

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE MEANING OF WORSHIP: THE Holy PERFUME

As we further think of the definition of worship, let us now consider:

6. The Holy Perfume (Exodus 30:34-38)

This very beautiful picture of worship is given to us as part of God's revelation to Moses in regard to the Tabernacle, concerning which He had said: "**Make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them**" (Exodus 25:18). Minute instructions were given regarding the details of its furnishings, and we find God repeatedly saying to Moses: "**And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount**" (Exodus 25:9; 40:26, 30; 27:8, cp. Hebrews 8:5).

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people" (Exodus 30:34-38)

Three things impress themselves on the mind as one reads this passage regarding the holy perfume.

(1) The Exclusive Use of It (verses 37-38)

It was reserved solely for use in the worship of God in the sanctuary. God expressly forbade its manufacture for any other purpose. The obvious inference from this is that worship belongs to God alone, and that He will share this honor with none. David, "the sweet Psalmist of Israel," by the Spirit's inspiration wrote: "**He is thy Lord, worship thou him . . . Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool, for he is holy . . . O come, let us worship and bow down: Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker**" (Psalm 45:11; 99:5; 95:6).

It will be recalled that the first demand of the law was: “**Thou shalt have no other gods before me . . . for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God**” (Exodus 20:3-5).

There is no substitute for spiritual worship. It is the unique right, the sole property, and the exclusive privilege of God Himself and He will not tolerate any rival. Idolatry, in its essence, is simply that by which man seeks to displace God, or which attempts to relegate Him to a position of secondary importance. An idol is anything that a man worships in his heart, to the exclusion of God. It was because of the idolatrous apostasy of Israel that God:

- Set Israel aside nationally,
- Allowed them to go into captivity,
- Scattered them to the four corners of the earth. (See II Kings 17:7-18; II Chronicles 36:14-17).

We do well to pay good heed to the Divine dictum: “**I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another**” (Isaiah 42:8). He alone claims the title of, “**Holy and Reverend**” (Psalm 111:9).

There is always the subtle danger of becoming more occupied with:

- The visible, than the invisible;
- With the temporal, than the eternal;
- With an outward and formal ceremony, than an inward and spiritual reality.

There can therefore be no substitute for spiritual worship:

- However ornate may be the ritual,
- Or gorgeous the vestments,
- Or beautiful the building,
- Or well phrased the prayers,
- Or smoothly conducted the service.

Undoubtedly all this has an appeal to the esthetic senses, and is well pleasing to the flesh, for man is naturally religious; but it is not spiritual, and consequently cannot please God.

(2) The Ingredients that Formed it (verses 34-36)

Four ingredients, compounded in equal proportions, composed this perfume, and each part was necessary to the whole. These ingredients were stacte, onycha, galbanum and frankincense. Each of these four things has a typical significance which we shall not dwell on now.

Let us think of them as four elements which, when compounded together in the heart of the believer, as he sits in the presence of God, causes the perfume of his worship to ascend to the Father and the Son.

The first ingredient is remembrance.

It is good for the believer to use his memory to recall what he used to be by nature, and what he now is, by God's matchless grace.

The words of Paul to the saints at Ephesus are pertinent to this:

“Wherefore remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh . . . but now, in Christ Jesus . . . are made nigh” (Ephesians 2:11, 13).

Let each Christian call to mind his black past, when he was without God, without Christ, without life and without hope. Then let him contrast this with his present acceptance in the Beloved, together with all the spiritual blessings that are now his present and eternal possession. Surely the result of such remembrance will cause him to life his heart in adoration to the One who made this so blessedly actual to his experience.

His memory should also be focused on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Himself. The purpose of the Lord's Supper, as indicated by the Lord Himself is: **“This do in remembrance of me.”**

In view of this, worship will become an essential feature of such a meeting, for worship is kindled upon the fires of remembrance. As David puts it: **“While I was musing, the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue”** (Psalm 39:3).

It is memory that enables us to recall the record of His matchless life, as given in the holy Scriptures.

The Christian should therefore concentrate upon:

- Christ's wondrous words,
- His mighty deeds,
- His perfect and holy character,
- His absolute obedience to the father's will,
- His infinite grace in going to the cross,
- His completed work of redemption accomplished by the sacrifice of Himself,
- His victorious resurrection,
- His glorious ascension,
- His present ministry as the great HIGH PRIEST of His people.

As he does so, the believer's heart will warm within him, and his worship shall rise to God as a fragrant perfume.

The second ingredient is gratitude.

As memory recalls all that God is and has done, the heart responds, even as the strings of a harp break forth into song beneath the skilful hands of a master musician. We have before noted that the gratitude of the believer delights the heart of the Father.

Socrates, the great Grecian philosopher, declared that gratitude was the greatest of all the virtues, and ingratitude the basest of all the vices.

A study of the great worship hymns indicate how great a part gratitude plays in their composition. Hannah Burlington beautifully expresses it thus:

“The knowing this, that us He loves,
Hath made our cup run o’er;
Jesus, Thy name our spirit moves,
Today and evermore.”

The “Ter Stegen” hymns are amongst the finest we have. One of them, by Ernst C. Homburg, written nearly 300 years ago, is redolent with gratitude:

“O Lord, from my heart I do thank Thee
For all Thou hast borne in my room,
Thine agony, dying unsoled,
Alone in the darkness of doom,
That I, in the glory of Heaven,
For ever and ever might be --
A thousand, a thousand thanksgivings
I bring, blessed Saviour, to Thee!”

The third ingredient is reverence.

This is produced as the soul apprehends, in some measure at least:

- The greatness of God,
- The majesty of His Divine character,
- The glory of His unique attributes,

As displayed in His

- Omniscience,
- Omnipotence,
- Omnipresence
- Immutability.

We are living in an age characterized largely by cynicism, flippancy and lightness regarding Divine things.

The modern trend is to humanize Deity and deify humanity, and that has not aided in man’s concept of God. One has only to read the Scriptures to discover that whenever a person was brought consciously into the presence of God, it filled him with a holy awe, humbled him in the dust and produced a deep reverence for God.

Moses, the great leader of Israel, was taught this lesson many times. At God's first revelation to him at the burning bush, the voice of Jehovah said: "**Draw not nigh hither; put thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground**" (Exodus 3:5).

At God's revelation to him on the mount, in response to his request to see God's glory, God gave him a vision of Himself. At this august spectacle we read: "**Moses made haste, and bowed his head towards the earth, and worshipped**" (Exodus 34:8).

Isaiah, whose magnificent concept of Deity has thrilled the hearts of the people of God for twenty-five centuries, had to lay to heart this essential requirement. In chapter six of his prophecy, he describes the vision he had of the glory of God which completely revolutionized his life. This sight not only filled him with a sense of his own littleness, uncleanness and insufficiency, but indelibly impressed upon him God's greatness, holiness and power.

Daniel, "**the man of desires,**" tells us that when he saw the majestic vision of God: "**There remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption and I retained no strength**" (Daniel 10:5-11).

We could add others to this list, but these will suffice to indicate how necessary it is that godly reverence accompany all our dealings with Divine things.

This reverence must always be present if our worship is to be acceptable to the One who is described as "**The high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity,**" and who hath declared: "**Let all the earth fear the Lord: Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him**" (Psalm 33:8).

Familiarity with God can never produce contempt, for those who know Him best, love and fear Him most. The more God impresses the soul with His Person, the greater that individual is filled with holy awe as he stands in the presence of Him, before Whose eyes "**all things are open and naked**" (Hebrews 4:13).

It should be obvious that humility of mind, sobriety of manner, and sincerity of spirit are essential to and fitting in the presence of the One who said: "**Ye shall . . . reverence my sanctuary. I am the LORD**" (Leviticus 19:30).

The fourth ingredient is amazement.

We have before indicated that worship has, as one of its basic requirements, the element of wonder. He who ceases to wonder, ceases to worship.

The hymn writer has put it thus:

"I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean!

O how wonderful! O how marvelous!
And my song shall ever be,
O how wonderful! O how marvelous!
Is my Saviour's love to me!"

One of the many titles of Deity is "Wonderful."

Everything about the Almighty takes upon itself this character. As the believer thinks of the wonder of His Person, His creation, His word, His Son, His love, His salvation and of each Christian's blessedness, he is led to exclaim with another:

"That Thou should love a wretch like me,
And be the God Thou art,
Is darkness to my intellect,
But sunshine to my heart!"

(3) The Purpose of It.

It was for God's pleasure and for His glory. These ingredients, equally compounded together, combined to produce a perfume which ascended to God in a fragrant stream and brought great pleasure to Him. Likewise, when a believer sits in the presence of God, with an equal measure of remembrance, gratitude, reverence and amazement well compounded in his heart, there will undoubtedly rise, from the censer of his soul, a silver stream of humble, reverent, sincere and adoring worship to his God and Father, and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, in turn, will delight God's heart, for it fulfils His desire for the worship of His people. This was expressed by His Son in these words: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23)

Our last consideration, under the heading of the meaning of worship, is:

7. The Root Meaning of the Word in the Old Testament

Those that understand such things have affirmed that the root meaning of the Hebrew word carries the thought of "a dog to its master."

As one approaches the town of Hartsdale from the city of New York, he will observe, to his left, an animal cemetery. It is perhaps the most ornate in the world. Beneath marble monuments, some costing hundreds of dollars, like the remains of pet animals and even birds.

Many of these tombstone's bear sentimental epitaphs, such as: "Momsie's only baby."

Others are grotesque, as one over a dog which reads: "He cannot come to us, be we can go to him!"

However, there is one epitaph that stands out from them all.

It is of a dog whose master caused to be inscribed: "To the memory of Bruce, the devoted servant, faithful friend, warm admirer, and ardent worshipper of his master." Then follows the name of its owner. Does this not aptly describe what a dog is? Dogs have been described, and not without some cause, as "man's best friend."

A cynic once remarked: "The more I know of human beings, the better I appreciate dogs!"

Let us use an illustration to clarify this point.

We will suppose that a man, warmly clad, ventures forth on a blustery and bitterly cold night. The temperature is below zero, and the streets are practically deserted. Presently he sees a poor, neglected, shivering and half starved cur, sheltering behind a telephone pole from the biting wind. Some cruel boys have tied a can to its tail, and it has been kicked from pillar to post, until now it is almost at the end of its tether. It will never survive a night like this on the streets.

The man pauses and looks the dog over. What a pitiable sight it is: thin, miserable, frightened, homeless, hungry and on its last legs!

His compassion is stirred and, yielding to the impulse of the moment, he stoops down, reaches out his hand and calls to the dog. Suspicious at first, for the dog has good reasons for distrusting mankind, it gradually approaches, until at length it comes under his hand. The man pats it on the head, strokes it, all the while speaking kindly words. Then, after removing the string and the can from its tail, he lifts it up, opens his overcoat, pops it in, and carries it back to his home.

When he enters his home he says to his wife:

"I've found a poor starving dog on the street, that will surely die tonight, unless it finds a home. Please put a sack in the corner of the kitchen and we'll take care of it for at least tonight."

Accordingly, the dog is gently placed on the sack, and a delicious bowl of hot bread and milk is given it, followed by some scraps from the evening meal. For the first time in many days the dog wags its tail in gratitude for this unusual kindness. The next morning it greets its benefactors with another friendly wag of its tail, and they decide to give it a permanent home.

A month passes by, and what a wonderful change it produces in that dog! As a result of good food and proper care, one would scarcely recognize the fine looking animal as that miserable starving cur of four weeks ago.

One evening, as the man is sitting in an easy chair, with one hand hanging over the arm of the chair, he suddenly feels something warm and wet on his hand. Glancing down he sees the dog looking up at him with adoring eyes as, again and again, it licks the hand of the one to whom it owes everything. The dog had not come into the room to beg for a bone, or even to be petted.

It wanted nothing from its owner but the privilege of sitting in his presence, so that it might look at him with rapt, adoring eyes and, every now and then, to enjoy the privilege of licking the hand of the one whom it loved above all others.

This is worship.

Now apply this to the believer, who once was a lost, guilty and helpless sinner, deserving only the judgment of a holy God.

Now,

- Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
- By faith in His substitutionary sacrifice and glorious resurrection,
- By acceptance of Him as Saviour and Lord,

He has been:

- Redeemed,
- Saved
- Brought into a place of acceptance, provision and security.

Surely it is not too much for the Lord to expect that His people, saved as such an infinite cost, will want, like that dog, to come into His presence in order to be occupied only with the One whom, “having not seen, they love” with all their hearts. May it be yours and mine to know something, by experience, of the real meaning and nature of worship, and thus fulfil His purpose in our salvation.

The words of Miss C.A. Wellesley will form a fitting conclusion to this section of our study:

“Occupied with Thee, Lord Jesus, in Thy grace;
All Thy ways and thoughts about me
Only trace
Deeper stories of the glories
Of Thy grace.

Taken up with Thee Lord Jesus I would be;
Finding joy and satisfaction
All in Thee;
Thou the nearest and the dearest
Unto me.”

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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