

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

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CHAPTER TWENTY

VIII. THE HINDRANCES TO WORSHIP

Having looked at the manner in which we should worship God, if it is to be acceptable to Him; let us now view the subject in the negative way, and note some of the hindrances to it. Seeing that worship is the Christian's highest occupation, we may be quite certain that:

The Devil, the *infernally enemy*,
The world, the *externally enemy*,
The flesh, the *internally enemy*.

Will combine to hinder the believer as he seeks to worship God.

It will be impossible to enumerate all these hindrances, for they are legion. We can do no more than name a few of the better known. These hindrances will be experienced, not only by an individual in his own personal spiritual life, but also by a gathering of believers, in assembly capacity.

- The spiritual tone of such a worship meeting is determined by the spirituality of each person present.
- This spiritual tone is difficult to describe, but it is nevertheless very real, and can be readily discerned by spiritual believers.
- There is a sense of the presence of God, of the reality of the unseen but eternal verities, and the hush of reverent awe that quiets the spirit and prepares the soul for worship.

Anything that tends to hinder this spirit of worship in a believer, or in an assembly of believers, should be avoided. Should the hindrance exist, it should be judged, confessed and turned from. Now let us look at a few of these hindrances.

1. Self-will

Self, in all its varied forms, will ever seek to intrude itself into the presence of God, and the Scriptures recognize this fact. In Exodus 28:36-38 we are given the description of the mitre which Aaron was to wear when, as high priest of Israel, he went into the presence of God. On the front of the mitre was a plate of gold, on which was inscribed the words, "**HOLINESS TO THE LORD.**"

The purpose for this mitre is then given: **“And it shall be upon Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts, and it shall always be upon his forehead that they may be accepted before the Lord.”**

What a strange expression this is: **“the iniquity of the holy things.”**

How can iniquity be associated with that which is holy? The answer is quite simple. Everything that man touches, he contaminates. Iniquity is present, even in the Christian’s holiest moments.

Peter’s grand confession of Christ’s eternal Deity was scarcely out of his mouth before the Lord had to rebuke him as the mouthpiece of Satan! (Matthew 16:15-23).

The nearer the believer gets to God, the more conscious he becomes of his own unworthiness and iniquity. How good, therefore, to have One in the presence of God who bears the iniquity of our holy things!

Perhaps the classic example of self-will intruding itself in the worship of God is the case of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron the high priest (Leviticus 10:1-11).

These two men, probably under the influence of strong drink (vs. 9) a sign of their lack of self control, took fire of their own making, placed it in their censers, together with incense which they had manufactured and, in direct disobedience to God’s distinct command, offered it before the Lord at the golden altar of incense. God’s reaction to this act of self-will was summary judgment, for we read: **“And there went out fire from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord”** (vs. 2). Any objection that Aaron might have offered was silenced by God’s word to him, for we read: **“This is that the Lord spake, saying: I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified”** (vs. 3).

Thus God, by this act of judgment, clearly indicated that there must be no self-will in connection with the worship of Himself. Worship must be in accordance with the instructions He has given in His word. The “strange fire” of self-will cannot be tolerated for one moment.

From this we may gather that no person can worship God as he pleased, or act in defiance of the known will of God as revealed in His word, and expect the smile of His approval, or that his worship will be accepted. Self-will is, therefore, definitely out in worship. However cunningly the “strange fire” and incense may be concocted; or however ornate may be the ritual of its presentation; it is doomed to be rejected by the God who “will be sanctified in them that come nigh” Him, and who must be “glorified before all the people.”

The believer can best worship when he has proposed, seconded and carried unanimously a vote of no confidence in himself.

Both self-will and self-expression have no place in the worship of One who must, because of Who He is, have **“the pre-eminence in all things.”**

2. Worldliness

This has proved to be an effectual bar to worship.

By the world, in this sense, is meant the sum total of all those things in the world from which God is left out, whether they be pleasures, persons, places or pursuits. Though the believer is “**in the world,**” as to the sphere of his physical life; yet he is most emphatically “**not of the world,**” as to the sphere of his spiritual life: “**And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are . . . I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world**” (John 17:11, 14-16).

The worldling is of the world, worldly. He not only lives *in it*, but he lives *for it*, and is quite content to live his life with no reference whatever to God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God or eternal realities. He wants nothing better than to be left alone to enjoy its pleasures, popularity, fashions, politics, riches, etc.

The moment such a worldling is awakened by the Spirit of God and the Word of God to a sense of his need as a guilty sinner, led to rest in Christ’s redeeming work, and receive Him as his Saviour and Lord, a great transformation takes place.

Instead of the world and its vanities being the *center* of his existence, Christ becomes both the *Center* and *Circumference* of his life, and he becomes “other worldly.”

- Instead of living for the kingdom of this world, he orders his life in relation to the kingdom of God.
- Instead of living for self, he lives for Christ.
- Instead of living in the realm of the seen and the temporal, he lives in the light of the unseen and the eternal.
- Instead Of his interests being earthly, they are now heavenly.

Thus he is “**delivered from this present evil world**” (Galatians 1:4).

Through the new birth, he becomes a “**stranger and a pilgrim**” in the land of his natural birth. In this way he demonstrates the truth of that Scripture which affirms: “**If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new**” (II Corinthians 5:17).

As a member of this new creation, he now becomes a worshipper of God. It would be pleasant to record that, having become a new creature, the Christian never again manifests any desire for the world and its ways; but alas, this is not true. That evil nature, the flesh, is still within him, and only requires encouragement to evidence itself in worldliness of thought, word and conduct.

This was the tragedy of Demas, one of Paul's fellow helpers, of whom he had to say: "**Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world**" (II Timothy 4:10).

The apostle John realized the subtle appeal that the world makes on the child of God. He faithfully warned believers concerning it and wrote: "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" (I John 2:15-16).

It was the worldliness of the Corinthian saints that prompted the letter of rebuke which Paul addressed to them. Let us not confine worldliness, in our thoughts, to the visible and outward manifestations of it.

- The lust of the eyes,
- The lust of the flesh,
- The pride of life.

May never be outwardly seen in a believer, or even be suspected by his fellow-saints; and yet it may be there, artfully concealed and in abundant measure.

Though a Christian may never outwardly darken the door of a theater, or dance hall, or engage in any of the visible and admittedly worldly amusements, he can inwardly be just as worldly in mind as the one who does.

- The brother in the meeting who sits with his eyes shut, and apparently engrossed in worship, may be planning a business deal in his mind.
- That sister, who sits so prim and proper, and who would never dream of being seen in any questionable place of amusement, or be guilty of doing anything that "simply isn't done," may be filled with self-complacency at the high degree of her attainment of "separation," and be quite proud of her humility and unworldliness of manner!

Worldliness, therefore, may consist of thought and attitude, as well as outward behavior.

One thing is certain, whether it is worldliness of thought or behavior, both combine to hinder the believer from worshipping in Spirit and in truth. Worship cannot function in an atmosphere of worldliness. It the believer is to experience what it means to be:

"Shut in with Thee, far, far above
The restless world that wars below;"

Then he must also know what it means to be unworldly in thought, attitude and deed.

Before he can be "**shut in,**" he must "**go forth**" unto Christ from all that denies Him the place of absolute pre-eminence: "**Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach**" (Hebrews 13:13).

The Christian must view the world, in all its aspects, as being “**crucified unto him,**” and he to the world (Galatians 6:14).

He must take his stand with Christ, in separation from that which is “**of the world,**” and steadfastly maintain this separation.

The child of God must not confuse isolation with separation. A monk may isolate himself in a monastery and yet not be separated unto God in heart and mind. It is not a case of shutting oneself up from any contact with the world and the people of the world, but of keeping oneself “**unspotted from the world**” (James 1:27).

The extent of the believer’s separation will be determined by the measure of his occupation with Christ.

As the Lord Jesus is allowed to fill his vision, occupy his thoughts, control his words and actions and satisfy his heart; in that degree the believer will be unworldly, and thus spiritually fitted to offer acceptable worship to God. The poet has expressed it in the following lines:

“This the treasure I’ve found in His love
That has made me a pilgrim below.”

3. A critical spirit

The fostering of a fault-finding attitude of mind in a believer is fatal to worship, for it occupies the Christian with his fellow believers, instead of with God. This critical frame of mind may begin in a small way, but if it is encouraged, and thus allowed to develop unjudged and unchecked, it will ultimately sour his whole life.

It will dry of the milk of human kindness in his heart, blind his vision, warp his understanding and render him useless, either to God or to his fellow believers.

When a person looks at things through the spectacles of censorious criticism, everything becomes distorted to his vision. Due to prejudice, he is unable to appreciate the viewpoint of others. Prejudice has been wittily defined as: “being down on what you are not up on!”

Thus, with a warped mind, he imputes ulterior motive to the actions of others.

Instead of looking for something to commend, the critic is always on the look out for something to condemn. Unfortunately, the critic is usually quite blind to his own many imperfections and shortcomings!

He demands from others what he is not prepared to give himself.

He is so intent on removing what he thinks to be a splinter in his brother’s eye, that he does not realize it is but the reflection of a huge plank in his own eye!

- What he refers to as “rudeness” in others, he dubs “frankness” and “faithfulness” in himself.
- What he calls “bad temper” in others, becomes “righteous indignation” in himself.
- What he alludes to as “stinginess” in others, is viewed as “sound economy” in his own life.
- What he designates “duplicity” in others, because “diplomacy” in himself!

It is bad enough when only one believer in an assembly is possessed by such a censorious spirit; but it is ten-thousand times worse when all those composing it are similarly affected. It is hardly necessary to say that no worship can rise in such an environment. God’s word says: **“If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another”** (Galatians 5:15).

Such a spirit of criticism acts as a corrosive and eats away the spirituality, both of an individual and an assembly. It was this critical spirit, doubtless prompted by envy, that caused Korah and his companions to approach Moses and Aaron with the complaint: **“Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Wherefore then life ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?”**

God left the people of Israel in no doubt as to what He thought of this act,

- First, by vindicating Moses and Aaron with the miracle of the budding rod;
- Next, by visiting His summary judgment upon the malcontents (See Numbers 16).

These things, “written for our learning” (Romans 15:4), should speak loudly to all our hearts of the evil of a critical spirit.

The remedy for such a spirit is:

- First of all a realization of its sinfulness and hatefulness in the sight of God.
- Second, humble and frank self-judgment and acknowledgment of it to God.
- Third, a holy determination never to allow it to have a place in one’s life again.
- Fourth, an apology to any who have been grieved by the unjust criticism.
- Fifth, much prayer on behalf of one’s brethren. There is no better cure for a critical and jealous spirit than to pray earnestly for God’s richest blessing on the one who is the object of the criticism.
- Sixth, a resolve to look for something to commend in one’s brethren. We read that **“Charity [love] thinketh no evil . . . beareth all things, endureth all things”** (I Corinthians 13:5-7). We must look at them through the eyes of Christ, and see how much of Him is evident in them.
- Seventh, to put the knife of self-judgment to all the future uprisings of this critical and censorious spirit.

The believer must ever keep in mind what he is in himself. This will cause him to be deeply thankful to the Lord that his fellow believers have exhibited so much grace in extending their fellowship to him, and for their great forbearance in putting up with him for so long! The result of such repentance will be a restoration of soul, an enlargement of heart-capacity for God, a freedom of spirit, an appreciation of all Christ is and has done, and a consequent pouring forth of adoring worship to the One who has done all things well.

4. Slothfulness

By this is meant the failure to use the means God has provided to enlighten the believer as to the value of worship and to stimulate it in a believer's heart. Many shrink from a study of this subject because of the effort such preparation involves. We have noted, earlier in this book, the high cost of worship.

- Worship is not an easy thing, but is developed as the believer, in holy energy, lays hold of what God has provided for him in Christ.
- Worship is not generated by lounging, nor is it developed in the atmosphere of spiritual apathy and neglect.

The fruit of worship does not grow in the field of the slothful, but comes by persistent cultivation, and this necessitates the determined application of mind and will: **"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man"** (Proverbs 24:30-34).

- The fire of worship needs the constant renewing of fuel if it is to rise, like the smoke of the morning sacrifice to God.
- The fuel needed is the study of, meditation in and obedience to the word of God, plus a life of prayer and devotion.

If this fuel is not forthcoming, then the fire of worship on the altar of the soul will die, and God will be denied the worship He seeks. The awkward and poverty-stricken silences, that sometimes occur in a gathering of believers for worship, is the sad consequence of this particular hindrance of slothfulness. The saints have nothing to give God, because they have not gathered anything from God.

Instead of their baskets being full of their appreciation of God and His Son, as a result of their individual study of the Word; they have neglected their Bibles, wasted their time on trivialities, and consequently appear before God empty. Such Christians often complain that they do not get the spiritual food they desire. The truth is they do not spiritually desire the food God has provided for them. The lack is not in the food provided, but in the lack of appetite for it. Ruth diligently gleaned in the fields of Boaz, with the result she had something to give: **"And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not. So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed"** (Ruth 2:15-18).

As the believer gleans in the rich fields of holy Scripture, and beats out by meditation what he has gathered, there will be no lack of worship in his heart, for he will be full of appreciation of all God is and has done.

This spiritual preparation of Bible study and prayer, so essential to worship, calls for both systematic and persistent effort, often of the heroic order.

Life today proceeds at an ever increasing tempo. Business and domestic duties cry insistently for more and more of the believer's time. Unless he is very careful, the Christian will soon discover that the secular has crowded out the sacred. He must therefore both make time and take time for the cultivation of his own private devotional life.

It may require getting up half an hour before the usual time, and spending that period in systematic Bible reading, meditation, study and prayer. He must jealously guard this period against the encroachment of business or household duties, and devote it sacredly and exclusively to the Lord.

Spiritual laziness must be viewed as the thief it is, for it will steal away the worship that should be offered to God.

Each believer needs to heed the soul stirring exhortation: "It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11-12).

Spiritual lethargy must therefore give place to spiritual alertness, if our worship is to be what it should.

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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