

WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT

Carl Johnson

In John the fourth chapter verses twenty-three and twenty-four Jesus said, "But 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. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

According to I Peter 2:5 and Hebrews 13:15 and in Acts 17:22-25, worship means to glorify, to adore and to praise God. In addition to this in I Cor. 11:26, 29, 30 it also means to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, as the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind.

I submit unto you that worship and the church go hand in hand. I believe with all my heart that they are inseparable; that one has not existed and cannot exist today, without the other. In the first century I believe that there would have been no such thing as Christian worship as is described in Acts the second chapter had it not been for the institution of the Church. By the same token I submit that worship has helped to perpetuate the church. So, I think you can see that they have a reciprocal effect on each other, in that there could not be worship without the Church and the Church could not be perpetuated without the worship.

The Church still stands today. As a result, it is necessary that we continue to worship God and to proclaim His Son as the Christ just as it was done in the first century of the Church.

Again, Jesus said in John 4:23-24, that acceptable worship is worship in the spirit and in the truth. Now, I want you to notice the co-ordinate conjunction "and" that links the two words, spirit and truth. Notice that because of that conjunction each of the words have the same value. One is not more important than the other but both are necessary for acceptable worship. To worship God in truth according to John 17:17 means to worship God according to the truth of His word. In other words, according to the pattern that he has established and the directions that he has laid down for us. Worship in spirit deals with our attitudes, our dispositions and our state of mind. Both are essential, and acceptable worship cannot be realized without the spirit and truth.

I might illustrate it like this; if we were to have just the truth alone just the word of God that would direct us as to how we should worship and we did not allow that knowledge of the truth to cause us to actively do the things commanded, then we would have nothing more than just theology or philosophy. By the same token if we just have a spiritual urge to worship but our worship is not done intelligently according to the truths or the principles that the Lord has laid down, then we have nothing but superstition. So then, the truth without the spirit is just mere theology or mere philosophy and the spirit without the truth is nothing more than superstition. I think you can find an example of each in Revelation the third chapter. A good example of truth without the spirit is made with reference to the churches of Sardis and Laodicea and you can find an example of the spirit without the truth in Acts the seventeenth chapter when the Bible talks about the idolatry found in Athens, Greece.

Now my talk tonight is based primarily upon the spiritual aspects of worship. In view of what we've already learned this evening I would submit that worshipping God in the improper spirit would make one just as guilty as worshipping the Lord in doctrinal error. So I hope you can see the gravity and the seriousness of the matter.

Let us notice a few ingredients that are necessary before our worship can be acceptable "in spirit." First of all, before our worship can be in spirit we must manifest the proper reverence to God. Listen to what the Bible says in Heb. 12:28. The apostle Paul says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." So then, before our worship can be acceptable to the Lord we must first of all manifest a spirit of reverence. On page 701 in the *Layman's Bible Encyclopedia*, "reverence" is rendered as a respectful, submissive disposition of mind arising from affection, esteem, fear, awe and a sense of the superiority of the person revered. So then, reverence means a respectful submissive disposition of mind. Before our worship service can be acceptable unto the Lord we must manifest that respect for Him and behave accordingly.

One thing that can help us is to understand that when we worship, we are in God's presence. One must sense that presence of God and that will help him to cultivate the proper spirit of reverence. Let me illustrate it like this: A couple of years ago I was holding a meeting

in the southern portion of the state of Missouri. Early in the week a friend of mine, who was a member of the local church, and I went out to invite people to come to the meeting. We came upon an elderly gentleman who lived in the area and we invited him to come to the meeting. Immediately he began to make excuses for not coming. He said, "Well you know, I'm awful busy now, winter is just about on us and I've got a lot of wood to cut. I've got a lot of hay to put in the barn, as well. I'll tell you we've just been so busy I just don't think I'm going to have time to come. In addition to that, I don't see too good anymore and the wife and I, we just don't like to get out and drive after dark. So I just don't see how we are going to be able to make it over to the meeting any."

My friend didn't hesitate a moment, he asked him this question. "Can I just ask you one thing then I'll just go and leave you alone?" The old fellow said, "Well, I guess so."

"If you knew that tonight the Lord Jesus was going to be over there; if you knew that tonight beyond any shadow of a doubt that the Lord Himself, Jesus the Christ was going to be over there in that little old church building, do you think you could find time to come over?"

The old man said, "Well, I guess if the Lord was going to be over there. I mean, if the Lord Himself was going to be over there, why, I think I'd make a point to come over."

My friend looked at him and said, "Well, you just wrap things up and come on over because He's going to be there."

You know he was right; Jesus said in Matt 18:20) "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there will I be in the midst of them. The same holds true of God our Father according to Psalms 139:7-11. I understand that as we assemble here this evening to worship, the Lord is here I don't mean He is just a figment of our imagination. I don't mean He is just something that we've read about or something that we have heard about and has become a part of our faded memory. I don't mean he is out there in some "never-never land", on the outside looking in. But, He's here; and if we could understand that principle, realizing that when we worship we're in the presence Of God I think it would help us to manifest the proper spirit of reverence respect and submission; feeling God's suzerainty as He is present before us It ought to help us in preparing ourselves for Worship. It ought to cause us to want to prepare ourselves, before we come into the house of God to present an atmosphere that welcomes us to concentrate entirely upon the Lord and not be distracted in any sense whatsoever. Because he is present and we feel that presence, hence, the spirit of reverence.

Sincerity

Secondly, before We can worship God in spirit we must have the ingredient of sincerity. In Phil. 1;10 Paul said, "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." Have you ever had someone compliment you on something only to realize by their presence or the attitude projected that they really weren't sincere, that it was more of a formality or just a ritual? Have you ever had anybody ask about your daddy back home who has been sick or who's been in poor health for years Or your mother and you could tell once again that they really weren't concerned, but it was more of a ritual or a formality. Personally, when someone projects insincere feelings to me, or puts on a phony attitude, it is not a compliment, but it is more of a slap in the face or an insult to my intelligence, because it is as though that person feels I don't know any better. I submit that the same is true of the Lord. The Lord has the very same feelings when we are insincere in reference to our worship to Him. I'm reminded of a passage of scripture that's found in Proverbs the twenty-eighth chapter in verse nine. The writer said, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law even his prayer shall be abomination." In essence, the writer is saying that when we realize we have erred in the sight of the Lord and we pray for forgiveness of our wrong and promise repentance but we just go right on and continue to repeat the same sins, he said our prayer becomes nothing more than an abomination. Our prayer becomes a disgusting mockery because we were not sincere.

This principle applies to every item of worship; not just in prayer, but in every part of worship that we may engage in. If we are not sincere in our praise of God, if we don't really mean our praise from the heart, if it is just more or less a ritual or a formality it becomes disgusting

mockery to the Lord; nothing more than an insult to His intelligence or a slap in the face. Let me illustrate it like this: In Eph. 5:19-20 and in Col. 3:16-17, the Bible says in reference to the item of singing in worship that we must sing in the spirit and in the understanding and that singing must be accompanied by the melody of the heart. Otherwise, it's not worship. I regretfully admit that there have been times when I have walked into the house of God in order to worship, sat down in the pew and began singing along with the congregation as services began and sang every word of every verse in the song. But, when it was over I didn't have any more idea of what the song said than before the song was led. Friends, that's not worship; it's nothing more than vain babbling as far as the Lord is concerned, an insult to His intelligence, and Jesus says in Matt. 15:9 that it has been offered in vain!

Humility

Notice a third ingredient. This is found in I Peter 5:5-6 and it has to do with the idea of humility. Peter said, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Again, in Proverbs 6:16-19 the Bible says that God literally hates pride. In James 4:6, James says God resists the proud and the conceited. So then we must manifest a spirit of humility, or our offering will not be acceptable in God's sight. I am reminded of what Jesus said in Luke the eighteenth chapter beginning with about verse 10. He talked about two men, one a Pharisee and one a publican and he began like this: He said, "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, the other publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus said that there were two men that went up into the temple to worship. He says the first man was a Pharisee who was noted for his self-righteousness and his self-conceit. He went up into the temple and immediately he began to thank God that he was so good. He began to thank God that he wasn't like all the other people out there in the world. He said Lord, I'm glad I'm not like the extortioners and the unjust and the adulterers. Then he got very specific and pointed to the man standing over there and said, even as this publican over here. Then he began to list all the things that he felt God should love him for. Then Jesus told of the second man. He said that when the publican went into the temple he didn't stand with the multitude but he went off by himself. The Bible says that he wouldn't allow himself to look up toward the threshold of Heaven but he humbled himself, he bowed himself, he smote himself upon his breast and begged God to forgive him because he knew he had sinned. Now then, listen to the Lord's appraisal of those two men. In verse 14 Jesus said, "I tell you, this man ...", talking about the publican or the second man. He said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for anyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Listen to me tonight brothers and sisters in Christ and friends, regardless of how much talent we may possess, our attitude toward our talent must be humble. For example, suppose I possessed the greatest capacity for performing wonderful works in the Lord's name. Suppose I had the most beautiful voice human ears had ever heard. Suppose I had the ability to preach the most convicting, the most convincing sermons of any preacher in the world, so much so that I could convince thousands and even hundreds of thousands of people to obey the gospel. But if such was the case and I did not have the proper attitude toward my ability, my worship would be for naught. Regardless of my ability, if I don't have the proper attitude of humility, my worship is in vain. I've got to realize that whatever ability I have is a gift. It is not anything that I've gained on my own merits or through my own efforts but it is a gift from God. So then, He's to be the recipient of the glory. Then after all is said and done, whenever I've been allowed to achieve all the levels of aspiration that I've ever dreamed of, whenever I've done all that I can ever do as far as my worship and service to God is concerned, I must have the attitude that Jesus talked about in Luke 17:10, the ability to say, "I'm an unprofitable servant because I've just done that which is my duty to do."

A fourth ingredient for acceptable spiritual worship is found in II Cor. 8:12. There, the apostle Paul talks about the fact that our worship must be of our own free will. He says, "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." I would suppose that this is the very first prerequisite to acceptable worship. It must be of our own free will. If I attend worship services to please my parents or wife, then my attendance has profitted my nothing. At the same time, if I attend worship services just because I feel I have to go, then that will not benefit me either. I have had people tell me before that the reason they go to church on Lord's Day morning and then forsake the other assemblies through the week is that they "have to" go on Sunday morning but they don't have to go any other time. Well, if that is the only reason they are going to worship to begin with, just because they "have to" or just because they "will go to hell if they don't", then their attendance has profitted them nothing. But, I must worship of my own free will—because that is what I want to do—if it is to be acceptable to God. But, if I have the proper desire to serve the Lord, He will accept my worship "according to that I have and not according to that I have not." For example, suppose a person has a good knowledge of the rudiments of music, and good singing voice. If he utilizes those talents as he should and manifests the proper spirit while singing, I am sure that part of his worship will be accepted as a sweet smelling savor to God. But, on the other hand, suppose a fellow doesn't have as pretty a singing voice and he really doesn't know the mechanics or the rudiments of music quite that well; if he really wants to worship the Lord, that's not going to be held against him. He's not going to be relegated to a subordinate role just because his singing might not sound as pleasant to human ears. The Bible says that if we really want to worship the Lord, it is accepted according to that we have and not according to that we have not. This applies to every aspect of worship. Another application can be made in reference to the contribution. If a person is poor, if he doesn't really have a whole lot of money when it comes time to contribute upon the first day of the week, the application here is that if he will make a liberal sacrifice of the limited funds that he does have, that will be esteemed just as highly in the sight of God as a larger nominal amount given by someone better off financially. The Lord is more concerned with the actual sacrifice we make, rather than nominal amounts, and that we make that sacrifice willfully.

The final ingredient that is needed before our worship is acceptable in the spirit is that our worship must be on an individual basis. In Rom. 14:12, the Apostle Paul said, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." I realize then that worship must be an individual thing. You can't worship the Lord by proxy. I realize that my wife cannot worship the Lord for me, and I can't worship the Lord for my wife. My mother or my father can't do it for me, my son or my daughter, if such be the case, can't do it for me because worship is an individual thing. For example: Let's suppose that a fellow comes up to lead the singing during the worship service. As he begins leading the song, I realize that he is not worshipping for me, and unless I sing, I haven't worshipped. Or as someone begins to lead the prayer in the worship services, I understand that he is not worshipping for me, and unless I attentively listen to the words that he offers to the Lord and I have the ability to sanction that prayer by saying amen at the end, I haven't worshipped. If someone gets up in the pulpit and preaches from the word of God, he is not worshipping for me. I have not worshipped unless I listen attentively to the things that he says, unless I listen objectively and try to glean the truths from the word of life that he preaches. I must apply that teaching into my life and allow it to shape and mold me into a better person because if I don't, even though I'm sitting in the audience and he's doing the preaching, I haven't worshipped. So then, worship is an individual thing.

We obey the gospel as individuals. We discharge our Christian responsibilities as individuals. We maintain our Christian characteristics as individuals. We're going to be judged as individuals and we worship God in the same manner. It is a tragedy that sometimes people don't realize this. I have been to places where some of the brethren had some hard personal feelings at one another; and because of that, there would be some people in the audience that wouldn't sing when one fellow would get up to lead a song. When one fellow would lead the prayer, because he, that individual, led the prayer somebody else out in the audience wouldn't bow. When one brother would pass the collection plate around, because he was the one who did it, there would be somebody out in the audience that wouldn't contribute. Brothers and sisters in Christ that is a

grievous error in the sight of God, because the other person is not worshipping for you. If we allow personal feelings to hinder us in our service to God, then we have not worshipped. So, realizing that worship is an individual thing and that we are not excused from any item of worship; we're always worshipping whether we are in the pew or whether we are in the pulpit. We are participating in worship whether we are listening and learning or whether we are doing the teaching. Whether we are leading the song or singing from the audience. So, from the very moment worship begins until it ends, we are all in a perpetual state of worship. Realizing this fact, I know that when we come to church we can't walk in like a critic at an opera and just sit back and pick out what we like and don't like. We can't come to church with the idea that we can catch up on a little of our sleep, etc. We can't come to Church for any ulterior motive except to worship God, perpetually throughout the service, while concentrating our entire thoughts, attitudes and emotions upon Him.

When all these things have been done, when all these ingredients have been incorporated into our worship, then the purpose of worship will have been fulfilled. We will have glorified, adored and praised God. And we will have proclaimed Jesus as His son. Then there is an added benefit for the worshipper for the Bible teaches us that we ourselves will have been strengthened. I realize that according to Matt. 13:12, that the more I worship the Lord, the more I be strengthened. The law of the natural and the spiritual world is that use leads to increase and disuse leads to decrease. So then, just attending the House of God from time to time and occupying a physical place and going through a ritual or a formality is not enough. My attitude, my disposition, my state of mind must be right or as Jesus said in Matthew 15:9, my worship is vain.