

Spiritual Worship

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Texts: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." (Exodus 20:4). "They that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24).

The Temple stood as the symbol of the Levitical system of legislation, and the Holy of Holies was at its center. All that was in this holy place was sacred—the tablets of the broken law most of all. These tablets were in the ark of the covenant. At the heart of Hebrew worship was the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice over the ark by the High Priest who represented man in his guilt before God. At the same time he represented God in love for man before the token of his sin, the broken law. In this way God sought to teach Israel that "ceremonial service apart from moral faithfulness is an empty sham."

Because Israel's worship was meant to be moral and spiritual, there was no place in it for images. Within human nature there is a deep-seated tendency to idol or image worship; man feels the need of seeing the objects of his devotion and finds it difficult to be wholly spiritual in his worship. God's chosen people were no exception to this rule. While condemning idolatry, the Old Testament records various concessions to this human need. In vision Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. Ezekiel saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." Previously Moses had been allowed to see God's "back parts" as He passed by. In the New Testament the Incarnation may be seen as a concession on the part of God to this need for objectification. The disciples of Jesus' day were highly favored in being able to hear and see Him who is now the object of all Christian worship. How many Christians have wished that they too might thus have known Him! But we never can worship the Jesus of the mount, the wilderness and the restless Sea of Galilee. We, with Paul can only know "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Nor can we worship Jesus on the cross because He was taken down and laid in a new-made tomb. Neither can we worship Him in the tomb because "He is not here, for he is risen."

But this does not mean that God has not allowed us any objective symbol of our Christian worship. Some folk would claim that the presence of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is sufficient provision for man's worship. And for some it is. But God still recognizes the weakness of human nature—our need of something tangible, in worship, something to see and feel and taste. The one remaining concession to this need of objectification in worship is the Eucharist with its bread and wine, symbols of the body of the incarnate Son. In addition to the Holy Spirit—which has no appearance—God has given that which has appearance and form and in substance seems to say, "These are all you need for worship—the emblem of my earthly body and my spiritual presence."

But an understanding of God's arrangement for worship does not solve the problem which is faced by every man who would make his worship spiritual and his life moral. It can only be done by combining that which is seen with that which is not seen, in their right relationship, and thereby realizing more and yet more fully that "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

The secret of spiritual worship is spiritual life. It is only reasonable to assume that men who are "dead in trespasses and sins" must, in the language of St. Paul, experience a resurrection to newness of life if they would worship God aright. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again, 'you must experience an infusion of life from above. Because of the lack of spiritual life

men in ignorance substitute form for substance and believe that doing as one has learned to worship is sufficient. It is anomalous to think that one can make his worship truly spiritual and at the same time be void of spiritual life. When one knows what it is to be "born of the Spirit" he has the essential of spiritual worship, if not its guarantee.

Worship, is not spiritual just because it is associated with one's own spiritual exercises: the singing of hymns, prayer and meditation. Rather, it is spiritual because it is associated with the Spirit of God. It is the acceptance by faith that God is revealed in the Holy Spirit which has been given as the "earnest" of the Christian's eternal inheritance. It is the partaking of that Spirit. It is the realization that the presence of the Spirit is the presence of God, and that because of this we can know God today better than the disciples of Jesus knew him. We can know more assuredly that the Holy Spirit is the very presence of God than they knew that Jesus was the Son of God during his lifetime. And "His spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God."

God is not only Spirit. John tells us that God is love. Spiritual worship is a worship of love. It is loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is trysting with the one true Lover of the soul. It is communion with the One who is altogether lovely.

Love is healing. It is a balm for the bruises of life, ointment for its hurts. It is oil poured into wounds, the caress which calms our fears, the hand which guides, the arm which upholds, and the heart which understands. Spiritual worship is compounded with love.

St. John also tells us that God is light. Light is revealing. Spiritual worship is an enlightening experience. It is not searching for we know not what, not a hoping against hope. It is living in light, living by faith in what God has revealed. It is being led by the Spirit from truth to truth, from strength to strength, from glory to glory. It is the questing of the soul after more of God. It is as a man standing with the sun in his face, the shadows falling behind him.

Spiritual worship is worship in spirit and in truth. It has to do with truth and not with speculation. It is truth revealed in Him who is the truth and relayed to us by his Spirit. It is truth as it is found in Jesus Christ. As our supreme authority He brooks no rivals, asks no quarter and dares to proclaim that both time and eternity are on His side.

One may ask what place the Scriptures have in spiritual worship. First, the Bible holds the same place that other ingredients of worship hold. It is a part of the necessary furnishings for effective worship. But more and above this the Bible is the source of our knowledge for all that we have been saying. It is "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path." It forever confirms the fact that the God whom we worship has revealed himself, and that is why we worship Him. Besides Him there is no God. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." He "was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." He, as Father, Son and Spirit is revealed in His Word and to it we turn again and again for the confirmation of our faith.

If one would know the reality of spiritual worship, if he would go beyond the forms, and worship at first hand and not as an accessory after the fact, let him by faith see Christ the supreme revelation of God. Christ must be seen, not just in a picture or a replica, however real it might make Him appear; not just in hymns and prayers, however inspiring they might be; and not just in hymns and prayers, however inspiring they might be; and not just in the narratives of Holy Writ, however accurate they are. Christ must be experienced as a living

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