

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

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CHAPTER TWO

DISTINCTIVE USES OF THE WORD

Having considered the first mention of the word “worship,” and gleaned something of what is involved in its use, let us now glance at:

4. Some Distinctions Between Prayer, Praise and Worship

Broadly speaking,

- Prayer is the occupation of the soul with its needs.
- Praise is the occupation of the soul with its blessings.
- Worship is the occupation of the soul with God Himself.

Prayer and praise may be mingled in worship, and included in the general thought; but properly speaking, each, in itself, does not constitute worship.

- “*Lord, save my soul,*” is prayer.
- “*Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul,*” is praise.
- “*Thank you, Lord, for what Thou art,*” is worship.

Perhaps an illustration may help to make this somewhat subtle distinction a little clearer.

Let us suppose a person who cannot swim falls into a river. As he vainly struggles to save himself, and realizes how hopeless his case is, he cries from the depths of his heart: “Help! Help! Save me! Save me!” This is prayer. No convicted sinner needs to be taught to pray. An old Puritan’s terse commentary on Psalm 107, where sinners, in their extremity are described as crying to God for deliverance, was: “Misery wonderfully indoctrinates a person in the art of prayer!”

In response to this drowning person’s cries for help, a well-dressed gentleman suddenly appears. Without a moment’s hesitation he plunges into the river and, at the risk of his own life, brings him safely to shore.

The response of the saved person is immediate.

He overwhelms his rescuer with praise and exclaims: “How can I ever express my gratitude to you for your brave act in saving my life! Thank you, ten thousand times!”

Surely this illustrates what takes place when a sinner is brought to realize that Christ, the Son of God, by His substitutionary work on Calvary, has made possible his salvation from sin’s penalty. Upon his acceptance of Christ as his own personal Saviour, he is assured, from God’s own word, that he is now saved.

This fills his soul with joy, and his lips with songs of praise to the One who has saved him. But now the rescuer, after seeing the one whom he has saved safely home, turns to him and hands him his card saying: “Here is my name and address. Would you please do me the honor of coming to my home tomorrow evening at 6:30 and dining with me. In this way, we can become better acquainted with each other.”

Accordingly, the following evening the rescued man goes to the address on the card. To his astonishment, he finds himself in the wealthiest part of the town. Furthermore, he discovers that his rescuer’s house is the grandest of all the palatial mansions in that district.

He rings the bell and the butler appears. After giving his name, he is ushered into the drawing room. The host then appears and immediately, like the perfect gentleman he is, puts his guest at ease. Dinner is announced and, during the course of the very excellent meal, the host skillfully steers the conversation so as best to entertain his guest.

When the meal is over, the guest has been charmed beyond measure at the nobility of his host’s character. He has been impressed with his kindness, intellect, hospitality, wisdom, graciousness, tact and humility of spirit.

In other words, he now appreciates the moral excellence, and the intrinsic worth of his host’s character, entirely apart from what he has done for him as his savior. While he does not forget, for one moment, that his host was his rescuer, yet his gratitude for what he did for him is now exceeded by his admiration and appreciation because of what he is, in himself.

Moreover, the more he gets to know his host by visiting him, talking and walking with him, the greater this sense of appreciation grows.

This will serve to illustrate that fine distinction which exists between praise and worship. The believer can never forget that the Lord Jesus Christ is his Saviour, and that He has redeemed him at the infinite cost of his most precious blood. Yet, as he comes to know the Lord more intimately, his gratitude to Him as Saviour, merges with and is superceded by an ever-increasing appreciation of the preciousness of His glorious Person, as the displayed excellencies of His perfect character are revealed, by the Spirit, through the Word of God.

The Christian, by communion with his Lord, is made to realize and exclaim with another:

“My Beloved is . . . the chiefest among ten thousand . . . Yea, He is altogether lovely!” (Song of Solomon 5:10, 16).

“Chiefest of ten thousand!
Fairest of the fair!
Altogether lovely,
Beyond all compare!
Lord of all creation;
Man of Calvary!
Son of God who loved and
Gave Himself for me!”

Now let us use another illustration, this time based on an actual incident.

A tenement building was ablaze in London. On the top story, a young woman was seen standing at a window crying for help, for she was trapped by the flames beneath. Her case looked hopeless until a young fireman, seeing her peril, mounted a ladder and, at the risk of his own life, brought her safely down to the ground.

In the excitement of the moment, the girl neglected to thank her rescuer for his brave deed, so the following day she called at his home to thank him for what he had done. He, in turn, reciprocated the call, and the acquaintance thus formed developed into friendship. This eventually ripened into love, and they became engaged. One day they both stood before a marriage officer, plighted their troth to each other and became man and wife.

Now this woman never allowed herself to forget that this fireman was her savior and that, but for him, she might have been burned to death; but he was now much more to her than a savior: he was her husband, her lover, her companion through all life’s vicissitudes and her all in all.

So it is with all Christians. The One who went to Calvary to make their salvation possible, has now united them to Himself in a bond that neither time nor eternity shall sever. He is not only the Saviour, but the LOVER, FRIEND, COUNSELLOR, GUARDIAN and GUIDE to all who know Him.

The words of God through Isaiah are peculiarly appropriate in this connection: “**Thy Maker is thy Husband**” (Isaiah 54:5).

5. Worship is Giving to God

Salvation is something received by us, as a free gift from God (Romans 6:23).

Worship is something presented by us to God, as a willing acknowledgment of our deep appreciation of what He is and all He has done.

We shall consider three instances of this aspect of worship which are recorded for us in the word of God. They should combine to make this abundantly clear to every believer.

A. The first instance we shall look at is the Israelite described in Deuteronomy 26:1-11.

“And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God.

“And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage:

“And when we cried unto the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.

“And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God: And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.”

Let each believer read this portion carefully for himself. Here is God’s own picture of what is involved in the phrase:

“And thou shalt . . . worship before the Lord thy God” (vs. 10).

Let us briefly examine this chapter, so full of spiritual significance, and notice seven things regarding this worshipper.

(1) The worshipper is one who has experienced what it means to be redeemed by blood and by power (vs. 5-8)

He was a redeemed man, who had been sheltered by the blood of the Passover lamb:

“For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12-13).

God instructed him to recall the fact that he had once been a slave under the bitter bondage of the Egyptians; but the Lord had looked upon his **“affliction, labor and oppression,”** and had brought him out of this dreadful condition by His **“mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terrible, and with signs and wonders.”**

Surely we have, in these words, a graphic illustration of that far greater work that God has done for every believer.

Though once, by nature, lost in sin and under its dread condemnation; yet because of the redeeming work accomplished by His beloved Son on Calvary, a full, free and eternal salvation has been provided for every sinner who will own his need, trust Christ as His Saviour and own Him as the Lord of his life.

Happy indeed is that person who can take the words of this Israelite upon his lips and truthfully testify: **“And the Lord brought me forth . . . with an outstretched arm, out of my sin, my need and my bondage, into the glorious liberty of the children of God!”**

Properly speaking, it is only one who has thus experienced God’s saving power in his own life, that can approach God as an intelligent and consistent worshipper.

Peter reminded those Christians, to whom he wrote, that they had **“not been redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ.”**

As redeemed ones, they could now offer up **“spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”** (I Peter 1:18-19; 2:5).

(2) *The worshipper is viewed as having an inheritance in the land.* (v. 1)

“When thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.”

This person had been the subject of Divine guidance, for he had been led by the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He had been the object of God’s providing care, for he had eaten of the manna from Heaven, and had drunk of the waters that flowed from the smitten rock. Now, by God’s grace, he is viewed as having been brought through the Jordan, and actually living in the land that God had promised. The typical significance of this should be obvious to each believer.

The Christian is viewed in Scripture as:

being already **“seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus”** (Ephesians 2:6).

He is assured, by God Himself, that **“in Christ”** he has **“obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will”** (Ephesians 1:11).

With the blessed consciousness that all this is now his, the believer can come boldly to the throne of grace and offer his grateful worship.

(3) *The worshipper was one whom God had blessed (vs. 2).*

He was instructed to take of the first fruits of the harvest, with which God had blessed him, and present it to the Lord as an act of worship.

God's promises of blessing to Israel were largely temporal and material, and were conditioned upon their obedience to His commandments.

“It shall come to pass if thou wilt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth: and all these blessings shall come upon thee and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out” (Deuteronomy 28:1-6).

In contrast to the earthly blessings of Israel, the blessings of the believer are eternal and spiritual. How wonderfully the Epistle to the Ephesians opens!

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

He then proceeds to enumerate some of these blessings, such as the Christian being chosen, predestinated, redeemed, etc.

Paul then points out the far reaching consequences of the bestowal of all those blessings. They shall redound,

Firstly to the praise of the glory of the grace of the Father who planned it;
Secondly, to the glory of the grace of the Son, who provided it;
Thirdly, to the glory and grace of the Holy Spirit, who empowered it and made it actual in the believer's experience (See Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

Thus both in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, the worshipper does not come to be blessed; but because he has already been blessed. Perhaps a good definition of a Christian is: “one whom God has blessed.” Each believer can therefore truthfully testify: **“The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it”** (Proverbs 10:22).

(4) *The worshipper is seen to be a grateful person (vs. 2-3).*

He is described as first gathering this gift of the first fruits, then placing it in a basket, and finally bringing it before the Lord. There was to be nothing of a haphazard character in this offering.

His act of worship consisted in:

- Picking the fruit with care,
- In arranging it in orderly fashion in the basket,
- Then making the effort to travel to the place God had selected.

This, at least, suggests his appreciation of all that God was and had done for him. By this act he joined the great company of those who, through the ages, have sung: **“God hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad”** (Psalm 126:3).

God wants an appreciative people, who are not satisfied to be always receiving from Him, but who also desire to give to Him.

God wants us to be like the Samaritan whom the Lord healed of his leprosy.

While his nine companions went their way, he returned to the Saviour, fell at His feet and gave Him thanks. Christ’s comment on this act is significant: **“There are not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger”** (Luke 17:12-19).

Altogether too many Christians suffer from what has been well termed, “the gimmee’s.”

Every time they come into God’s presence it is to ask Him to “give them” something.

“Give me this;” “Give me that;” “Give me the other;” is their constant and monotonous cry.

They are like some little children who only come to their parents to get something from them, and never think of giving anything to their parents in return.

There is a story of a little girl who brought great joy to her mother.

One day she came in from her play, sat down on a chair, and watched her mother as she ironed. Her mother inquired: “What do you want, dear?” The child replied: “I don’t want anything, mother. I just want to sit here and look at you and love you!”

Our Lord clearly indicated that God, the Father, was seeking for worship from His children.

“The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 3:23).

God greatly desires that those whom He has so abundantly blessed, will respond to His desire for worship and, as they wait in His presence, will pour out their love for Him in worship and adoration.

We are told that the words, “think” and “thank,” were originally the same. Whether this be true or not, one thing is certain: a “thankful” Christian is certain to become a “thankful” Christian, for he has only to remember, to rejoice.

God's word to Israel was: **"None shall appear before me empty"** (Exodus 23:15).

It is pathetic indeed, at a meeting convened particularly for worship, to see so many who apparently have neither taken the time nor made the effort to put anything in their basket of gratitude.

The long periods of silence in many worship meetings are often, not the silences of worshipful adoration, but the silences of spiritual poverty.

It will be noted that in Deuteronomy 26, it is individual worship that is in view.

It goes without saying, that the quality of our collective worship, will be conditioned by the spirituality of each believer present at the meeting convened for that purpose.

The obvious teaching of this passage in Deuteronomy 26 is that each believer should be spiritually exercised during the week, and personally select and arrange his basket of first fruits. He should then bring with him, to the assembly of God's people, a heart filled with his own individual appreciation of all that God is, as revealed in His beloved Son. As each Christian does this, the spiritual tone of the worship meeting will be lifted to a high plane, and God will receive that which He seeks -- the worship of His beloved, blood-bought and Spirit-born children. May we not disappoint Him in this!

(5) The worshipper is anticipated as being obedient to God's word (v. 2).

He was told to go **"unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place his name there."**

This place was afterwards designated.

At first it was at Shiloh, where **"the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together,"** and the tabernacle was pitched. See Josh. 18:1.

Later on, this place was transferred to Jerusalem, where the temple was built: **"That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place"** (I Kings 8:29).

It is important to note that God did not leave the choice of the place of worship to the caprice of the worshipper.

He selected one specific place, where He placed His name and made this place known to His people.

The worshipper was instructed to come to this place and offer his gift of the first fruits, if he was to be well pleasing to God.

It is conceivable that an Israelite, when in the land, might have argued: “I don’t think it makes any difference where one takes his offering. Personally, I very much prefer Jericho to Jerusalem; for Jericho is much closer to where I live. Besides, the way to Jerusalem is uphill, and this calls for more effort than I care to make. In view of this, I shall worship God at the place of my choice.”

All this sounds very much like the present day attitude of many Christians.

In fact, it is quite common to hear a young convert advised to “join the Church of his choice.” On many decision forms, a space is left for the person who professes to be saved to indicate, on the dotted line, his “Church preference.”

Has God left the believer no directions as to this matter of his Church fellowship? Is each Christian left to follow his own inclinations in this important matter? Of course not.

The same God, who indicated to the Israelite in the Old Testament just when, how, and where to worship; has left us, in the New Testament, clear directions as to this matter.

The well known words of the Lord Jesus should come home to every Christian’s heart: **“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”** (Matthew 18:20).

Each believer would do well to examine his position in regard to his church, or assembly fellowship. He should make sure that he has the support of the general teaching of the New Testament Scriptures, both as to his warrant for meeting with believers, and also the conduct of such assembly gatherings. These Divine principles of church fellowship have been clearly laid down, and should be whole-heartedly obeyed, cost what it may.

(6) *The worshipper is seen to be a humble person* (vs. 5-9)

No provision was made for either pride of race, place, face, or grace.

His confession was:

“A Syrian ready to perish was my father.”

He gave himself no “airs,” evidenced no superiority complex, and assumed no patronizing manner as he came into the presence of God. There was to be no self-glorification, or display of that obnoxious thing, the flesh, which Christ declared **“profiteth nothing”** (John 6:63).

There was to be no place for snobbery, for all Israel had a common ancestry -- **“a Syrian ready to perish.”**

(A snob has been well defined as a person halfway up the ladder of fame, who spends all his time licking the feet of those above and kicking the ones below!)

Of all snobbery, none is quite so nauseous as the religious brand, personified in the Pharisee, whose uplift was confined exclusively to his nose, and who prayed thus with himself: **“God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are,”** etc. (Luke 18:11-12).

Each believer would do well to lay this to heart as he approaches God’s holy throne.

God hates pride in any shape or form.

Through Isaiah, He has declared: **“Thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, Whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit”** (Isaiah 57:15).

Again we read: **“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble”** (James 4:6).

Pride ill becomes one who is “only a sinner, saved by grace,” and who, but for the grace of God, might even now be in hell.

Humility of spirit is therefore an essential accompaniment of worship.

(7) The worshipper is described as giving to God (vs. 10-11).

“Thou shalt set it (the gift) before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God.”

It well be noted in this chapter that the worshipper does not ask God for a single thing.

He does not come to God with a petition on his lips, but with a present in his hand.

Though it is quite true that he only brought to God what God had previously given to him, yet God was delighted with the gift and credited it to his account! (v. 10).

A little girl once climbed into her daddy’s lap and asked him for a quarter. When the father asked her what the money was for, she artlessly replied: “Why, it’s your birthday tomorrow and I want to buy you a present.”

Accordingly, her father gave her the quarter and, sure enough, on the morrow he was the recipient of a little present from his daughter, for which he himself had paid!

It is hardly necessary to add how much her father appreciated this token of his child’s remembrance and affection.

David clearly realized this fact, for he said to God: **“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee!”** (I Chronicles 29:14).

God freely and unstintingly pours His multiplied blessings upon His people.

Is it too much for Him to expect that they shall bring Him the first fruits of their appreciation of what He is and all and all He has done?

Alas, how little worship God received from His children! How often so-called “worship meetings” degenerate into mere glorified prayer meetings!

One brother rises and prays: “O Lord, help us to worship.”

Another pleads: “O Lord, grant that we may truly worship Thee,” etc., etc.

The person described in Deuteronomy 26 did not say: “Lord, help me to bring my basket of first fruits.” He brought it, and said: “**And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits,**” etc., (v. 10).

The worship meeting does not exist for the purpose of enabling us to pray that we might worship God, but for the actual presentation of our worship to Him. The logical conclusion is, if there was more prayer offered before the worship meeting, there would be no need to pray at the worship meeting.

*** For further information on this, see “An Introduction to a Study of Church Truth,” and “Scriptural Principles of Gathering,” by the same author.**

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