to us as we study the Word, and we are brought to a fuller estimate of the Godward aspect of Christ’s sacrifice, and see how perfectly it delighted the heart of the Father and brought glory to His name.

Thus we enter into the truth of the burnt offering.

(5) *In the vision of Isaiah* (Isaiah 6:1-3)

The call and commission of this man of God was preceded by a vision which further illustrates the importance of worship.

In his vision he saw the Lord; “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.”

Above the throne stood the seraphim, each having six wings.

We are expressly told the purpose of these wings: **“With twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.”** As they attended the Lord upon His throne, they cried one to another: **“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory!”**

Thus these angelic beings, which stood in the presence of the God of the universe, used four of their wings to indicate their attitude of reverence and worship, and only two to accomplish their service.

These five instances, selected from many others in the Scriptures, should surely serve to impress us with the supreme importance of worship, as seen in the high estimate that God places upon it.

~ **end of chapter 6** ~

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