

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

Alfred P. Gibbs

Copyright © 1950

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

V. THE GROUND OF WORSHIP

We now come to a consideration of the ground, or basis of worship. In this, as in everything else pertaining to life and godliness, we should know just where we stand. We shall think of three things which are fundamental to worship: redemption, relationship and representation.

1. Redemption

The infinite holiness of God demands that all those who approach Him, with a view to worship, must be acceptable to Him. Holiness possesses two qualities, a love of righteousness and a hatred of iniquity: **“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows”** (Hebrews 1:9).

We read that God is **“of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity”** (Habakkuk 1:13).

His intense hatred of sin is revealed everywhere upon the pages of Scripture. Because of His intrinsic and absolute holiness He must punish sin. We read that: **“The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”** and that: **“He can by no means clear the guilty”** (Romans 1:18; Exodus 34:7).

In view of this, the question may well be asked: “How can a person, who is both a sinner by nature and practice, be made fit to stand accepted in the presence of a holy God, and offer worship that delights His heart?”

The answer, in one word, is redemption.

God has revealed in His word, that the only way a sinner can approach Him, and be accepted before Him, is on the ground of a God appointed, scripturally presented, and divinely accepted substitutionary sacrifice. This fact is everywhere evident in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

Over the pages of the Old Testament are written the words: **“The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul”** (Leviticus 17:11).

Over the pages of the New Testament appear the words: **“Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission”** (Hebrews 9:22).

There can be no approach to God, no standing before God, no acceptance with God, no pardon from God and no worship to God, apart from an acceptable substitutionary sacrifice which bears the sinner’s sins, takes his place, died in his stead and is accepted by God on his behalf. No person can ever be accepted before God on the basis of his own merits, such as his morality, good works, religious observances, prayers, or good resolves.

Both my nature and practice, every person is a sinner and, as such, deserves only eternal banishment from God’s presence. A beautiful illustration of this necessity for and the provision of God’s redemption is found in Exodus 20:22-26.

The law had just been given from Mount Sinai, consisting of ten commandments, which combined to reveal the righteous requirements of Deity. God well knew that the people of Israel were incapable of keeping this law, in spite of their proud avowal: **“All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do”** (Exodus 19:7-8).

On God’s instructions, Moses then re-ascended the mount, and received a further revelation from the Lord. This gives us a beautiful picture of both His holiness and grace.

Mark carefully the words God spake:

“An altar of earth shall thou make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen. In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.”

The meaning of this is plain.

God knew that Israel would never be able to approach Him, or be blest by Him, on the basis of their law keeping, or because of human merit. Therefore, in His grace, He provided a means by which they could approach to Him, be blessed by Him and worship before Him.

This trysting place between God and Israel was an altar.

On that altar a substitutionary sacrifice was to be offered, by which the offerer was to be accepted by God in his offering. Thus he was enabled to worship God, not on the basis of his own efforts at law keeping, but on the ground of the sacrifice God had provided for him.

Notice God’s desire for His people’s blessing: **“I will come unto thee and bless thee.”**

There could have been no blessing for Israel then, nor can there be any for us now, if this blessing is to be conditioned on our obedience to the law, or on the ground of human merit. Blessings can only flow out from God to man on the ground of a substitutionary sacrifice. Let us illustrate.

Here is an Israelite who has broken the law. He realizes that God is holy, righteous and just, and that his sin must be punished, unless he approaches God in the way He has indicated in His word. He therefore comes to the altar with a lamb for a substitutionary offering.

- He kneels down and places his hands on the head of the lamb, thus identifying himself with his offering and transferring, in picture, his guilt from himself to the offering. That lamb is now view by God as bearing the sins of that sinner.

- He next takes a knife and slays the lamb. As he watches the blood flowing from the spotless sacrifice, he can truthfully say: ***“Though I am a sinner, and therefore condemned by the law to die for my sins; yet that lamb has borne my sins, taken my place and died for me, to be accepted by God on my behalf.”***

- He is now in the position to worship God because of his acceptance before Him on the basis of redemption by the blood (or death) of the lamb.

The language of Scripture is: **“It [the offering] shall be accepted for him”** (Leviticus 1:4).

Thus the offerer is accepted in and through his offering.

We have drawn attention from only one of very many pictures, or types of Christ in the Old Testament Scriptures. It required all these types and offerings to illustrate the great work which He, as the Lamb of God, accomplished on the altar of Calvary. It was there that “once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26).

Upon that Cross Christ willingly allowed Himself to be crucified, for He knew it was the only way by which a just and holy God could righteously pardon a guilty, but repentant and believing sinner.

Each person who comes to God upon the **SOLE BASIS OF Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice**, rests simply in the finished work of Christ, and receives Christ as his own Saviour and Lord is, that moment: **“Justified freely by his [God’s] grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:24).

Let every reader make certain that his is the only ground upon which he approaches God to worship, for there is no other way. Albert Midlane wrote a hymn that clearly and beautifully presents this glorious truth:

“The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Saviour’s blood;
‘Tis in the Cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.

God could not pass the sinner by,
His sin demands that he must die;
But in the Cross of Christ we see,
How God can save us righteously.

The sin is on the Saviour laid,
'Tis by His blood the debt is paid;
Stern justice can demand no more,
And mercy can dispense her store.

The sinner who believes is free,
Can say: 'The Saviour died for me!'
Can point to the atoning blood,
And say: 'This made my peace with God'."

2. Relationship

The second essential, or ground for worship, is relationship.

Those who approach God do so with the word, "Father," upon their lips. Our Lord taught His disciples to say: "**Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name**" (Matthew 6:9). It is "**the Father**" that seeketh worshippers, and the worshippers are those who have become "**the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus**" (Galatians 3:26).

This relationship, as we have previously seen, is brought about by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. We read: "**Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever**" (I Peter 1:23).

In the Old Testament, it was Aaron and his sons who were called upon the act as priests in connection with the place of worship; first, in the Tabernacle and later, in the Temple.

It was their relationship to Aaron that qualified them for this privileged position.

In the New Testament, it is "**the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty**" who are called, fitted and privileged to worship. Over "**the new and living way,**" which leads into "**the holiest of all,**" are written the words: "*For the children of God only!*"

Happy indeed are those who have come to know what it means to "**have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace**" (Ephesians 1:7).

Such are assured, by the Word, that they have been born from above, and that this birth was "**not of blood** [heredity], **nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God**" (John 1:13).

It is as "**brethren,**" or those in the family of God, that we are said to have "**boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus**" (Hebrews 10:19).

The Christian comes not to a strange cold, distant and impersonal God to worship, but to One whom he knows and loves as his Father.

One of the evidences of regeneration is that the believer received the spirit of sonship, whereby he cries; “**Abba, Father**” (Romans 8:15). Thus between God and those who worship Him, is the precious and permanent link of Heaven-born relationship.

3. Representation

The third essential for worship is representation.

This means that the worshipper must have a High Priest as His REPRESENTATIVE in the presence of God for him. Through the mediation of this great High Priest, his worship is presented and made accepted to God.

Once more we must turn to God’s picture book, the Old Testament, to learn from the “types,” “figures” and “patterns” which God has given, just why the mediation of Christ, as our great High Priest, is absolutely essential if our worship is to be acceptable unto God.

The two Old Testament books to read and study in connection with this truth are Exodus and Leviticus. The true significance of these, in turn, cannot possibly be understood apart from the New Testament book, the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Should the reader desire a fuller knowledge of these truths, he will find George Soltau’s: “*The Tabernacle, The Priesthood, and the Offerings*,” a veritable gold mine of spiritual profit. C.H.M.’s “*Note on Leviticus*,” and “*Notes on Exodus*” will also yield its quota of wealth.

After God had redeemed His people by the sprinkled blood of the Passover lamb, and delivered them from Egypt’s power through the divided waters of the Red Sea, He gave instructions to Moses to prepare a Tabernacle, by means of which He might dwell in the midst of the people of His choice. Elaborate instructions were given in regard to this Tabernacle and its furniture, and also concerning the selection, clothing, consecration and anointing of Aaron, together with a description of his varied duties.

Aaron was the Divinely selected, called and appointed High Priest of this Tabernacle. While in this capacity, he acted as Israel’s representative before God. Associated with Aaron were his sons, who acted as priests. Minute directions were also given as to the various kinds of offerings, and the ritual in connection with each, as it was brought before and offered to God.

The last chapter of Exodus records the erection of the Tabernacle, the installation of the Aaronic priesthood, and concludes with God’s approving response to all that which had been done in obedience to His instructions. We read that: “**A cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle . . . The cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys**” (Exodus 40:34, 38).

What we wish to draw particular attention to is the high priestly ministry of Aaron, as he performed his duties, as Israel’s representative, in the presence of God.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ, as “**the great high Priest of our profession,**” is contrasted with Aaron, and compared with Melchisedec. In fact, the key word of this Epistle is “**better.**”

Christ is seen as superior to Aaron in every respect, both as to His Person and His work.

Christ offered:

- A “**better sacrifice**” (Hebrews 9:23),
- By which He brought in a “**better covenant**” (8:6),
- Of “**better things**” (12:24),
- Resulting in a “**better hope**” (7:19),
- Leading to a “**better country**” (11:16).

Undoubtedly the outstanding event of the year to the children of Israel was the great day of Atonement, which is described in Leviticus 16.

On this occasion all the sins, transgressions and iniquities of the nation were brought to remembrance, and a substitutionary sacrifice was offered for them by means of which an atonement, or covering for them, was made. This was the only day of the year that the High Priest was allowed to pass through the veil and enter into the holiest of all. The ceremony connected with this day of Atonement is full of spiritual significance.

First of all, Aaron had to make an atonement for his own sins, before he could do anything on behalf of the people whom he represented before God. Accordingly, he took a young bullock for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. After laying his hands on the bullock, he killed it at the brazen altar. He then took his censer which was filled with burning coals and placed incense thereon.

With the blood of the sin offering, he now entered within the veil into the holiest of all. With the incense rising in clouds, Aaron proceeded to sprinkle the blood both on and before the mercy seat seven times, and thus made atonement for himself. After this he took two goats and presented them before the Lord at the door of the Tabernacle.

Next, he cast lots upon the goats, one lot for what was called “**the Lord’s goat,**” and the other for what was termed, “**the scapegoat.**” He then slew the goat of the Lord and, with its blood and his censer, again entered the veil and sprinkled the blood seven times on and before the mercy seat, and thus made atonement for the people. After this, he returned to the gate of the Tabernacle, laid his hands upon the head of the scapegoat, and confessed over it “**all the iniquities of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins,**” and thus transferred them, in picture, to the head of the scapegoat. This goat was then led away, by a fit man, into the wilderness and there turned loose, to return no more.

This ceremony, like all the others in connection with the worship of Israel, is utterly meaningless apart from the New Testament. When we turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews, all this involved ritual becomes beautifully clear and redolent with Christ.

The fact that Aaron had to present an offering for his own sins is used to show, by contrast, the superiority of Christ as our great High Priest. We read: **“He needeth not . . . to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people’s, for this He did once, when he offered up Himself”** (Hebrews 7:27).

The two goats constitute a double type of Christ’s sacrifice, illustrating the fact that He not only died for our sins to meet every claim of a holy God, but also bore them away from God’s presence for ever. The infinite superiority of Christ’s sacrifice to that of Aaron’s is further seen in the fact that the Lord Jesus is not only described as the Offerer, but also the Offering.

Moreover, this offering on the day of Atonement had to be repeated each year, so that there was a continuous remembrance of sins (Hebrews 10:3). In contrast to this we are told that: **“Once in the end of the world hath he [Christ] appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”** (Hebrews 9:26).

We are further assured that believers **“are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all”** (Hebrews 10:10).

We are further informed that there had to be many high priests in Israel, **“because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; but this man, [Christ, the great High Priest] because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable Priesthood”** (Hebrews 7:23-24).

Just as Aaron, with the atoning blood and the fragrant incense, entered through the veil into the holiest of all, as Israel’s representative, and sprinkled the blood before and on the mercy seat, thus satisfying all the demands of God’s holy throne; so Christ, by virtue of His own blood has **“entered in, once [for all] into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us”** (Hebrews 9:11-12).

Now, as our Representative, He ever lives in the presence of God on behalf of His people, with all the eternal virtue and value of His divine Person and perfectly accomplished redemption! Not only has our Lord entered Heaven to engage in His work as our great High Priest, but He has also opened up the way for all His redeemed people to enter into the holiest through Him, there to engage in their highest occupation -- the worship of God. Just as Aaron, within the holiest, caused clouds of incense to rise before the blood-stained mercy seat; so now Christ, our great High Priest, because of the eternal virtue and value of His Person, and the efficacy of His precious blood, causes the incense of our worship to rise before God’s holy throne and be acceptable unto the Father.

Mark carefully what God has to say in this regard: **“For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified . . . Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”** (Hebrews 10:14-22).

No wonder the inspired writer, as he contemplated the super-excellency of the priesthood of Christ, as contrasted with Aaron, said simply: "Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such an high Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1).

WHAT KIND OF HIGH PRIEST DO WE HAVE?

What a wealth of meaning is compressed into those six monosyllables: "**We have such an high Priest.**"

The whole Epistle is taken up with this theme:

- Christ is described as being a powerful High Priest, for "**In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted**" (Hebrews 2:18).
- He is a merciful High Priest, for He knows all the frailties of His people, and meets their every need (Hebrews 2:17).
- He is a faithful High Priest, both to God and man. Unlike Aaron, He is incapable of failure. He never fails in the fulfillment of His promises, or in the execution of His duties. He never slumbers nor sleeps, but ever lives to accomplish His gracious purposes (Hebrews 2:17).
- He is a sympathetic High Priest, for He is touched with all the "**feeling of our infirmities**"; and was "**in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin**" (Hebrews 4:15). Christ was "**the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief**" (Isaiah 53:3). He knows what it means to be weary, to hunger and thirst, to be betrayed and forsaken, to suffer agony and to die. The child of God is therefore assured of both a sympathetic ear and an understanding heart from his Representative.
- He is an ever-living High Priest. "**Death hath no more dominion over him**" (Romans 6:9). He lives in "**the power of an endless life**;" and is therefore untiring and unceasing in His activities on behalf of His own. Thus His people are being "**saved to the uttermost**" through His ceaseless intercession on their behalf (Hebrews 7:25).
- Then He is an exalted High Priest, for He is described as "**a great high Priest,**" and One who has been "**made higher than the heavens**" (Hebrews 4:14; 7:26).

How great He is, no finite mind will ever comprehend:

"The Father only -- glorious claim --
The Son can comprehend."

- Lastly, He is an eternal High Priest, for He is made "**an high Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec**" (Hebrews 6:20).

HIS HIGH PRIESTLY MINISTRY

It is grand indeed to see how full and complete is this high priestly ministry of our Lord:

- His heart is occupied for us, for He loves His own with a tender and unceasing sympathy:

“When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!” (John 11:33-36).

- His mind is occupied for us, for His people are the subject of His constant thought: **“But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God”** (Psalm 40:17).

- His eyes are constantly upon us, to anticipate and provide for all our needs, for **“He that keepeth . . . shall neither slumber nor sleep”** (Psalm 121:3-4).

- His hands are busy for us, guarding, guiding and protecting the sheep of His pasture: **“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one”** (John 10:26-30).

- His ears are ever open to His people’s cry: **“The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry”**.

- His lips are constantly used as He pleads for His people and, by His ceaseless advocacy and intercession, maintains their cause before the father’s face: **“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”** (Hebrews 7:25) and **“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”** (I John 2:1).

- His feet are not idle, for He companies with His own, and promises never to leave or forsake them. The two disciples on the Emmaus highway discovered, to their delight, the blessedness of the Saviour’s companionship: **“And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them”** (Luke 24:15). Yes, we can truthfully testify: **“We have such an high Priest!”**

Christ is thus our divine Representative in the presence of God for us. He has secured our redemption by His own most precious blood. He has made our relationship actual with God. He now, **“in the power of an endless life,”** as our great High Priest, represents us before the father’s throne.

Thus, the three-fold ground of worship, which the holiness of the triune God demanded, has been perfectly and gloriously provided. The redeemed child of God need not stand outside in fear but, with holy boldness, may draw near into the holiest of all. He is assured that his Representative, the great high Priest, will present his worship before the Father in all the perfection of His own Person. All believers may now reverently and adoringly repeat: **“We have such an high Priest!”**

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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